A NEW 9 MILE ROAD

CITY OF OAK PARK
Established 1945
MICHIGAN

PREPARED BY THE CONGRESS FOR THE NEW URBANISM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the U.S. EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities under their Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program, the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) offers free technical assistance to communities in need with assistance and leadership from a consortium of partners collectively known as Livability Solutions.

Livability Solutions partners, which include the nation's leading experts in creating sustainable communities, lead one- and two-day targeted workshops in communities around the U.S. Communities are selected based a number of factors, not least of which is their readiness to implement the recommendations developed during the technical assistance program. Eight to ten communities are selected to receive technical assistance each year of the program.

Communities learn how to use one of the Livability Solution's tools or workshop approaches, such as walkability audits, green infrastructure valuation guides, shared use agreements, and community image surveys, that can help achieve goals of enhancing livability, creating lasting economic and environmental improvements, and improving residents' public and social health.

In Winter-Spring 2015, the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) was selected to provide technical assistance to the City of Oak Park, Michigan, to develop recommendations for the redesign of 9 Mile Road through the city. Oak Park was selected because of their readiness to take the recommendations from the technical assistance and directly implement.

The City of Oak Park understood that in order to meet or exceed their livability and economic development goals, 9 Mile Road—an over-sized road for the capacity of vehicle traffic it carries—needed to be redesigned in order to become more pedestrian friendly and set the framework for improved social and economic interactions.

GOALS OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Specific goals of the technical assistance were few but clear. They included:

- Assistance creating a concept for a street redesign of 3.63 miles of 9 Mile Road through the City of Oak Park
- Engaging with stakeholders – businesses and residents along corridor, City Council and other elected officials – to achieve support for street redesign concept
- Collect any other info/data that would be helpful for the City and MDOT in applying for future funding (including TAP funding) to implement the street redesign recommendations
- Additional guidance for making thoroughfares in the city more walkable by laying groundwork for a citywide non-motorized transportation plan
- Connect efforts along corridor for ongoing zoning updates taking place over the next 6-8 months

Planning and engineering recommendations from the technical assistance workshop will allow Oak Park to expedite the redesign of 9 Mile Road. Following the workshop, the City of Oak Park will have the necessary planning and preliminary design needed to bid and select an engineering firm to implement the workshop's recommendations.

ACE HARDWARE
ACE
HARDWARE
Paint
OVER
1400
COLORS

BACKGROUND

The City of Oak Park is located in the center of Metro Detroit, 8 miles from downtown Detroit and adjacent to many vibrant inner ring suburbs including Ferndale, Royal Oak, and others. The City of Oak Park is racial, culturally, and religiously, diverse, boasting sizable Jewish, African-American, Chaldean, and Arab populations. Yet despite this diverse mix of people, the overall population is estimate to decline from 2.50 to 2.48 person per household between 2013-2018, challenging the longheld idea that Oak Park is a "family city".

Founded in 1945, much of Oak Park's building stock is from the middle of the century, a large portion of single-family homes are classified as "Mid Century Modern." The street grid follows an irregular pattern, with some neighborhood and major streets connecting directly onto 9 Mile Road, others purposefully disconnected, and several residential driveways and business entrances opening directly onto the road. Though consistently a five-lane arterial through Oak Park, the changing context, or character, directly to 9 Mile Road through Oak Park makes it a difficult route to characterize.

OAK PARK STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In 2013-2014, the City of Oak Park embarked on an ambitious public planning process to develop a strategy for attracting and sustaining economic development in the city. This process led to Oak Park's Strategic Economic Development Plan in Spring 2014. The plan understands and reacts to changing trends in where and how people are choosing to live, work, and recreate. The plan smartly ties urban design to the economic development. The stated purpose of the plan is to:

1. Build upon existing assets with specific recommendations for new planning, investment, and infrastructure strategies that lead to a redeveloped Oak Park in five to ten years; and

2. Serve as a tool to promote private sector development and investment and guide public sector initiatives.

On the outset, the planning process set a clear agenda for change and action. Because of the scope and timeliness of the Strategic Economic Development Plan, CNU's technical assistance relied heavily on the recommendations within plan.

WHAT DOES THE PLAN SAY ABOUT 9 MILE ROAD?

The Strategic Economic Development Plan proposes three (3) areas of focus around public perception of space, including streetscape identity to "Redesign and rebrand priority streets as the arteries that anchor Oak Park's commercial sub-districts."

The Plan recognizes the need to connect the built environment to the public realm, suggesting:

From streets and signage to events and identity, Oak Park's public image and people's experiences in the public realm affect residents' and visitors' perception of the city. Currently, Oak Park's physical environment does not reflect the community's values in local businesses, recreation opportunities, and social experiences…

Commercial facades, signage, and streets are the face of Oak Park. They provide people with first impressions of the businesses that are associated with them regardless of the quality of goods and services being offered….

Events and festivals also shape experiences. While Oak Park has many annual events and ongoing programs, they are not strong regional destinations and many take place indoors, hiding the activity from the larger community….

Together, brand, events, commercial facades and signage, and a welcoming streetscape are the tools that can communicate Oak Park's unique identity and create a sense of place for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The recommendations in this report are intended to complement and expand recommendation with the Strategic Economic Development Plan, offering a detailed approach to redesign 9 Mile Road that will in turn provide a better foundation for economic development in Oak Park.

WHAT DOES A REDESIGNED 9 MILE ROAD MEAN FOR OAK PARK?

Streets and street networks provide a template for a rich combination of housing, shopping, and transportation choice. 9 Mile Road is the principal roadway through the center of Oak Park. Right now, it serves mostly motor vehicles and neither creates an attract environment for pedestrians to walk or take transit nor a safe environment for cycling or other alternative modes of transportation. Together, this reduces the economic development potential along of 9 Mile Road.

Streets and street networks should support a robust mix of culture of and commerce. Aligning the goals set forth by the residents of Oak Park in the Strategic Economic Development Plan, the redesign 9 Mile Road can play a catalytic role by better:

- Connecting people to goods & services
- Creating a more walkable Nine Mile Road corridor
- Initiating a catalyst for economic development
- Defining an area for Oak Park downtown

Though challenging, redesigning 9 Mile Road to create an identity for Oak Park and boot economic development while honoring the needs and wants of Oak Park residents is possible. To do so, a redesigned 9 Mile Road must:

- Reallocate street space for other community-serving use
- Encourage biking with dedicated bike lanes
- Integrate bike parking and bike storage to serve transit riders
- Make crossing Nine Mile on foot and bike safe and convenient
- Provide greater visibility and identity for commercial businesses
- Create public gathering places
- Create a heart for the Oak Park community
- Bring green into the center

THE PROCESS

CNU was hired to lead technical assistance in the City of Oak Park with the expressed goal to draft recommendation for pedestrian-friendly, business supporting design changes for 9 Mile Road. To do so, CNU turned to recommendations with the FHWA-endorsed ITE/CNU Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach. This document was created through a partnership between the CNU and the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). This manual acts as a how-to document that illustrates best practices for the creation and implementation of walkable, mixed-use streets—the kinds of streets specifically endorsed by the Strategic Economic Development Plan.

Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach has become a tool that transportation planners, public works departments, city leaders, and community members are using to design better streets, mitigate traffic, spur economic growth and act on public health concerns. It illustrates how transportation guidelines can be applied to roadway improvement projects to make them more compatible with community objectives and context in urban areas.

Working with officials in the City of Oak Park, CNU determines five (5) key goals of this technical assistance:

	Design Workshop (Public and Stakeholders)		
	Day 1 (half day, 30 May) **Orientation and Public Workshop Day** **Objective:** Develop shared understanding about the technical issues and community concerns and ideas	**Day 2** (full day, 01 June) **Technical Discussion and Design Day** **Objective:** Vet community ideas and resolve concerns; discuss tradeoffs and draft alternative corridor plans	**Day 3** (half day, 02 June) **Define Preferred Alternative Day** **Objective:** Define the features of the Preferred Alternative; identify City and CNU Team wrap up assignments and timeline
Morning		Invited members from partner organizations and departments discuss Workshop / public feedback and technical issues and tradeoffs	Studio time with core Oak Park / CNU Team
Afternoon	Site Tour with City of Oak Park and CNU Team	Studio time with core Oak Park / CNU Team Sketch options	
Evening	**Public Meeting Opening Event** **Part 1: Presentations** • Nine Mile Corridor Walkable Corridor Goals (City) • Present Walkable Street (CNU-ITE manual) Principles and Practices (CNU Team) **Part 2: Workshop** Engage in **small group hands-on workshop exercise** to provide local knowledge about corridor support for pre-charrette land use options		

Public Event

Priorities: Corridor theme

1. Complete streets w/ bike lanes
2. Linear park w/ dog trails
3. Boost visual amenities
   - decorative light poles
   - flower pots & benches
   -

Table #1

I Street Parking

II Pedestrian Walkways

III Biking

Trees/Greenways - Both Median +

Transit - Bus Stop, Bike Parking/Racks/Storage, Bike Shelters
Cleaning of Shelters in Winter

Crossways

Public Parking Lot - No Street parking
- fee for Street parking - Ferndale

Terminus

WHAT WE HEARD

During Monday night's kick-off meeting, residents were broken into five tables with maps of the 9 Mile Road Corridor through Oak Park and asked to prioritize the most important components of a redesigned 9 Mile Road. We asked participates the following simple question:

How important is:
- Biking
- On-street parking
- Pedestrian amenities, such as walkways and crossings
- Street trees and "green" infrastructure, such as rainwater garden
- Transit rider amenities, such as shelters and easy access to shelter
- Other?

More than 30 Oak Park residents participated in the workshop. Participants wrote their responses and justifications on sticky notes, which then led to a facilitated discussion around each table. Remarkably, a consistent set of priorities emerged from these were:

- Pedestrian walkways/amenities
- Improved bike infrastructure
- Bring "green" into the corridor

While these three priorities were consistently held amongst the tables, other interesting and important ideas were mentioned, including – public art, sidepaths, bus stops, bike amenities, public space improvements.

WHAT ELSE WE HEARD

Transit/Transit Stops
- Bus stop shelters with bike parking, locks, and storage
- Cleaning and heating of shelters in the winter
- Bus shelters: where did they all go?

Biking
- Bike rental
- Color coded bike/footpath
- More bike racks
- Complete Streets with bike lanes

Parking
- No more angled parking
- Public parking lot–no street parking; fee for street parking in Ferndale
- On-street parking

Pedestrian Amenities
- Better, more visible walkways/crossing
- Wider sidewalks
- Allow for outdoor dining
- Well lit
- Brick pavers waste of money; rubber stamp instead
- Terminus with street garden/rain garden
- Boost visual amenities like decorative light poles, flowers pots, trees, and benches

Public Art
- Public art, well and strategically places

Additionally, most of the workshop participants agreed that the corridor needs a theme and that the corridor should be "green" and that a linear park with dog trails and the sidepaths and sidewalks should be wide enough for two people pushing strollers to walk side-by-side.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITY

CHALLENGES // OPPORTUNITY

RIGHT OF WAY

The right away of 9 Mile Road—the amount of land occupied by the footprint of the roadway—is large compared to comparable streets in Oak Park and adjacent communities. This poses an urban design challenge because larger roadways make it more difficult for buildings to frame the street and build and attractive, inviting public realm where people want to walk. The amount of right of way also acts as an opportunity because the excess of land allows for more flexibility in design, and fewer trade-offs (e.g. bike lanes can be easily accommodated).

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

9 Mile Road through Oak Park moves through several different character areas, each with a different design challenges and trade-offs that need considered.

COST/FUNDING

Funding has not yet been secured for the redesign of 9 Mile Road. Applying and securing for funding from sources outside the city is essential to moving the project forward in a timely fashion.

AGING POPULATION

The population of Oak Park is decreasing slightly while the average age is climbing. As residents aging, driving long distances, or even short ones, because difficult and often dangerous.

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STRONG PUBLIC SUPPORT

For the first time since the City's founding, Oak Park boasts an Office of Economic Development. The Mayor and her team remain commitment to increasing economic activity in Oak Park by attracting new businesses while making the city for more attractive and safe for people to walk and ride bikes.

CREATING A NEW DOWNTOWN, SENSE OF PLACE

Oak Park has never had a traditional downtown or Main Street. The redesign of 9 Mile Road provides best opportunities for the city to connect its transportation and land-used goals together, to create a vibrant city center with a distinct character.

LOCAL EXAMPLES (FERNDALE)

PROXIMITY (TO DETROIT, FERNDALE, ROYAL OAK)

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SCALE 1"=100'

SCALE 1"=100'

FIVE CHARACTER AREAS

The 9 Mile Road Corridor consists of numerous character areas (or contexts) that will require different streetscape treatments depending on their characteristics. In some cases, one charter area type exists across the street from another character area type. It is important to properly identity these character areas, the preferred design treatments, and the trade-offs that need to be considered when designing a new 9 Mile Road.

CHARACTER AREA 1 - RESIDENTIAL WITH SINGLE-FAMILY WITH DRIVEWAYS

- Single Family residences facing the street
- Driveways open onto 9 Mile Road
- Lots of potential conflicts with cyclists and drivers
- Largest single character area; dominates eastern and western ends of 9 Mile Road

CHARACTER AREA 2 - STRIP COMMERCIAL

- Strip shopping centers on one side of the street
- Low, one-story buildings
- Currently, no on-street parking in most blocks

CHARACTER AREA 3 - STRIP COMMERCIAL + MULTI-DWELLING RESIDENTIAL

- Strip shopping centers on one side of the street
- Multi-dwelling units with driveways on other side of the street
- Several driveways, creates need for lots of left turns
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CHARACTER AREA 4 - LINEAR PARK

- Wide linear strip of park space on southern edge of 9 Mile Road
- Wide enough for runners, walkers, strollers, and bikes
- Planted with trees

CHARACTER AREA 5 - FUTURE DOWNTOWN

- Big box retail at major street intersection - 9 Mile Road & Coolidge
- Buildings set back from the street, surrounded by large parking lots
- Superblock structure

RECOMMENDATIONS

PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Any redesign of 9 Mile Road should prioritize the pedestrian experience. By adding better lighting, wider sidewalks, street furniture, select on-street parking and more, 9 Mile Road will become a more comfortable and enjoyable place to walk.

CROSSWALKS

Currently, crosswalks are few and far between on 9 Mile Road. Pedestrians must walk numerous blocks to find a marked crossing, and when they do, it is often only marked on one side of an intersection not both. If the pedestrian does not find a crosswalk near them, they then risk walking across a wide five-lane roadway with traffic moving in excess of 30 mph. As designed, 9 Mile Road is not safe for pedestrians.

Numerous crosswalks should be added on 9 Mile Road. These crosswalks should include: continental markings, countdown timers, ADA Ramps, and ….and be sited with transit stops and other destination in mind. No pedestrian should have to walk more than 3 blocks before being able to safely cross the street.

For a list of crosswalk locations (see map)

PEDESTRIAN REFUGES

More info needed

PEDESTRIAN LIGHTING

The current lighting along the 9 Mile Corridor does not enhance the pedestrian experience. The cobra head lighting that hangs over 9 Mile Road is more akin to highway lighting, not that of an important and dignified urban street. By adding new lighting that is scaled to the person walking or riding his/her bike (shorter, more ornate), the experience of commuting via walking or biking is improved and, at night, more safer.

PUBLIC ART INTEGRATION

When the City of Oak Park should consider integrating public art from local artists, similar to neighboring Ferndale's "ART TOWN" program. Well curated public art can create a "sense of place" and theme along the corridor.

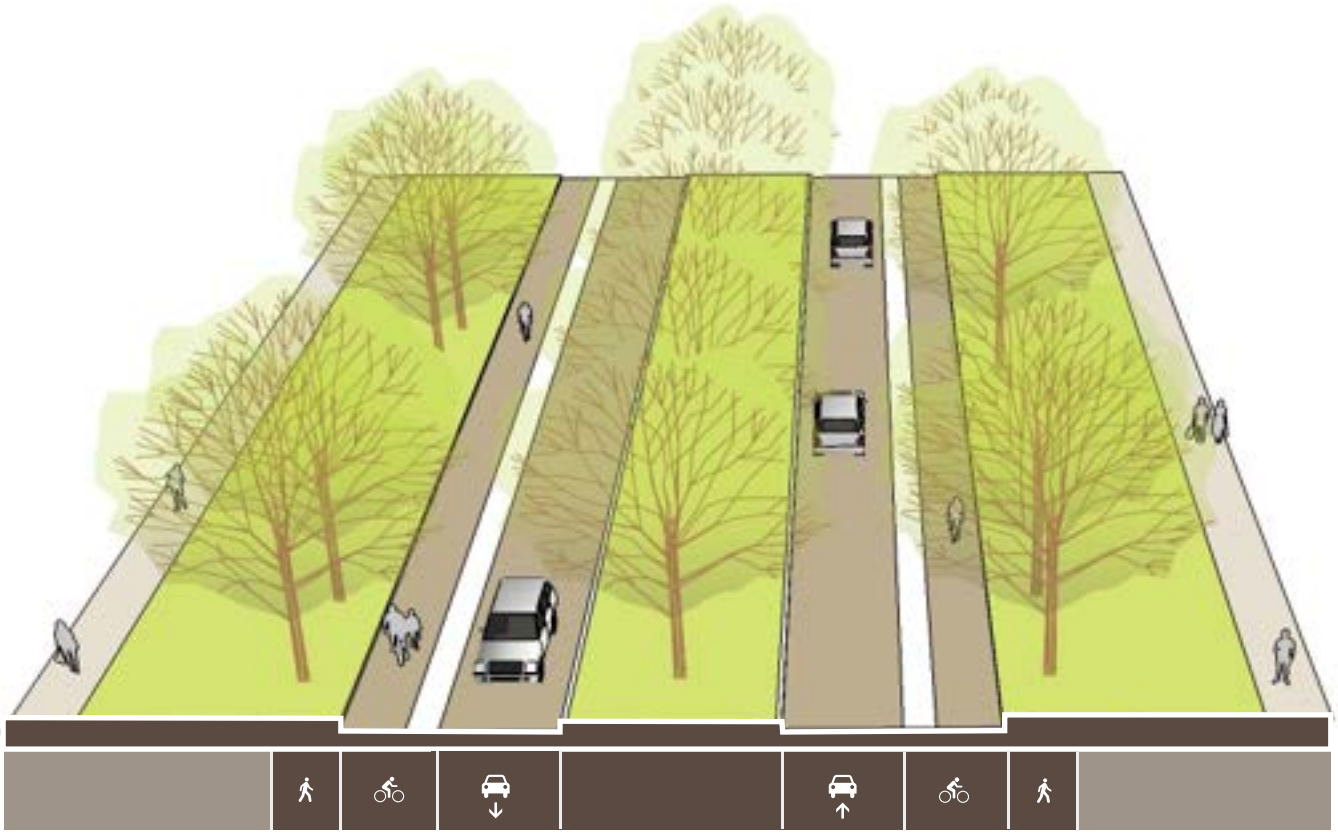
TRADE-OFFS

BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE

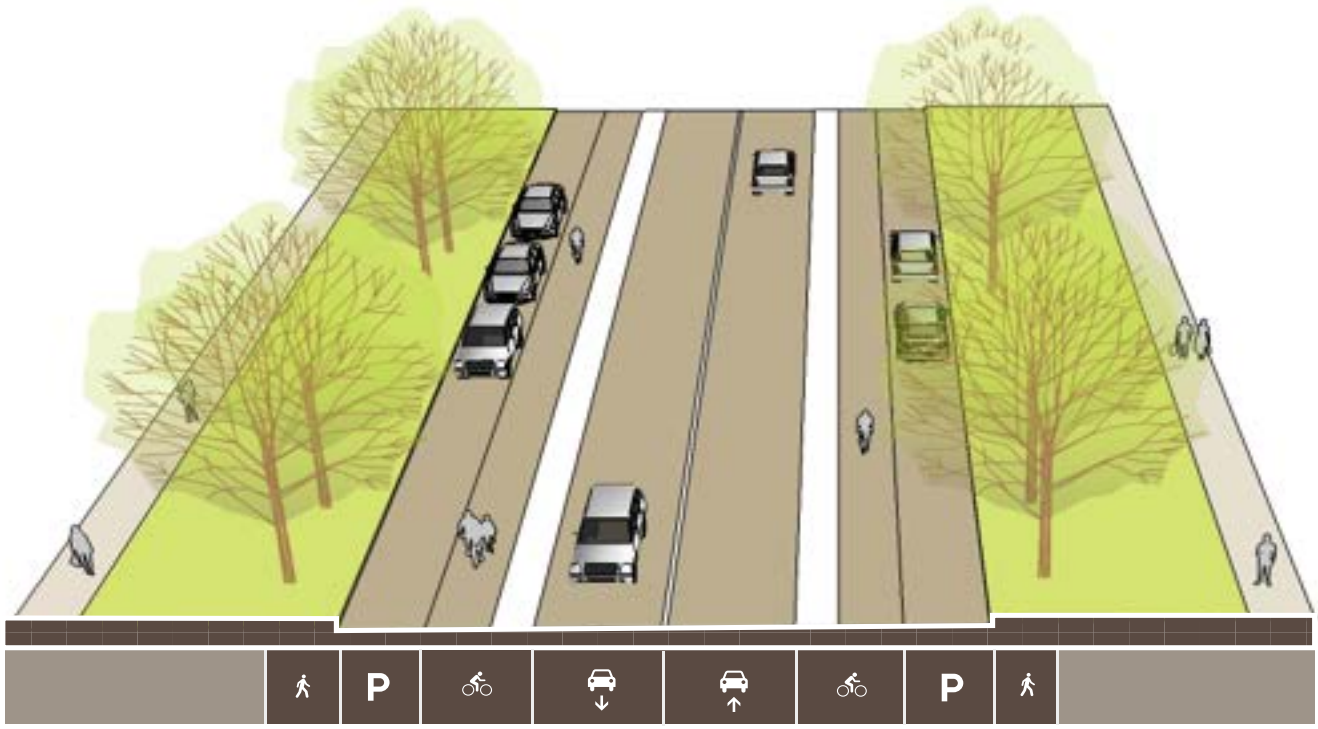
Riding a bike is increasingly common among adults and, in areas that make it a priority, an acceptable, if not desirable, form of transportation—commuting daily to work via bike, riding a bike for pleasure or for exercise, and using a bike to run errands. Cities across the U.S. have embraced cycling to the happiness of some and consternation of others, primarily those who drive for most of their daily activities.

The future of transportation is multi-modal, meaning one should have choices in how he/she gets to a destination. To encourage not just those intrepid few who can and will bike in any condition, municipalities must build out bike infrastructure that promotes safe cycling to the masses, specifically that large cohort (~50%) designated as "interested but concerned" who are interesting in biking but feel it is still to unsafe or uncomfortable to do so. By building the right kind of bike infrastructure, and lots of it, the City of Oak Park can not only encourage cycling at all ages and to all cultural groups, but actually get more people to ride, thus improving quality of life and health outcomes, reducing the number of cars in traffic, and getting more people on the street.

DESIGNS OF BUFFERED BIKE LANE



TRADE-OFFS



GREENING THE CORRIDOR

TYPES OF PLANTED MEDIANS ALONG CORRIDOR

LINEAR PARK DESIGN (IMAGE)

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ADDITIONS

TRADE-OFFS

CITY CENTER

The City of Oak Park lacks a traditional downtown or city center, restricting its capacity to capture new retail and commercial activities. The 2014 Economic Development Strategy Plan identifies the intersection of 9 Mile Road and Coolidge Highway and the area immediately surrounding it as the logical nexus of the community, stating:

This area physically and psychologically represents the Oak Park's gathering places, including civic buildings, Shepherd Park, Oak Park High School, and the 9 Mile & Coolidge shopping cluster. This area already generates much activity between daily uses and special programs, and it has the potential to be a connected, walkable district activated by a revitalized mixed-use retail center.

The following recommendations, presented as potential options for the intersection at 9 Mile Road and Coolidge Highway, will go the furthest to change the character of 9 Mile Road and the City of Oak Park itself. If the city is to become more an attractive destination that is walkable, getting this intersection correct is key.

ROUNDABOUT OPTION

Roundabouts are not new to Michigan or Metro Detroit. Many residents in Oak Park have encountered newly constructed roundabouts in nearby suburbs and towns, including Southfield and Ann Arbor. News coverage and actual usage of these roundabout undoubtedly color people's perceptions of what a roundabout is and how it functions. In some cases, as we heard in our final presentation, the public's perception of a roundabout is generally not positive. What distinguishes the proposed roundabout in Oak Park is that it is truly urban: it has lanes two lanes feeding into the roundabout at once, instead of three or more.

As with anything new, drivers in the United States tend to approach roundabouts with trepidation. This is to be expected and embraced. If the roundabout option is selected and built, an extensive education campaign should accompany the decision to acclimate drivers to rules of the roundabout. These rules, which differ only slightly from a traditional signalized intersection, include:

- Slow down and choose the correct lane
- Yield to pedestrians and traffic on your left already in the roundabout
- Do not change lanes in roundabout
- Yield to pedestrians as you exit roundabout

WHY A MODERN ROUNDABOUT?

REDUCES TRAFFIC CONFLICT POINTS

REDUCE TOTAL CRASHES BY 29%

REDUCES INJURY CRASHES BY 31%

SAFEST TYPE OF AT-GRADE INTERSECTION

SLOWER SPEEDS

SIMPLIFIED DECISION MAKING

PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY

REDUCES PEAK HOUR DELAYS FROM 75 SECONDS TO 5 SECONDS

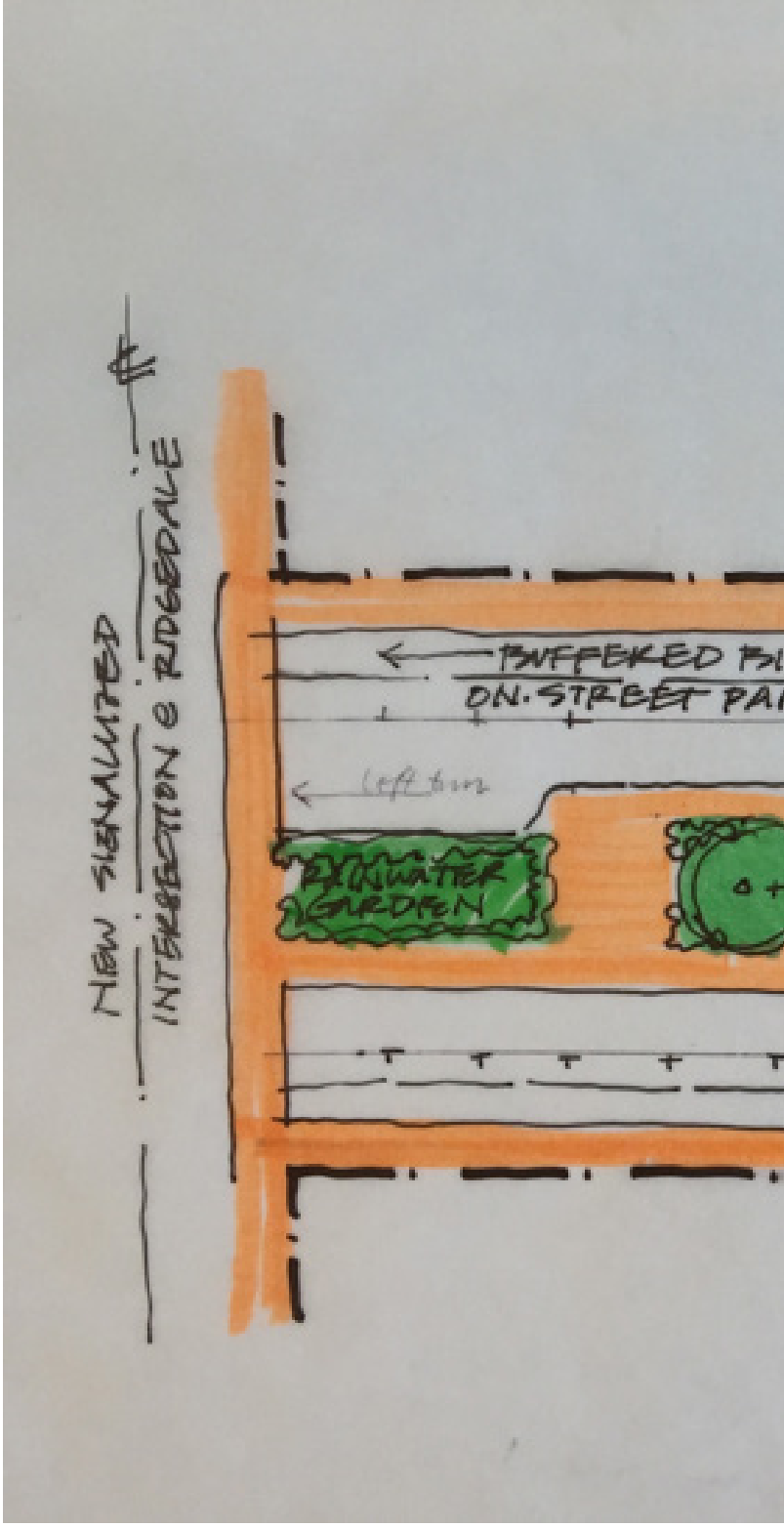
REDUCES BACK-UPS

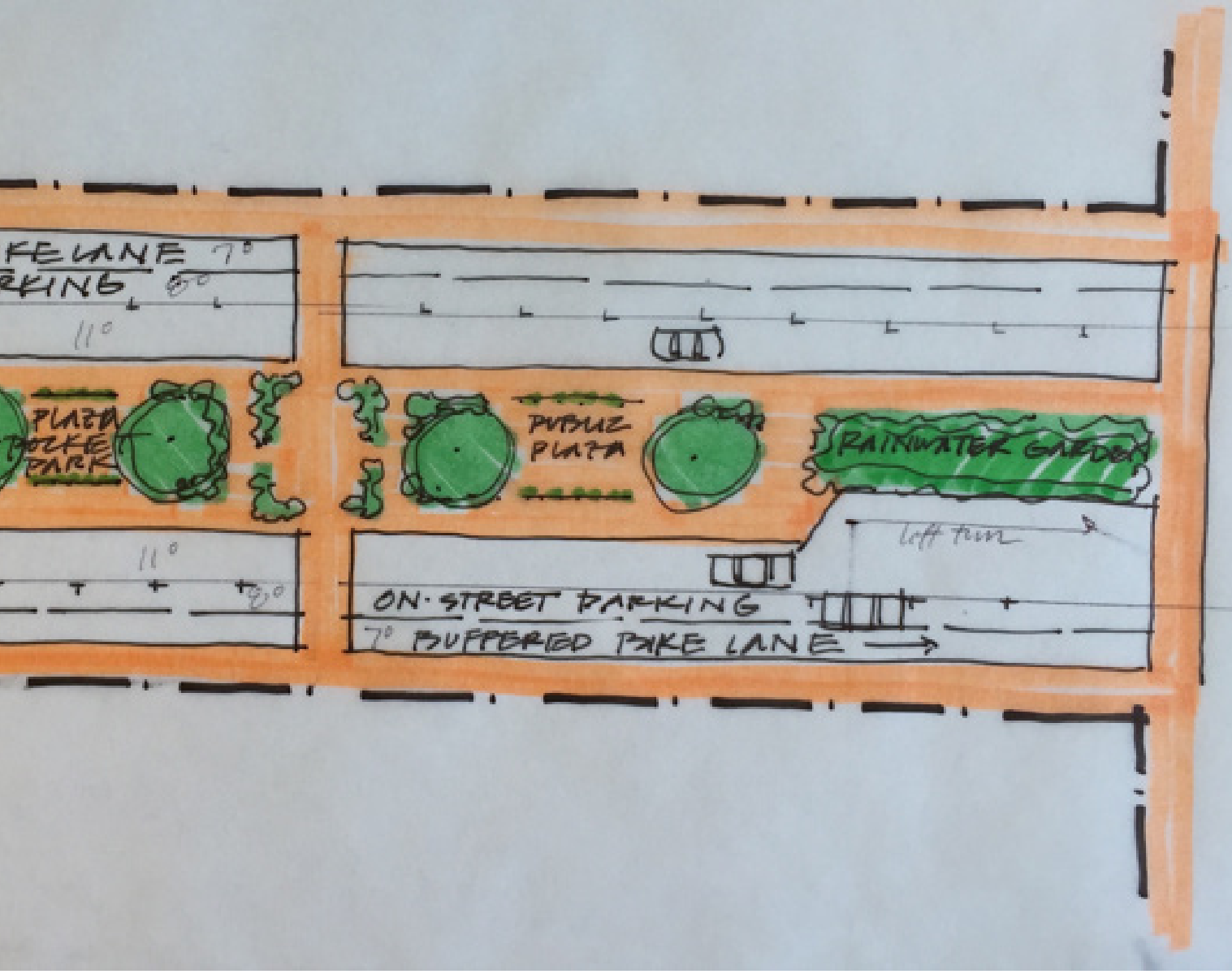
OPERATES DURING ALL TIME PERIODS OF DAY

BETTER TURNING RADII FOR TRUCKS

CREATES AN AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENT

PUBLIC PLAZA OPTION

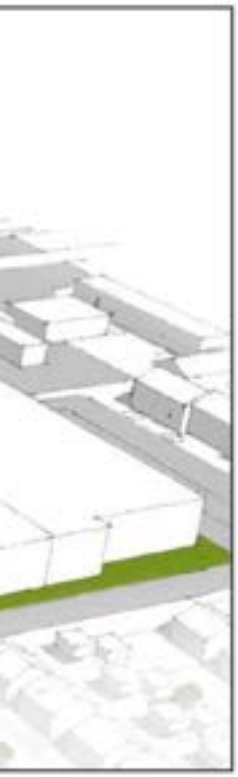



FE LANE 7'
RKING 8'
11'
PLAZA
POCKET
PARK
PUBLIC
PLAZA
RAINWATER GARDEN
left turn
11'
8'
ON-STREET PARKING
7' BUFFERED BIKE LANE

CSL Plasma
W Nine Mile Rd
Coolidge Hwy

Bird's eye model of existing conditions at 9 Mile & Coolidge, viewing northeast.

Bird's eye model of potential development concept at 9 Mile & Coolidge, viewing northeast.



REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES – NEW STREET CONNECTIONS/STREET FRONTAGE

The Economic Development Strategy Plan makes astute observations about the current and potential character of the intersection of 9 Mile Road and Coolidge Highway. It states:

The 9 Mile Road and Coolidge Highway intersection is considered Oak Park's main shopping cluster. Although the area has seen recent streetscape enhancements, the auto-oriented design (drive-thrus, gas stations, parking lots at street corners) has prevented this area from becoming an attractive retail destination because it is not walkable. Overall, there is a lack of street frontage, especially at the intersection's corners where it is most desirable. Places like these - low-rise shopping centers that are setback from the street and surrounded by parking lots - are auto- oriented, not pedestrian friendly, and not successful layouts for retailers, as exemplified by the vacant retail spaces in all four quadrants.

9 Mile and Coolidge has potential for both new development and redevelopment with 30,000 to 40,000 SF estimated supportable retail, or 10 to 12 stores. Long-term strategies focus on creating a walkable, mixed-use retail destination by encouraging development that fronts the street, high- quality public spaces that catalyze new development, and multi-family housing connected to retail by comfortable non-motorized paths.

In the short-term, low cost, high impact projects can be implemented to get the community thinking about this area differently, such as activating underutilized parking spaces with movable chairs, food trucks, and Wi-Fi hot-spots.

This alternative design for 9 Mile Road keeps the signalized intersection at 9 Mile Road and Coolidge. It embeds public space into the center of the roadway, creating a "living room" for Oak Park. It create a public space worthy of annual outdoor public events, like a 4th of July celebration. Not only this, but the public plaza makes a statement: Oak Park is a place for people.

Once built, the public plaza could also spill onto the adjacent street for public events that warrant partial or full street closures. It goes a long way in creating a "sense of place" and a civic space for the city.

Adjacent land-uses should transition over time to come up to the street, where shops and restaurants open up onto the adjacent sidewalk, instead of parking lots. It will take time for this transition to occur, but zoning updates should be made now to allow for this redevelopment to take place in future.

ACTION PLAN / IM

NEAR-TERM

These recommendations can be implementation within 6 months.

- Seek funding, via Michigan's TAP Grants or similar funding source, as was done in Ferndale, to help pay for these street improvements.
- Calculate the cost of the street improvements by soliciting a quote for the cost of street improvements.
- Use tactical urbanism to activate public space along 9 Mile Corridor, specifically in the linear park area, inviting temporary exhibits and sculpture works, with the hope that some art will find a permanent home with the completed redesign.
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- ??

PLEMENTATION

MID-TERM

These recommendations should be implemented within one to three years.

- The City of Oak Park should put out a public bid to seek engineers and designers for the redesign for 9 Mile Road.
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It's important to note that the recommendations herein are not contingent about State or Federal funding. If the City of Oak Park is committed to a walkable, bike-friendly, and vibrant 9 Mile Road, the city should proceed with the engineering and construction. The

LONG-TERM

These long-term and policy recommendations will take time and due diligence to implement. It is wise to begin now, as implementation of these recommendations can serve as a catalyst to improve the whole of Oak Park.

CONCLUSION

The residents of Oak Park have a clear set of priorities for 9 Mile Road. They want more pedestrian walkways/amenities, improved bike infrastructure, and a "green" corridor.
A well-designed 9 Mile Road that meets the needs and desires of residents can be accomplished. With strategic planning and investment from the City of Oak Park, 9 Mile Road will become a more active, vibrant corridor that is inviting to all modes of transportation.

For the redesign to be successful, designs and trade-offs in this report need to be discussed and debated. There is not enough money or roadway to accommodate at the needs and desires of users at all times. And not every recommendation is appropriate for every one of the five character areas that comprise the corridor.

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