



Near West Side: In the Heart of Milwaukee

Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Near West Side Market Analysis – Executive Summary

The following is an executive summary of a Market Analysis prepared by Place Dynamics and Cross Management Services in October of 2017. In 2020, following additional stakeholder input, Vandewalle & Associates provided additional content and updated recommendations in order to reflect more recent market data and current priorities. This material was prepared amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which had immediate impacts on virtually all sectors of the national economy. This document was prepared with the best information available, recognizing that economic conditions will continue to fluctuate.

Introduction. Milwaukee’s Near West Side is rich in unrealized opportunity. Anchored by five of Wisconsin’s most significant private or quasi-public organizations, its neighborhoods are centrally located and filled with desirable and affordable commercial, mixed-use, and residential buildings. Long term, the area has many qualities that will contribute to its revitalization as a highly desirable location for both businesses and residents.

A market analysis was commissioned in 2017 by the City of Milwaukee and the nonprofit Near West Side Partners (NWSP) to determine and prioritize opportunities for investment in residential, mixed-use, commercial, office, and industrial development within the Near West Side. In addition to the data analysis, many business owners, property owners, and service providers were interviewed for their perspectives on local market conditions. This initiative is among a long list of studies and actions taken by the Near West Side’s stakeholders.

Local Assets. The Near West Side contains some of Milwaukee’s most centrally located neighborhoods, situated among some of the City and region’s most enduring assets, employers and amenities, and the ability to travel throughout the region within minutes. Some of the area’s strongest qualities include:

- **Proximity to employment centers** in the downtown, Menomonee Valley, Miller Valley, and 30th Street Corridor.
- **Major anchor institutions**, including Aurora Health Care, Harley-Davidson, Marquette University, Molson Coors, Potawatomi Business Development Corporation.
- **Distinctive architecture**, particularly in single family homes north of Wisconsin Avenue.
- **Recreational amenities** including the Hank Aaron Trail, Washington Park, and King Park.
- **Quality schools**, including Marquette University High School, Milwaukee High School of the Arts, Milwaukee Academy of Chinese Language, and Milwaukee Academy of Science.
- **Cultural and entertainment amenities**, particularly along Wisconsin Avenue and on the Marquette campus.

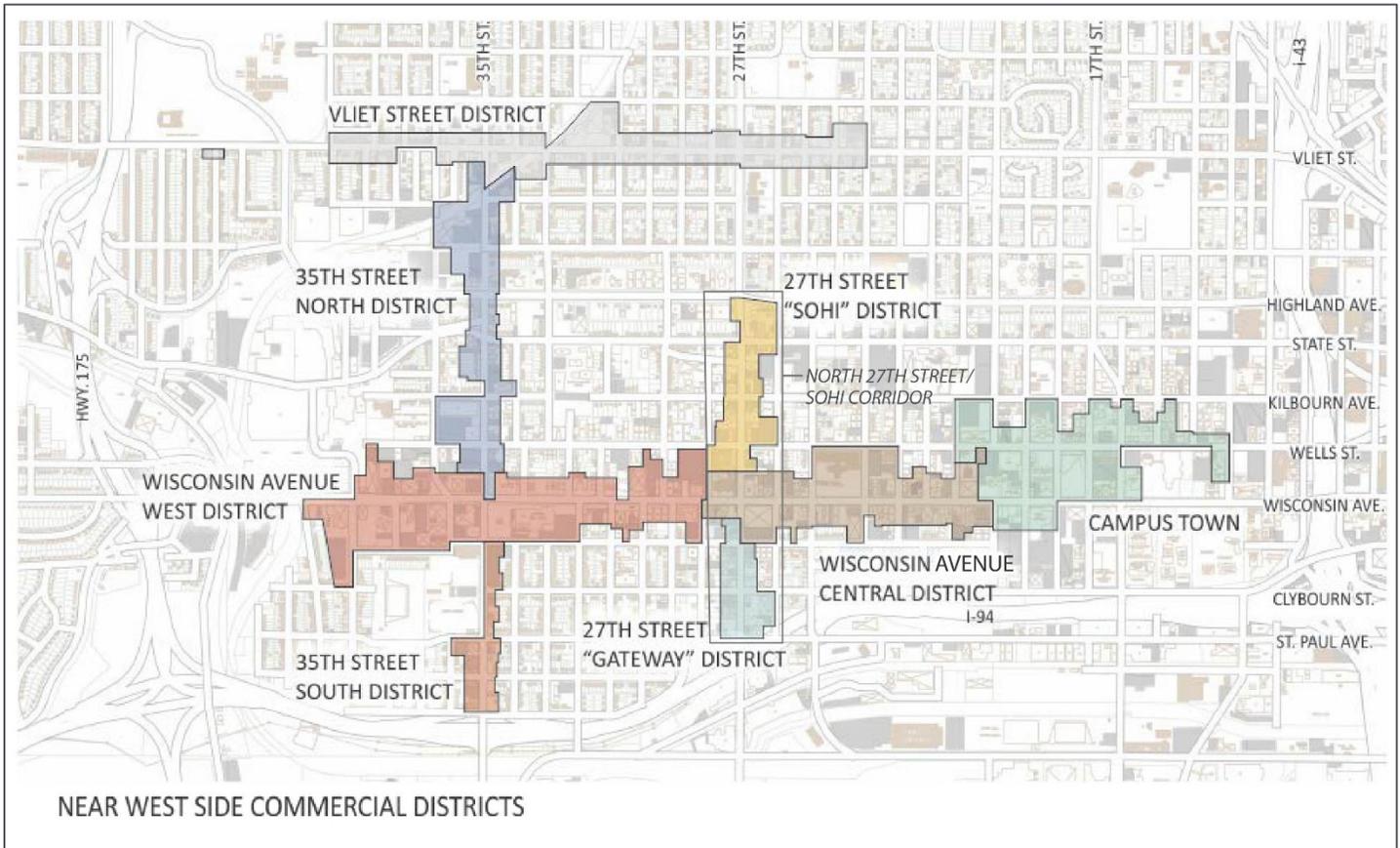
As downtown Milwaukee continues to see investment and growth at a scale not seen in decades – Fiserv Forum and Deer District, The Hop streetcar, the Warner Grand Theater, thousands of new housing units, plus billions of dollars in additional investment currently under construction or proposed – the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to downtown have begun to see increased development interest as well. This spinoff growth from downtown is expected to bolster existing assets in the Near West Side and build on committed anchor institutions such as Harley-Davidson and Molson Coors (formerly Miller Brewing Company).

By the Numbers

- 24,000 residents across seven neighborhoods¹
- 10,000 households with median household incomes of \$20,000 to \$40,000 per year¹
- 16,000 jobs²
- More than 8,500 undergraduate and 3,300 graduate and professional students enrolled at Marquette University, hailing from nearly every U.S. state and 89 countries³
- Strong traffic volumes along 27th Street (15,000-17,000 cars per day), Wisconsin Avenue (12,000-16,000) and 35th Street (14,000-18,000)⁴

1. ESRI Business Analyst, 2019
 2. Census OnTheMap, 2017
 3. Marquette University, 2019
 4. Wisconsin DOT Traffic Counts, 2015-2018

Commercial Districts. The Near West Side is comprised of several distinctive commercial districts with their own market niche and commercial character. These districts are surrounded by seven residential neighborhoods with unique histories and identities.



Upward Progress since 2017. Much has been accomplished since the Market Analysis was completed in 2017. In particular, the Near West Side Partners has continued to play a critical leadership role in igniting the revitalization currently underway. Although there is still important work ahead, NWSP has demonstrated its ability to build excitement, generate momentum, and implement plans to make the Near West Side a destination for visitors and a neighborhood of choice for employers, employees, and residents. After a period of disinvestment, the Near West Side is back on the upswing and is gaining momentum rapidly.

This progress would not have been possible without the exceptional collaboration and sustained support from anchor institutions, BID #10, businesses, property owners, community leadership, and residents. The Near West Side is home to an economically and socially diverse array of residents and stakeholders who provide strong community support for local businesses and who have contributed to a growing sense of renewal and excitement in recent years.

In addition, the reuse of formerly vacant or underutilized structures, improved streetscaping, and other public safety improvements are contributing to a vibrant startup culture for neighborhood-scale businesses, owing to the number of available and affordable buildings offering unique spaces, architecture, and a distinct sense of place. Since 2017, most of the businesses that have formed, relocated to, or expanded on the Near West Side are locally-owned small establishments, which have different needs from those of large businesses, and which will benefit from business development programs to foster their growth. A few recent Near West Side successes and investments include:

- An expansion of **Daddy's Soul Food & Grille** on 27th Street
- A new **Sendik's Fresh2GO**, which provides healthy food options near the Marquette Campus
- A **cluster of new local businesses at 38th and Vliet Street** – including Pete's Pops, a popsicle production facility and storefront, and Triciclo Peru, a Peruvian bar and restaurant
- Improved neighborhood **lighting**
- Closure of a problematic business and other **public safety improvements**

Significant Federal Investment

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded NWSP and Marquette University a **\$1.3 million Choice Neighborhood Initiative Planning Grant** to prepare a comprehensive Transformation Plan to revitalize the College Court public housing development and increase investment in the surrounding area. Included in the grant is \$950,000 in funding for highly visible community projects, which will be used to build momentum and attract additional investment. Eligible uses include recycling vacant property into community gardens, pocket parks, or farmers markets; beautification, place-making and community arts projects; homeowner and business façade improvement programs; neighborhood broadband or Wi-Fi; fresh food initiatives; and gap financing for economic development projects. In utilizing these funds, NWSP and Marquette University will work with the other Near West Side anchor institutions along with other key partners, including BID #10, City of Milwaukee, Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee, LISC, Marquette University Center for Peacemaking, Marquette Democracy Lab, Milwaukee Police Department, Milwaukee Public Schools, and Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership / BIG STEP.

“I believe we have the premier public-private partnership in the nation with the Near West Side Partners and our government institutions. This is a very important neighborhood because it has all the elements. It has industry. It has manufacturing. It has healthcare. Obviously, it has entertainment, and you have people from all backgrounds, from all races, from all income here on the Near West Side.”
- Mayor Tom Barrett

Additionally, the NWSP have been hard at work queueing up impactful projects, land banking, and telling the story of the Near West Side. The outcome of these crucial efforts is reflected in the large number of major projects in the planning stages that have the potential to tip the scale and significantly transform the Near West Side within the next few years.

New Investments in the Works. Several major short-term and long-term redevelopment projects are anticipated to continue to advance the Near West Side and drive further revitalization.

- **East-West Bus Rapid Transit:** this nine-mile transit service will connect Downtown to the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center in Wauwatosa via Wisconsin Avenue, is expected to have a major impact in this area. It will benefit residents, employers, and workers by providing faster, more appealing, and more convenient transportation between two regional economic centers. It will also set the state for transit-oriented development, enabling increased density, investment, activity, and amenities around the five BRT stops planned for the Near West Side.
- **Rehabilitation of the State Theater:** an all-ages music venue, featuring sound engineering studios, artist merchandise storefront, café, and classes and workshops focusing on youth, hip hop/rap and electronic music, performance skills and professional development for musicians.
- **Ambassador Suites:** the former Wisconsin Avenue School will become an extended-stay, luxury suites hotel managed in conjunction with the prominent Ambassador Hotel.
- **Rehabilitation of the Tower Theater:** this former theater will be restored and repurposed as a premier event venue with a combined event capacity of 750, ideal for hosting corporate and social meetings and ceremonies in various spaces. Opening anticipated in 2021.
- **Planet 2 Plate:** using a food-tech incubator model, this project seeks to bring jobs, access to fresh food, and healthy living education to the area and involves full renovation of existing buildings at 27th and Wells to house an urban agriculture facility, commercial kitchen, market, cafe, and event space.
- **Potential Office Building:** a potential \$98+ million office building, now in pre-development stages, would involve the construction of a 200,000-square-foot office building housing up to 600 employees, plus walk-in visitors. Once complete, this project would have a dramatic impact on the Near West Side, generating significant foot traffic and employee demand for lunch, shopping, housing, groceries, and cafés.
- **Revitalization of College Court Apartments:** in collaboration with residents, this aging public housing development will be revitalized to provide a continuum of housing choices for households of various income levels. This project will strengthen the surrounding neighborhood by improving housing, but also jobs, shopping, schools, and transportation.
- **Planned Streetscaping at 27th & Wisconsin:** in 2020, a \$350,000 investment will be made at this key intersection - including signage, branding, traffic calming, planters, crosswalks, bump-outs, camera installations, trash cans, and wayfinding signs for historic buildings.
- **North 27th Street Pedestrian Improvements:** the City of Milwaukee’s “rapid implementation” initiative will build quick, low-cost street improvements to increase the safety and comfort of people walking, biking, and driving. The project will use paint, colored pavement markings, and flexible posts to create curb extensions at four intersections between W. Wells Street and W. State Street.

New Business Potential. The 2017 Market Analysis and 2019 Retail Gap Analysis highlighted the following market opportunities:

Small-Format Grocery Store: While market forces, the locational patterns of existing grocers, and limited demand do not support a full-line grocery store, there currently is the potential to attract a limited-assortment grocer or grocery co-op.

Restaurants and Other Eating and Drinking Places: There is also demand for eating and drinking places that cater to local employees. This market is largely untapped, particularly on the western end. Fast food, fast casual, and full-service restaurants might be supported.

Neighborhood-Serving Retail Businesses*

- Furniture and home furnishing stores
- Family and women’s clothing stores
- Shoe stores
- Sporting goods stores
- Used merchandise stores
- Electronics & appliance stores

Neighborhood-Serving Service Businesses*

- Personal care services (e.g., barber shops, hair and nail salons, and spas)
- Real estate management and appraisal services
- Other personal services (e.g., pet grooming and tattoo shops)
- Amusement and recreation industries (e.g., fitness and sports recreation centers and bowling)
- Agencies, brokerages, and other insurance related activities
- Services to buildings and dwellings (e.g., maintenance, janitorial, and landscaping services)

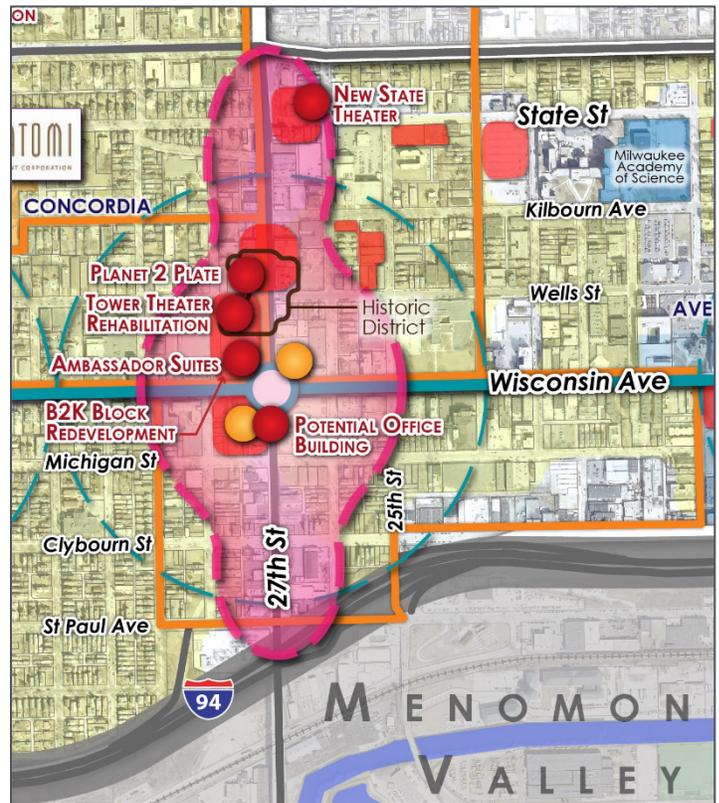
Small Light Industrial, Service, and Office Uses: Continued investment in the area can be led by demand from small businesses for affordable and good quality office and industrial space. Often locally-owned and with only a few employees, such uses include a long list of possible businesses such as building contractors, auto repair services, small wholesalers, bookkeeping services, health care services, or personal care services. These uses create a demand for 1,000 to 5,000 square foot flex spaces, which could be provided by rehabilitating existing buildings or through new construction on redevelopment sites.

Housing: The Near West Side is poised to take advantage of a growing interest in housing in the central city and urban lifestyles. The Near West Side’s proximity to downtown, excellent private and charter schools, and historic housing stock make it appealing to new residents. Rising housing values in other neighborhoods will encourage households to look to the Near West Side, which is on an upward trend but with housing prices attainable for first-time buyers. In addition, new residential and mixed use development will be an important component in future catalytic redevelopment and infill projects.

*Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2019

2020 Priority Redevelopment Areas. Commercial market conditions suggest that there are several nodes should be targeted for redevelopment. Their locations, traffic patterns, and availability of sites for redevelopment best position these nodes to capture the available market.

- **27th and Wisconsin:** Several key redevelopment sites and pending investment described above (Tower Theater, Wisconsin Avenue School, potential office building project, and more) will generate excitement and spur further investment around this critical and highly visible intersection. Once completed, these projects will become future neighborhood anchors, bringing significant foot traffic into the Near West Side and positively transforming the image, role, and function of the district. In addition, the planned East-West Bus Rapid Transit will create opportunities for increased investment and transit-oriented development along bus stops.
- **3500-3800 Blocks of Vliet:** While several major redevelopment projects are in the works in the Near West Side, some will not come to fruition for a year or more. In the meantime, 3500-3800 Blocks of Vliet Street is building momentum and is a top location to advance in the short-term. This node contains several sites with redevelopment or reuse potential and market conditions that support commercial uses.



Proximity to large employers and stable neighborhoods make it attractive for restaurants and some retail and services. Building on the small cluster of new businesses at 38th Street, this node could support food-related uses that support the entire Near West Side, including a small-format grocery store, a public market, and senior housing as envisioned in the 2016 Charette Report. Investment in this area will also set the stage for reuse/redevelopment of the Mid-City Shopping Center, revitalization of College Court, and future revitalization of 35th Street north of Wisconsin Avenue.

Secondary Priorities: Investment in these viable redevelopment areas will grow the commercial market in the Near West Side and will likely be boosted by catalytic projects in the priority areas described above.

- 35th Street, North of Wisconsin Avenue – This area should rise in priority if federal funding is awarded to implement the Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan
- 2700-2500 Blocks of Clybourn Street
- 200-300 Blocks of 35th Street
- 2300-2500 Blocks of Vliet Street
- 2200-2300 Blocks of State Street
- 2600 Block of State Street
- Opportunity sites identified during the 2016 [Design Charette](#) process

Recommended Strategies and Initiatives.

The growing energy in the Near West Side has strong potential to attract desired investment, build partnerships, and generate transformative impacts that benefit all residents, businesses, and visitors. The following initiatives and strategies are recommended to carry the momentum and achieve the vision for the Near West Side.

- **Proactively pursue land banking to assemble and preserve sites for future redevelopment.**
- **Actively market priority and/or prime commercial sites.**
- **Expand public relations** to continue to tell the story of the Near West Side and change outdated perceptions.
- **Implement plans for Iconic Way** between the Harley-Davidson headquarters and Museum.
- **Encourage infill housing, continued restoration, and de-densification**, leading with the College Court Revitalization.
- **Continue to capitalize on the anchors, assets, and extensive resources** dedicated to the area to increase commercial opportunities.
- **Cluster investment to ensure maximum impact and create a catalytic effect.** Concentrate public and private investment in the two priority areas: 27th & Wisconsin and 3500-3800 Blocks of Vliet. While all investment is enthusiastically welcomed in the Near West Side, market conditions suggest that private, City, HUD, and other resources should be prioritized in the top two areas to ensure critical transformative occurs in a manner that meets the goals of the NWSP and residents. Clustering investment will establish centers of activity that can build momentum and encourage spinoff private investment in the surrounding area.
- **Elevate Brew City Match or BID #10 as a concierge for redevelopment or City-owned properties** by connecting investors to grants, other funding sources, and small business programs.
- **Recruit and partner with ACRE graduates** to invest in redevelopment/reuse sites – big and small.
- In order to foster grassroots investment, **encourage businesses based on community ownership, equity ownership, and workers collective models**, which rely on shared startup investment and provide benefits to its members/owners/employees.
- **Encourage more collaborative spaces** such as coworking spaces, talent hubs, and convening and gathering spaces in order to leverage local knowledge and expertise (such as food & beverage, STEAM careers, or entrepreneurship). The State Theater project’s music hub model could be an example for additional collaborative spaces.
- **Build on enhanced connectivity from East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** to improve transportation options and the pedestrian experience. Measures could include traffic calming on commercial corridors, streetscaping, expanded BublR bikeshare throughout the Near West Side, additional the Rapid Implementation Plan pedestrian improvements, and buffered bike lanes on 27th Street.
- **Review zoning and local codes** for consistency with recommended uses.
- Continue to promote successful **startup and small business development programs**.

