

Photo: The Better Block

**West Akron Neighborhood Plan**  
**ECONOMIC AND HOUSING ASSESSMENT**

**KM Date Community Planning, LLC**  
*Prepared for: MKSK  
and The Progressive Alliance Community Development Corporation, Akron OH*

FINAL REPORT August 4, 2023





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

In collaboration with the City of Akron and Akron-based foundations, the Progressive Alliance Community Development Corporation is working with MKSK on a neighborhood plan for the West Akron and Sherbondy Hill neighborhoods, west of the City of Akron, Ohio. This study was done as part of that plan, to provide recommendations for economic development and housing in revitalizing the neighborhood. Recommendations were based on data collection and analysis, and an extensive set of interviews with neighborhood stakeholders. This report summarizes findings on retail goods and services, dining, other business activity, housing, and general community development ideas that came up in the stakeholder interview process.

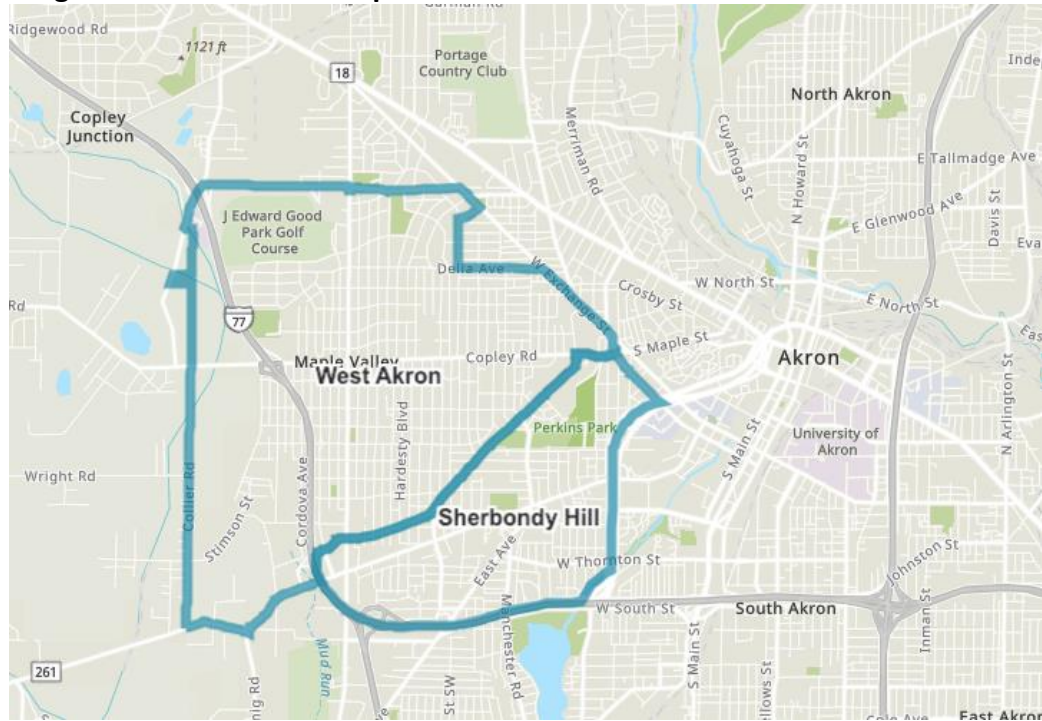
As with any such analysis, data and interviews can only go so far in determining potential opportunity for business and revitalization success. Other key factors, such as the vision, business and marketing savvy, and capital capacity of the entrepreneur/project proponent, and changing market conditions, have a profound effect on business success and are beyond the scope of this report. No guarantees are made with regard to potential business or redevelopment success are made with the recommendations given in this report.

### The West Akron Market Area

The study area of this report included both the West Akron and Sherbondy Hill neighborhoods, located 5 minutes to the west of downtown Akron. The neighborhood as a whole has excellent freeway access, within 5 minutes of most businesses, off I-77 and I-76 to the west and south. Typical of many urban core neighborhoods in legacy cities of the Midwest, the neighborhood has a history of disinvestment and decline. Prior to the 1960's, it was a thriving African American neighborhood with several main streets featuring entertainment, dining, and full range of neighborhood-supporting businesses. In the present day, the West Akron

neighborhood is still a place of tree-lined streets and well-kept homes. There remains a strong African American cultural presence, and several major assets in or near the neighborhood, including the Akron Zoo, Cleveland Clinic/Akron General Hospital, historic assets, active churches, parks and community centers.

### Neighborhood Location Map

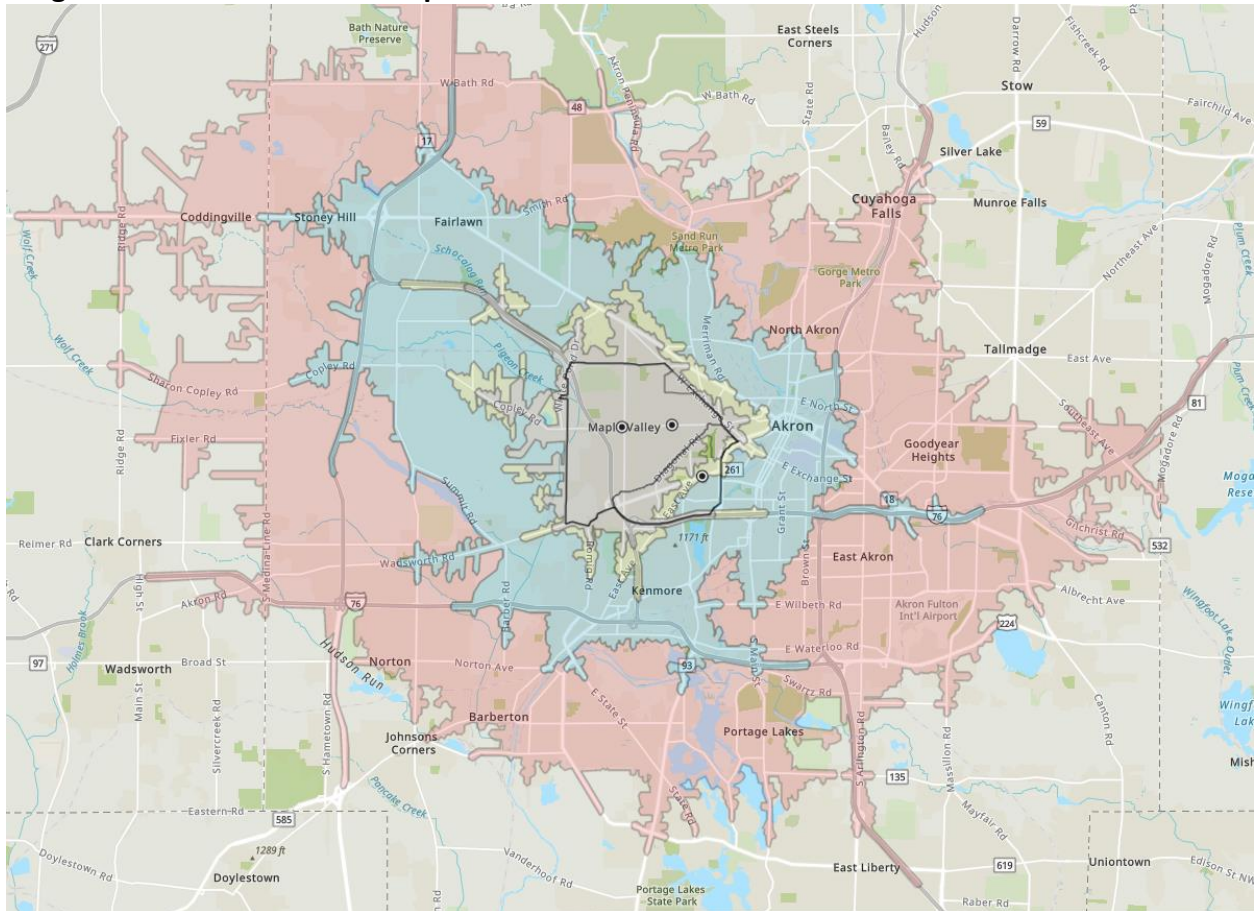


Source: ESRI, KM Date Planning, City of Akron

As shown in the Trade Area map, drive times around the neighborhood were plotted at 5, 6, 10 and 15 minutes. The neighborhood boundary around the West Akron and Sherbondy Hill neighborhoods was chosen as the study Trade Area, due to its similarity to the 5- and 6-minute drive times, and because it includes areas of opportunity north of Copley Road. The map shows that beyond the trade area analyzed, there are a range of suburban markets within 10 and 15 minutes of the neighborhood center, including Fairlawn, Cuyahoga Falls and Barberton.



## Neighborhood Market Area Map



Source: ESRI, KM Date Planning, City of Akron

### Map Legend

- Black outline – Neighborhood boundaries
- Gray area – 5-minute drive zone
- Green area – 6-minute drive zone
- Blue area – 10-minute drive zone
- Pink area – 15-minute drive zone

### Neighborhood Economic Factors

The West Akron neighborhood is home to 23,000 residents, and 10,000 households. Our analysis showed that the total buying power of these 10,000 households is \$500 million, which is solid for an urban neighborhood. At the 6-minute drive time, the total buying power increases to \$1 billion, which is solid for urban/suburban neighborhoods.

With its proximity to downtown Akron and suburban business zones, there are 93,000 workers within 10 minutes' drive of the neighborhood center. Inside the trade area boundary, the

average local household income was \$50,601 in 2022, falling in the middle income “quintile” of US households.<sup>1</sup>

### **Retail Findings**

Leakage (neighborhood household dollars being spent elsewhere) in the West Akron neighborhood is substantial. Analysis of retail supply and demand within the trade area shows that there is a leakage of \$14.1 million annually for dining alone, with \$13 million for hardware/home and garden, \$11 million for grocery, and \$6 million for clothing and accessories. There is a general merchandise surplus of \$24 million in the neighborhood, indicating that people are spending more at those stores (Dollar Stores, drugstores, Walmart, and the like) than at other retail opportunities; and that those stores are serving outsiders as well. Similarly, personal, repair and similar services (such as hair salons, auto repair) also have large surpluses, indicating outside clientele and dollars coming in. Pet services/supplies, legal services, and entertainment are the services with the largest leakage, at \$2 million, \$1 million, and \$1 million respectively.

More detail is included in the full report, covering 37 retail niche categories, as well as dining by subcategory.

### **Business Activity Findings**

An analysis of business activity, including retail and all other commercial entities, shows that there are 327 businesses with commercial locations in the neighborhood, plus 69 home businesses.

Strengths in the neighborhood, when compared to the City and County, include education, health care, hospitality and services, motor vehicle and parts dealers, and gas stations. The Akron Public Schools and the Akron Zoo, among the largest employers, are very important assets for workforce development efforts.

The large number of workers within 10 minutes is another opportunity that neighborhood businesses can build on. In addition, larger businesses and employers are likely bringing potential customers to the doorstep of smaller businesses.

Micro-clusters with more than four businesses, and the greatest potential for collaboration, include marketing, design, and publishing; hospitality and tourism; financial services; education and knowledge creation; and business services.

See the full report for a detailed discussion of business activity, and the Appendix for detailed tables.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: ESRI 2022, based on American Communities Survey data.

## Housing Findings

The West Akron neighborhood has been cited as the “single largest swath of residential housing in Akron.” Many long-term residents still maintain their properties, and many streets are still tree-lined. 90% of 1, 2 and 3-family properties are in very good, good, or average condition.

Of the 11,773 units in the neighborhood, 77% are single-family homes, with another 10% duplexes or single-family attached homes. Half of neighborhood householders are renting, and the other half are owners. The majority (85%) of householders over age 65 are homeowners; half of all units are owned by seniors. Across the neighborhood, there is a 15% vacancy rate, which is high, and indicates poor condition, high rents, or both. The owners of 77% of residential parcels in the neighborhood are based in Akron; 8.7% of owners are out of state, and 6.8% are in Ohio but outside Summit County

About 5.3% of 1, 2 and 3-family properties are in fair condition (about 485 properties), which are at risk of falling into acute disrepair. About 73 homes are in poor or very poor condition and in need of immediate intervention.

A housing affordability analysis was done, which compares household incomes to housing price points for renters and owners, based on the assumption that households can afford to spend no more than 30% of their income on housing-related costs. The analysis indicates that there is a gap in owner-occupied housing valued over \$150,000. About 1,000 households could afford housing valued higher than \$150,000 which is not available in the neighborhood. When examining rental properties, the situation changes. The gap in rental housing is for units with rents below \$500 per month. 1800 renting households are shown to be spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

For more detailed information, see the full report.

## Stakeholder Interviews

28 interviews were completed with neighborhood stakeholders, including new and longtime residents, new and longtime business owners, developers and a real estate agent working in the neighborhood, elected officials, city staff, schools leaders, and leaders of churches and nonprofits.

The discussions addressed neighborhood assets and challenges, and big ideas and priorities for revitalizing the neighborhood. Stakeholders’ big ideas included restoring commercial vitality, strategic investment, creating catalytic regional attractions, strengthening relationships, and many others. Findings were summarized in more detail later in this report. A full report was also written, which is included in the Appendix.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The West Akron neighborhood presents many opportunities for economic growth – ranging from commercial area rejuvenation to business recruitment and expansion, to new housing opportunities. Key recommendations of this report include:

- Strengthen the Copley Road commercial area as a core Main Street which serves local residents and families, workers, and outside visitors
- Create a regional draw, either offering recreation, entertainment and/or employment, with clean and safe parking and lighting, to attract outside visitors and workers to the neighborhood
- Work with local major employers to provide opportunities for workforce development
- Recruit new businesses, and support existing businesses as they grow
- Work with home businesses with the potential to transition to bricks-and-mortar
- Address the need for code enforcement, outside landlord management, and limiting dollar stores, through regulation
- Develop a strong economic development presence collaboratively with the City to work with businesses and seize on opportunities
- Develop a Community Investment Fund to support local businesses and provide supportive investment opportunities for stakeholders (including neighborhood alumni)
- Strategically revitalize the housing market through targeted new development, renovation, and neighborhood improvement
- Address gaps in the housing market to provide a wide range of housing types and price points
- Support residents and small landlords in housing repair through a variety of programs
- Develop and implement a robust marketing/branding program, to provide accurate and positive information about the neighborhood to the public and residents
- Reach out to residents, potential new residents, former residents and Buchtel alumni, businesses, workers in the neighborhood and downtown, and residents of adjacent neighborhoods to establish relationships and change public perception
- In the long term, as the neighborhood revitalizes, re-create a community-serving retail core in the Sherbondy Hill area

For more detail and information, see the full report.