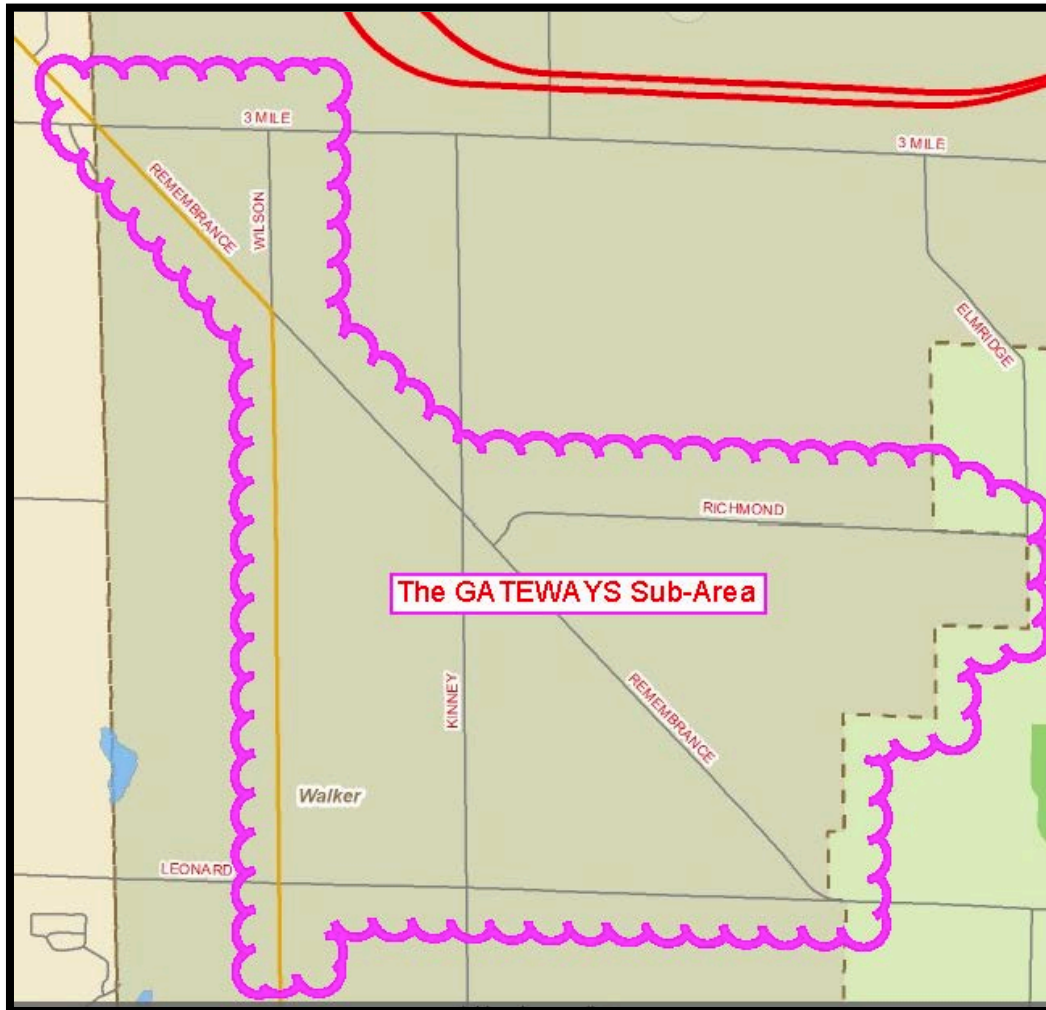


The GATEWAYS Sub Area Master Plan

City of Walker

Introduction: The Walker City Commission and Planning Commission decided in 2011 to create a sub-area master plan for the Remembrance Road and Wilson Avenue corridors. The sub-area was given the name of GATEWAYS. Generally speaking, the northerly limit for the sub-area was 3 Mile Road and the southerly limit extended approximately ½ mile south of Leonard Street. The sub-area has since expanded to include the Richmond Street, Milo Street and Mullins Avenue corridors relative to pedestrian and bicycle connections.

The Wilson Avenue and Remembrance Road corridors have significant, yet quite different, land use challenges and concerns. This report presents a strategic summary of the GATEWAYS sub-area, the issues and opportunities for improvements.



The general extent of the GATEWAYS Sub-Area.

A Brief History: The odd alignment of Remembrance Road is due to the original corridor use for light rail passenger and freight trains. This “Lake Line” was powered by electricity and ran from downtown Grand Rapids to the Lake Michigan shore. Service began in the early 1900’s. The Lake Line was shut down by 1930 but some buildings, such as Dr. Kelley’s vet clinic, date to the electric light rail era.

Remembrance Road then transitioned to US-16. Some of the older auto-related buildings and motels are of this US-16 vintage. The construction of US-131, I-196 and I-96 ended the US-16 era for Remembrance Road. The current configuration of Remembrance Road is very similar to the historical US-16 cross section.

Wilson Avenue is State of Michigan Highway M-11. This road has been planned as the “West Beltline” for the Grand Rapids region since the 1960’s. Wilson Avenue was planned as the north-south connector between I-96 and I-196. The intersection of Wilson Avenue with major east-west roads, such as Leonard Street and Lake Michigan Drive (M-45), makes M-11 a regionally important highway.

Planning to Plan: The most effective community planning is conducted in a context-sensitive manner. This means that master plans should be developed in a strategic, transparent manner that weaves together public involvement and the best available information. The final planning results must reflect the local and regional context of neighborhoods, business districts, the natural environment and the transportation network. These sometimes-conflicting components must be thoughtfully integrated into a comprehensive master plan if future changes are to be beneficial to the city and its citizens.

As such, The Walker City Commission and Planning Commission created a Citizen Advisory Committee in 2011 to assist in the development of the GATEWAYS Sub-Area Plan. The City has conducted a randomized survey of residents using the services of Grand Valley State University. The City has also held a series of public meetings relative to the development of the current GATEWAYS Sub-Area Plan, from future land use, park and recreation perspectives.

A Summary of Land Use Issues and Actions: The following issues and corresponding actions have been identified by city officials, staff, committee members and citizens since 2011 relative to the GATEWAYS study area.

Wilson Avenue Corridor

Issue: Peak hour traffic congestion on 3 Mile Road as drivers stack to cross M-11.

Action: Work with MDOT to gather peak hour data. Develop intersection improvements based on current and projected traffic data.

Issue: What improvements should be made to the intersection of Wilson Avenue and Remembrance Road?

Action: MDOT is working on plans to convert the existing intersection to a “modern roundabout” design.

- Detailed modeling is required to ensure that a modern roundabout will work in this specific location.
- City of Walker officials, staff and citizens should be involved in the modern roundabout modeling and design processes.

Issue: The Dolci Real Estate Group owns a large property at the southwest corner of Wilson Avenue and Remembrance Road. This property, and two adjacent and very long and narrow lots owned by the VanPortfliets, is zoned C-1 Local Commercial and C-2 Community Commercial. The 1998 Walker Master Plan calls for “LDR - Low Density Residential” uses for these properties. This is an obvious conflict between zoning and master planning.

Action: The future land uses for the Dolci and VanPortfliet properties should be shown as follows:

- The Dolci property should be planned for a transitional mixture of uses, blending from commercial to office to residential as distance increases from the Wilson / Remembrance intersection.
- The VanPortfliet properties should be planned for low density residential uses.

Issue: Public safety concerns at the intersection of Wilson Avenue and Richmond Street.

Action: Implement the 2007 Wilson Avenue M-11 Access Management Plan.

- Quantify the need for intersection improvements, such as widening, the addition of turning lanes and the threshold for a traffic signal.

Issue: The large properties at the northeast corner of Wilson Avenue and Leonard Street are zoned for Mixed Use Planned Unit Development but remain vacant.

Action: These properties are owned by Visser Development. A former project called Lewis Farms has expired but certain components of the expired plan should be carried forward, including the following:

- The development of a connected, internal network of public and private streets, linking to Shannon Street and a pending subdivision called “Winchester Woods.”
- An integrated site plan that combines limited commercial, professional office and complimentary residential land uses.
- Preservation of the tree line along Wilson Avenue, the existing woods and the existing wetlands.
- Potential driveway connections to Wilson Avenue should be consistent with the 2007 Wilson Avenue M-11 Access Management Plan.
- Regional stormwater detention / retention facilities should be constructed.
- Improvements to the Leonard Street cross section should include context-sensitive components of the complete streets design method, including pedestrian and bicycle connections.

Issue: There are several small lots on the east side of Wilson Avenue south of Leonard Street that are zoned C-1 Local Commercial and C-3 Highway Commercial. A concern has been expressed that these types of lots can quickly convert to a strip of commercial sprawl type uses, which is not desired in this location.

Action: These lots should be master planned for office at the intersection of Wilson Avenue and Leonard Street and medium density residential uses on the adjacent lots.

Remembrance Road Corridor (including Walker Village Drive, Leonard Street, Milo Street and Mullins Avenue)

Issues and actions are grouped together more here than on the Wilson Avenue corridor. This is justified because the main issues must be identified at the larger neighborhood scope and addressed with improvements that often stretch beyond a specific site.

Main Issues:

- 1) The current land use pattern adjacent to Remembrance Road is suffering from a high commercial (and soon to be industrial) vacancy rate. Except for a few notable local businesses, the corridor appears to be in a cycle of disinvestment.
- 2) There is a lack of comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle connections along Remembrance Road and to destinations such as Blandford Nature Center, schools, churches, homes, places of employment and recreation sites / features.

Actions:

- 1) Redesign the Remembrance Road corridor to match projected average daily trips of vehicles and to accommodate pedestrians and bicycle riders.
 - a. A road diet should be instituted from Walker Village Drive to Leonard Street.
 - i. Reduce the number of travel lanes from four to three.
 - ii. Stripe bicycle lanes on the street surface.
 - iii. Install street trees and additional lighting in the parkway.
 - iv. Install sidewalks on both sides of the road.
 - b. The intersection of Leonard Street and Remembrance Road should be reconstructed in the following manner:
 - i. Short term: Eliminate the northwesterly “slip lane” from Leonard Street to Remembrance Road. Carry sidewalks and bicycle lanes through the intersection. Add mast arms for the traffic signals. Install professionally-designed landscaping in the expanded green spaces to act as “Gateway” type features.
 - ii. Long term: Reconstruct the intersection as a one lane modern roundabout. This will likely require property acquisition.

- c. Connect pedestrian and bicycle routes from Walker Village Drive northwesterly to the Fred Meijer Trail.
 - i. Enhanced trail crossings are needed where the Fred Meijer Trail crosses Remembrance Road and Leonard Street. Cross Alert type devices should be installed.
 - d. Connect pedestrian and bicycle routes from Remembrance Road to Walker Village Drive, Mullins Avenue, Milo Street and Richmond Street in a contextually-appropriate manner.
- 2) Reduce the area that is master planned for “Village Commercial” land uses on the 1998 Walker Master Plan map.
- a. The former “D&W” site and nearby properties should be master planned for a mixture of land uses in a more urbanized setting to increase the usability of the lots while expanding pedestrian and bicycle access.
 - i. Future land uses should be a mixture of senior housing, assisted living, aging-in-place facilities, services, offices, restaurants and retail shops.
 - ii. Public transit services should be preserved and enhanced.
 - iii. New buildings should not resemble strip commercial architecture. Buildings should be allowed up to three stories in height, consisting of brick, block and glass facades.
 - iv. Redevelopment should occur in a comprehensive “Planned Unit Development” manner to enhance site aesthetics, provide safe vehicular access and create innovative stormwater controls.
 - b. All other areas shown as “Village Commercial” on the 1998 Walker Master Plan map should be planned for residential, office or industrial uses depending on the location and existing operations.