

The Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor Redevelopment Plan



The Office of Urban Initiatives and the UB School of
Architecture and Planning Center for Urban Studies

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Introduction

More than 3,500 citizens came out in October and November 1996 to join their neighbors in an extended conversation about Buffalo's future. They attended "Neighborhood Summits" in each of the nine Council districts. The Neighborhood Summit provides the City with a clear statement of the resident's city building priorities. The citizens cited crime and improving housing and neighborhood conditions as their top priorities, while revitalizing neighborhood commercial areas ranked fifteenth.¹ In many neighborhoods, like Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood, crime, housing, neighborhood conditions, and commercial corridors are so connected that any comprehensive approach to community development would address them. Within this context, commercial corridors are central to the redevelopment of central city neighborhoods.

First, commercial corridors are the windows through which people see neighborhood life and culture. If the commercial corridors are dilapidated and rundown, then people will believe the surrounding neighborhood is also dilapidated and rundown. On the other hand, if the commercial corridor is vibrant and thriving, people will believe the surrounding neighborhood is vibrant and thriving. Commercial districts, then, will either add value to surrounding neighborhoods or subtract it from them.

Second, commercial corridors provide residents with goods and services that bolster the quality of life. Many central city residents are dependent on public transportation. This makes the journey to grocery shop very difficult. They must take the bus, get a ride from a friend, or take a taxi. Riding bus with groceries and children is a difficult task. An East Side resident once said in a focus group on neighborhood development, "Bags, babies, and buses don't mix." She was talking about the complexities of the journey to grocery shop. A vibrant and thriving neighborhood commercial corridor provides many convenient goods to local residents, which allow them to purchase frequently used goods in the neighborhood rather than make lengthy journeys.

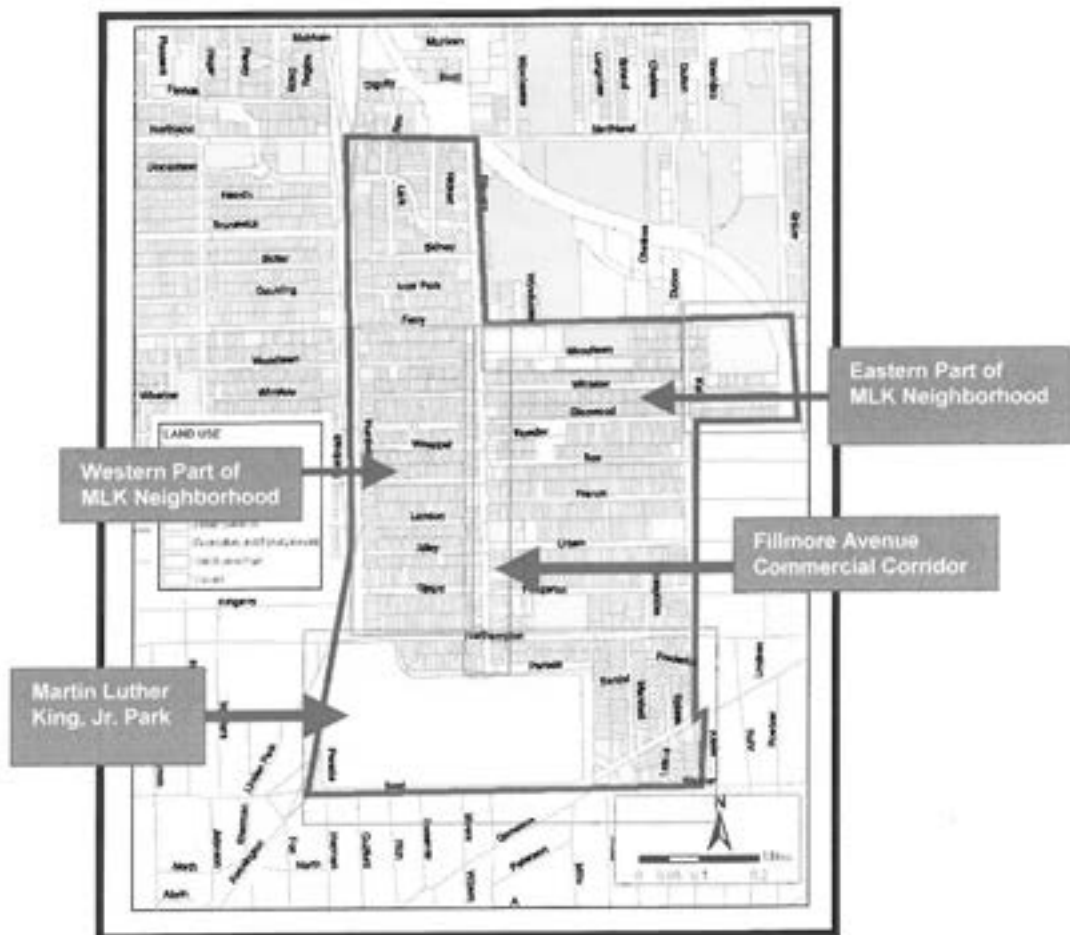
The Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor is central to the development of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. It is the gateway to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and the spine that holds together the two western and eastern sections of the neighborhood. The redevelopment of the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor is central to the redevelopment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood.

The Vision

The vision is for the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor to be a vibrant and thriving commercial corridor that is a cultural *commons* for the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood and a Gateway to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. The Fillmore commercial corridor will be a symbol of the vibrancy of King's Dream and a place that brings people together from across the race and class divide come to shop, play, and interact.

¹ The Urban Design Project, **The Neighborhood Summit Review: A Summary Accounting on Buffalo's Fall, 1996 Neighborhood Summits**, School of Architecture and Planning, University at Buffalo, Fall 1997 (reprinted Spring 1998), p. 3

Map 1: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood



Goals

- **Physically transform the commercial corridor.** The corridor should be built out so that it is capable of housing a variety of new business and commercial outlets.
- **Increase commercial development.** Identify and develop business opportunities in the district consistent with the needs and wants of the residents and business people and to focus the district around a regional market niche.
- **Develop a business support network for business owners in the corridor.** Assist business owners gain access capital and assistance for business expansion, façade improvement, and to support other activities designed to improve business conditions.
- **Develop the surrounding Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood.** Transforming the MLK neighborhood is central to the success of revitalizing the commercial corridor.
- **Incorporate the history of African Americans and the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor into the redevelopment strategy.** Strengthen the theme of the corridor by increasing awareness of the histories of Black Buffalo and Fillmore Avenue whenever possible in the execution of the plan.

- **Enhance the quality of life (QOL) in the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.** Engage in activities that promote safety, code enforcement, cleanliness and beautification initiatives to enhance the livability of the corridor.
- **Develop live near space to increase the population density in the commercial corridor.** By developing apartments above commercial establishments the population density and customer base of the corridor can be enhanced.

The Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor Redevelopment Plan will be divided into three parts. The first part details the district context in which the redevelopment plan unfolds, and part two outlines the neighborhood context. Lastly, the redevelopment plan is discussed.

Part One: The Masten District Context: Retailing Potential in the District

The Masten District has several concentrations of economic activity, with the four most important ones being Jefferson Avenue, Fillmore Avenue, East Delavan, and the Central Park Plaza. Although this section deals with redevelopment of the Fillmore commercial corridor, it is important to place the Fillmore commercial corridor in context and to understand how its development is related to the overall development of the Masten District. Consequently, to place Fillmore Avenue in context, the market study analyzed the retailing potential in the entire district.

The following provides an estimate of the potential for new local general retailing for foodstuffs, clothing, furnishings, and associated business such as dining and auto service in the Masten District. In assessing the potential and location of new activities the aim is to balance supply and demand for each type of retail activity, taking account of existing provision (to avoid unnecessary closure of existing stores) at the local (catchments) level or, where appropriate, at the district level.

Current Situation

Map 1 shows the location of residential demand in the Masten district (bounded by the green lines). To provide an indication of the variation in household income (and hence demand), dwellings are shaded by their assessed value (red is high, green is low). With the exception of the area north of the Central Plaza, the district is mainly low income. Nonetheless, at present - as the analysis below based on a comparison of supply and demand shows - in the district as a whole, and in its major sub-divisions, there is excess demand for retail goods, dining, and personal service. This suggests that new retailing capacity in the area would find a ready market based on local demand providing new stores are of comparable quality to those serving other areas of the City.

The only dedicated shopping area is Central Plaza and includes a variety of stores and requires a facelift. There are potential locations for retail districts along Jefferson, Delaware, and Fillmore with some relatively new outlets – primarily fast food, general pharmacies, and gas stations, plus on major new supermarket. The Tops market on Jefferson is a much needed addition to the retail mix, but the analysis suggest the locale could support an additional store. Much existing retailing is in poor repair, typically small stores interspersed with dwellings and vacant lots selling a variety of goods.

Supply and Demand by Catchment Area

For purposes of local-area retailing analysis the district is sub-divided into four catchments – Jefferson, Fillmore, Delaware, and Central (indicated by the blue lines in Map 1). These form “natural” localized catchments in that they are separated and bounded by major thoroughfares and visual barriers (such as the Expressway, industrial parks, and rail lines). Typically, given adequate retailing, residents opt to use outlets within these catchments for a high proportion of their purchases of goods such as foodstuffs, and day-to-day items. This is especially the case

with relatively low car ownership locales such as Masten district. Residents also purchase a variable proportion of their less regular comparative-shopping goods such as furnishings, clothing, etc locally. The catchments also have a sizable daytime population of workers in local industries, hospitals, and education. The location and approximate size of the employment at each business is indicated (by the circles). Again, given attractive retailing, service, and dining opportunities, it is likely that visitors would make increased, albeit, limited use of local opportunities. It is also possible, that more affluent residents in neighboring districts would use new retailing outlets, although this is likely to occur only when the new facilities have become established.

Current Retail Profile

Number of Businesses	Jefferson	Fillmore	Delevan	Central
Home Improvement Stores	2	2	1	2
General merchandise stores	9	6	6	8
Food stores	9	2	5	4
Auto dealers, gas stations	2		5	2
Apparel, accessory stores	2	4	2	3
Furniture, home furnishings	2		2	9
Eating & drinking places	19	8	10	14
Miscellaneous Retail Stores	4	2	3	3

The analysis is carried out using Claritas business and demographic data supplemented by additional data from the Center for Urban Studies archives and the City of Buffalo Downtown Workers survey. The Claritas data set provides information on the number, employment, and sales of local retail establishments by type, and of the roughly corresponding categories of household expenditure.² These data are compared for the Masten district as a whole and for the separate catchments. Because the catchments indicated above do not coincide with either the Buffalo districts or census tracts, some allowance has been made for this as shown in Map 2.

Present Residential Demand

Residential Demand \$m	Jefferson	Fillmore	Delevan	Central	Total
Retail Trade	\$79.1	\$24.0	\$68.6	\$42.2	\$213.9
Home Improvement Stores	\$3.1	\$0.8	\$2.8	\$1.6	\$8.4
General merchandise stores	\$16.9	\$5.3	\$14.8	\$9.0	\$46.1
Food stores	\$21.8	\$7.5	\$18.8	\$11.4	\$59.6
Auto dealers, gas stations	\$16.6	\$4.6	\$14.6	\$9.4	\$45.1
Apparel, accessory stores	\$16.5	\$5.0	\$14.6	\$9.0	\$45.1
Furniture, home furnishings	\$4.5	\$1.2	\$4.1	\$2.5	\$12.3
Eating & drinking places	\$21.7	\$6.8	\$18.8	\$12.3	\$59.7
Miscellaneous Retail Stores	\$8.1	\$2.3	\$6.5	\$3.9	\$20.8
Total	\$109.3	\$33.6	\$95.1	\$59.0	\$297.0

Chart 1 shows the current provision of retailing, dining, and personal services in the district as a whole (shown in blue). It also gives the total demand of residents for these same categories (shown in red) and the expected demand from daytime workers. Total expected demand is calculated as the sum of workday demand (about 5%, except dining) and the proportion of purchases that residents are expected to make locally, about 70% of total, depending on the category (shown in yellow). *The actual extent of these purchases will depend largely on the extent to which the any new outlets and the retailing districts overall can be made attractive to*

² There are some ambiguities in matching expenditures and sales because many of the stores sell a variety of goods (i.e. general merchandise) but are not categorized as such. Some adjustment has been made.

resident and workday customers. The apparent success of some newer ventures in the area (such as the new super market, coffee shops, etc) and possibilities for creative marketing (such as workplace delivery of lunches, cleaning, etc.) indicate that this is quite possible.

For all categories, except possibly home furnishing, expected demand well exceeds current sales by local outlets. For the calculations, population and income levels are taken to remain at current levels. Note that since the excess of demand over supply is quite substantial, modifying population or income to account for upward or downward shifts will not change the broad conclusions as to the possibilities for new retail developments.

Estimated Retail Potential (Sales Area, Employment, and Investment Requirement)

Chart 2 shows the excess demand for each retail category in each of the four catchments. Again, in all catchments there appears to be the potential for additional local sales. The exceptions are the excess supply of dining facilities in the Fillmore, which is offset by a roughly equal excess demand in Delaware. There is also excess local supply of food and furnishings in Central, suggesting that this plaza serves as a regional center to some extent (i.e. draws some custom from outside the Central catchment area, possibly also from outside the Masten district. Given the proximity of catchments, it is appropriate to consolidate excess demand as necessary across the district in order to minimize closedown of existing stores. The reallocated excess demands are shown in Chart 3.

The estimates of excess demand given in Chart 3 are used to calculate the potential number of stores, their approximate construction costs, and the number of retail jobs provided. It is assumed that, to be competitive with others outside the district, stores new will be somewhat larger (measured as sales area or number of employees) than those currently serving the area and will have higher productivity (measured as sales/employee). New stores are taken to be twice as large as the average for Buffalo stores of each type in order to capture scale economies in construction, service, and the variety of good sold. The size of stores should be such as to balance scale economies, variety, and local competitiveness. Productivity-related levels are given in Chart 4. In several cases, the demand is considered to be insufficient to support these larger stores. The resulting suggested numbers of stores of each type in each catchment based on these considerations are shown in Chart 5, together with the current number of stores. Although the number of new stores is relatively small, their sales would be amount to one third of the expected total sales. The estimated retail potential and suggested number of stores is summarized below. Charts 6 and 7 show the sales area, and investment requirement for new stores and Chart 8 gives the approximate number of (direct) jobs that would be created.

Afterthought: although, no additional home improvement and furnishing stores are indicated to serve the local community, it is possible that existing furnishing stores draw customers from beyond the Masten district, with the prospect for further agglomeration of these stores and additional custom for other new stores.

Summary of Retail Potential

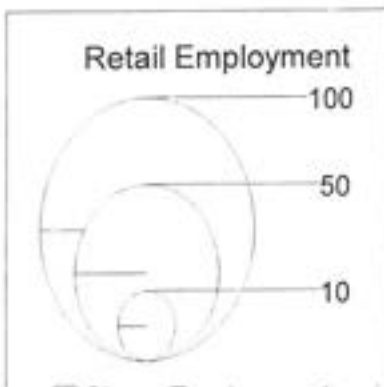
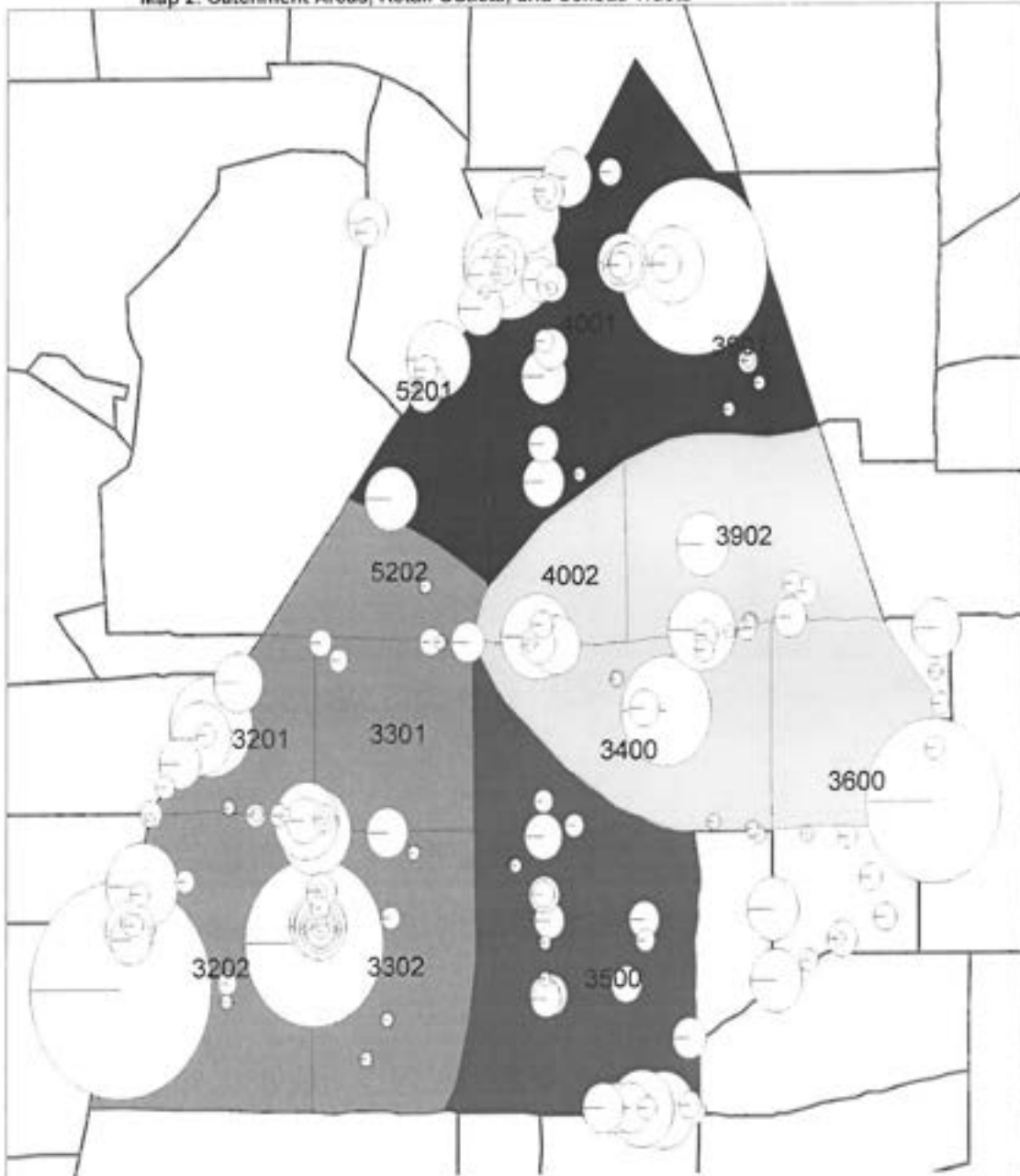
Approximate Sales Area (SQFT)	Jefferson	Fillmore	Delevan	Central
Home Improvement Stores				
General merchandise stores	31,279	3,789	19,138	8,352
Food stores	62,217	16,212	53,678	132,107
Auto dealers, gas stations	5,090	5,730	13,201	2,381
Apparel, accessory stores	97,898	16,883	89,745	41,923
Furniture, home furnishings				
Eating & drinking places	22,165	72,455	40,385	9,906
Miscellaneous Retail Stores	37,489	4,942	20,728	11,820
Total	256,136	120,011	236,874	206,488

Suggested Stores	Jefferson	Fillmore	Delevan	Central
Home Improvement Stores				
General merchandise stores	1			
Food stores	2	1	2	4
Auto dealers, gas stations			1	
Apparel, accessory stores	10	2	10	4
Furniture, home furnishings				
Eating & drinking places	2	8	4	1
Miscellaneous Retail Stores	2		1	1
Total	16	10	16	8

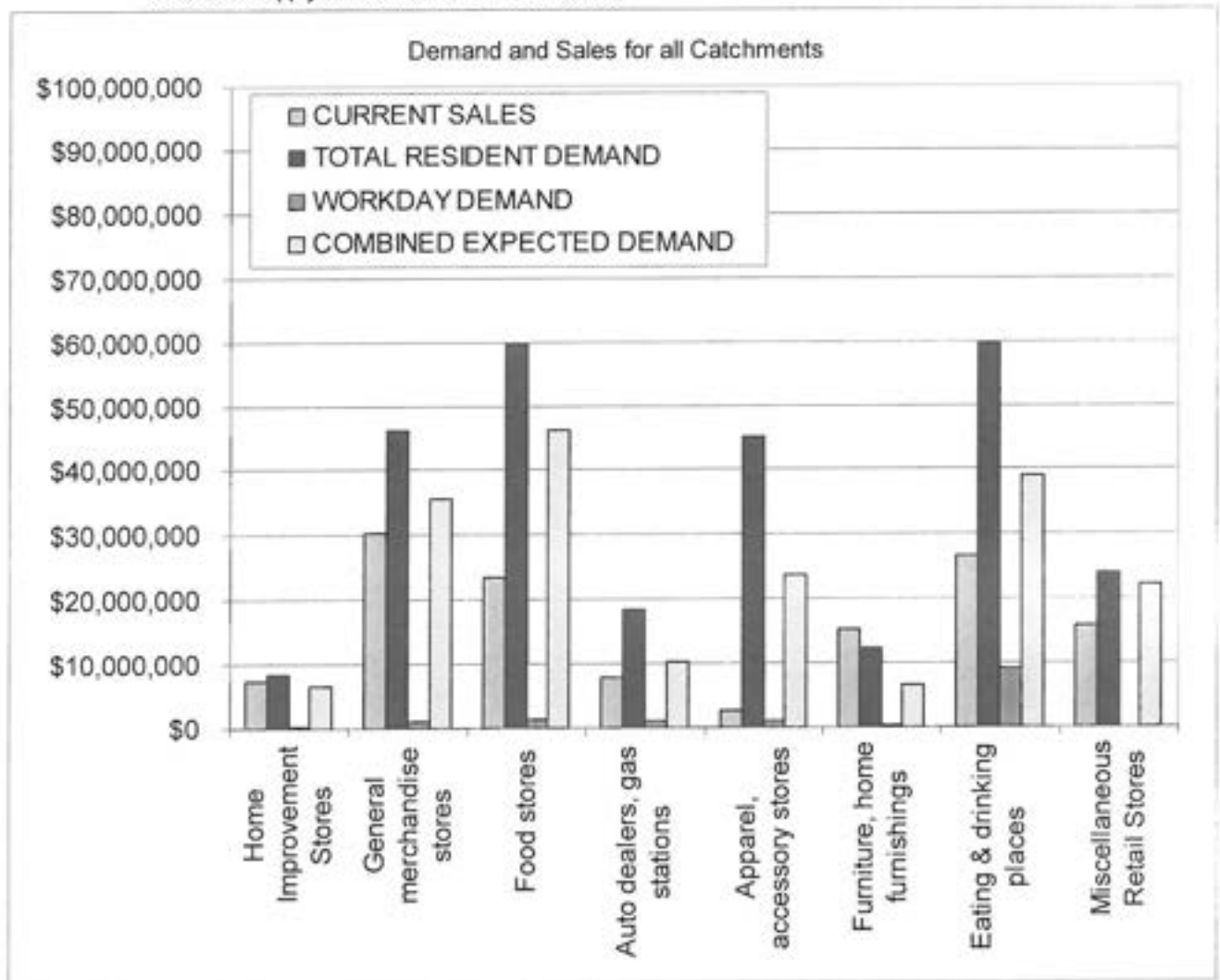
Map 1: Location of Residential and Workday Demand



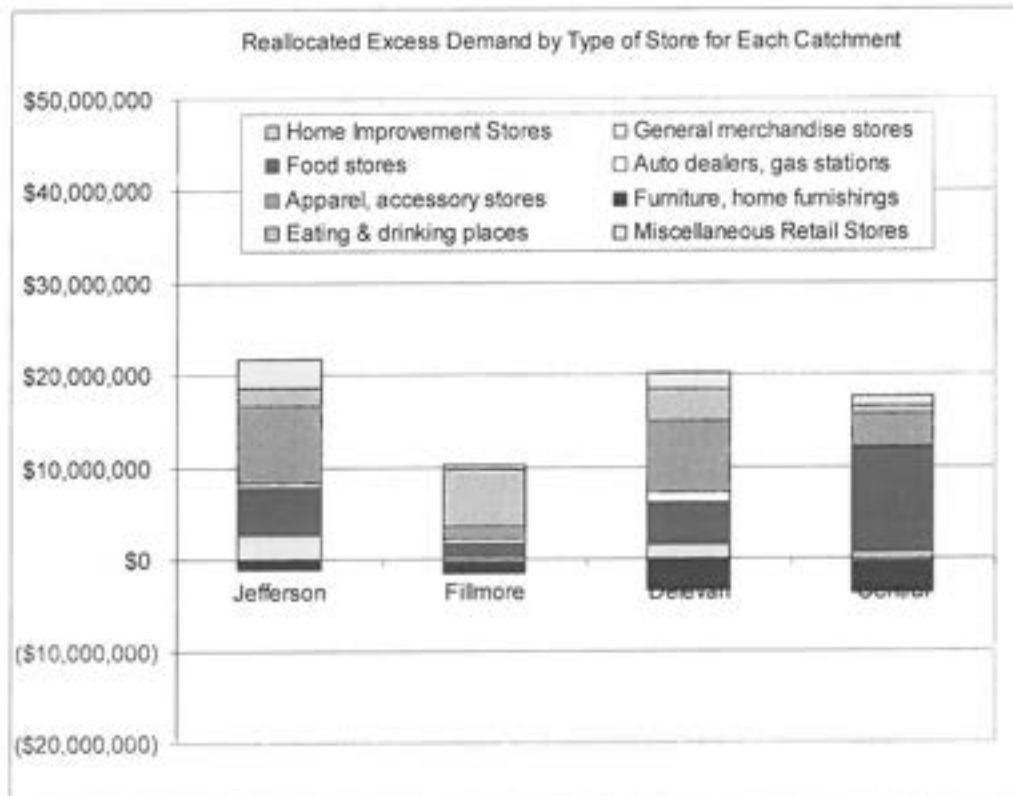
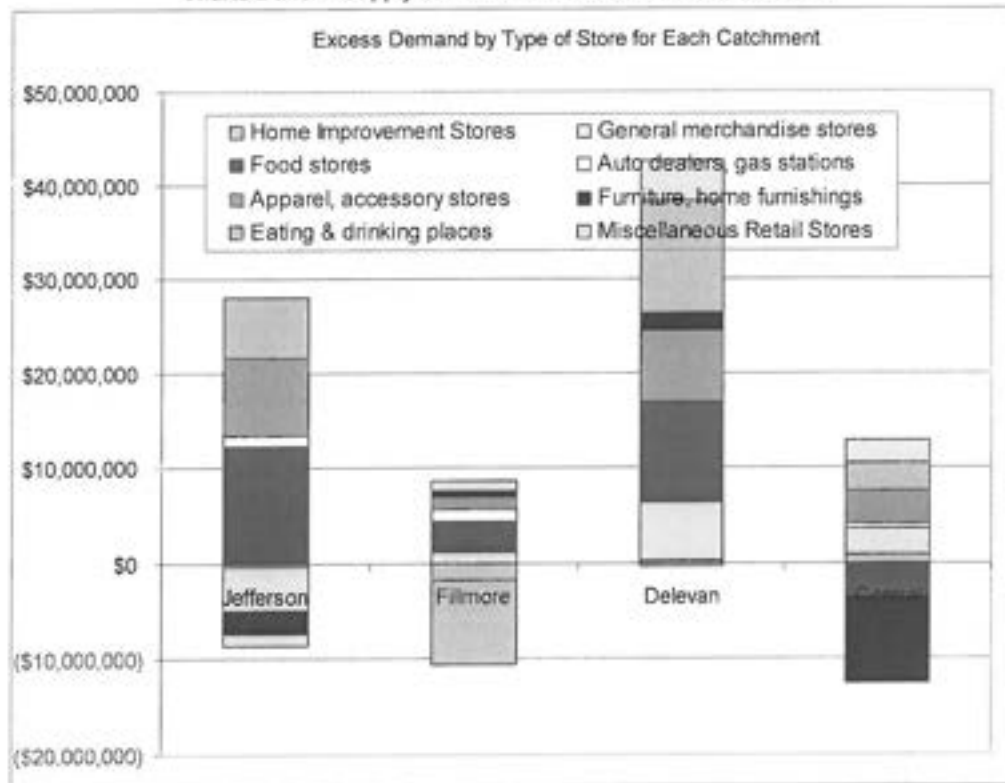
Map 2. Catchment Areas, Retail Outlets, and Census Tracts



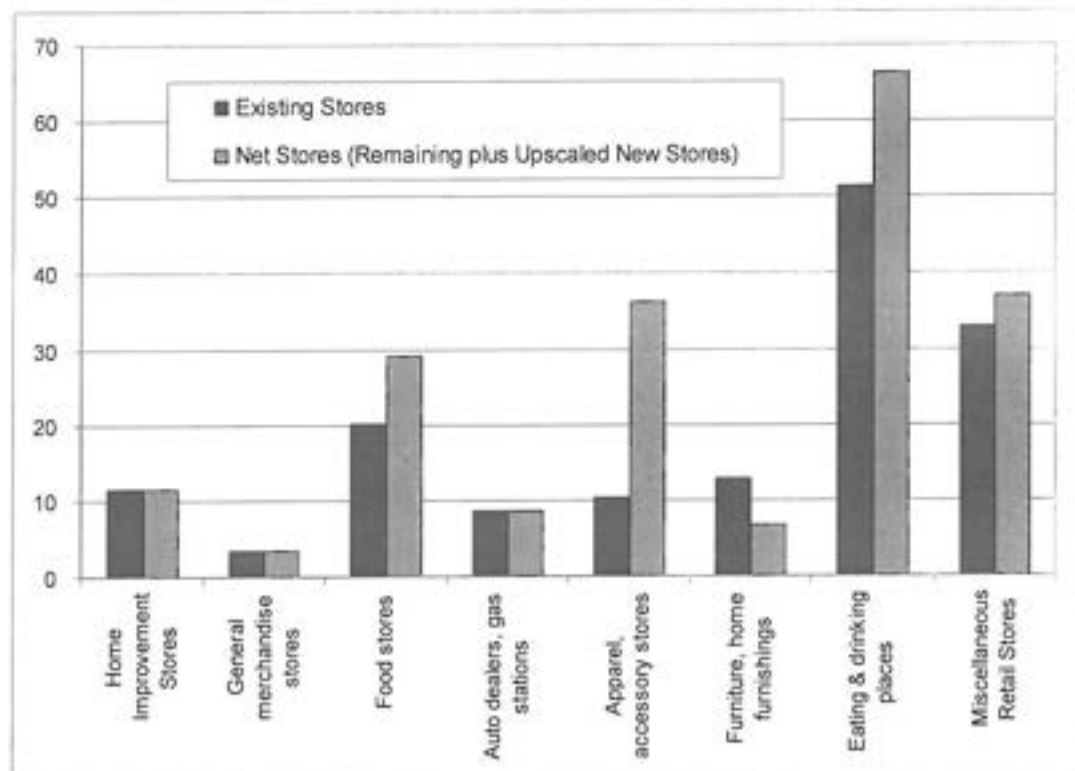
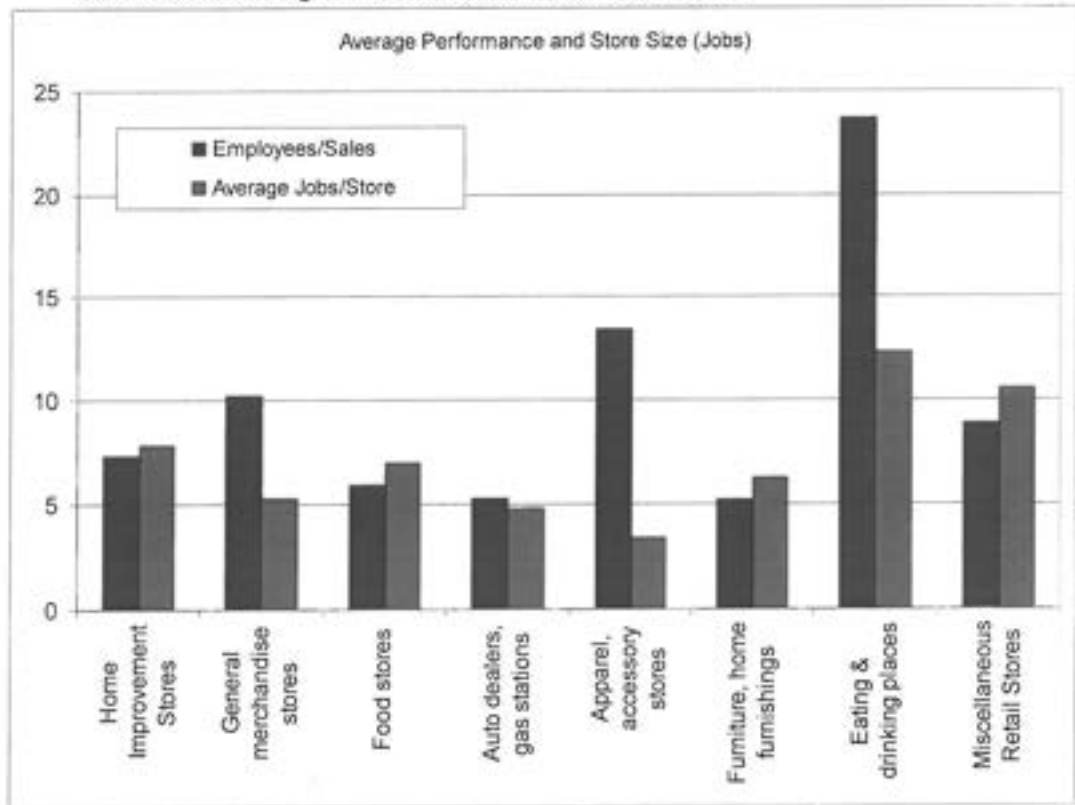
Charts 1: Supply and Demand for Masten District



Charts 2 and 3: Supply and Demand Imbalance for Catchments

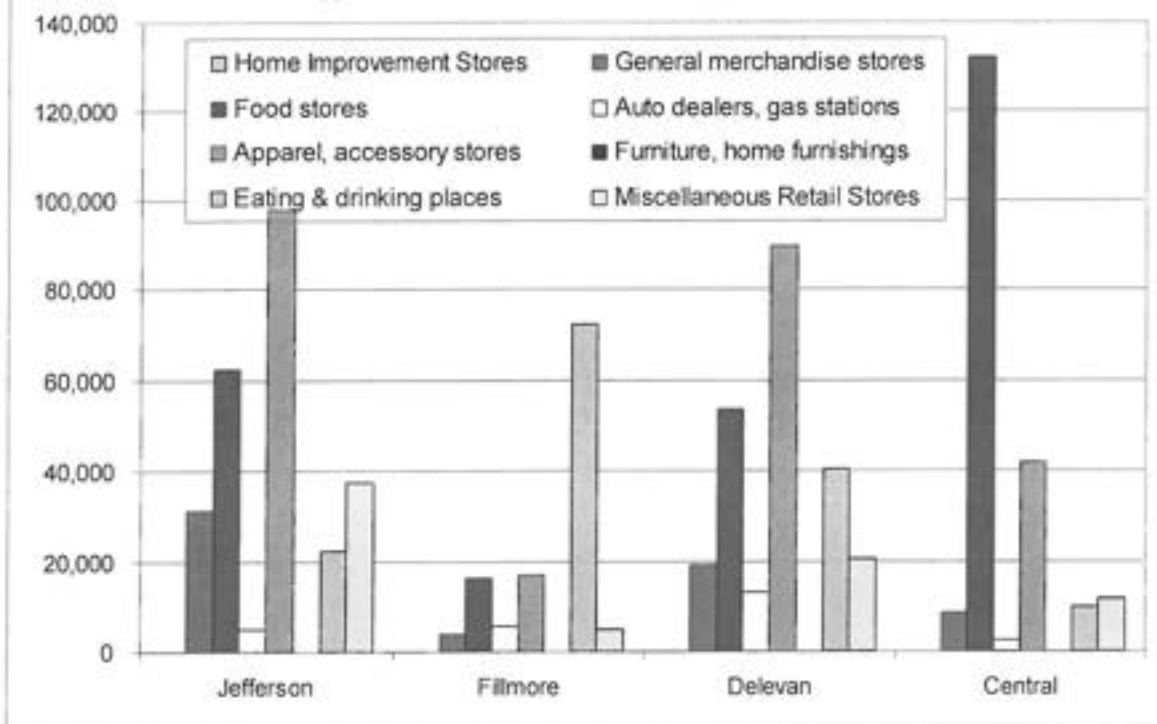


Charts 4 and 5: Average Performance and Number of New Stores



Charts 6 and 7: Sales Area, and Investment Requirement for New Stores

Approximate New Sales Area SQFT by Type and Catchment



Approximate Construction Cost \$m by Type and Catchment

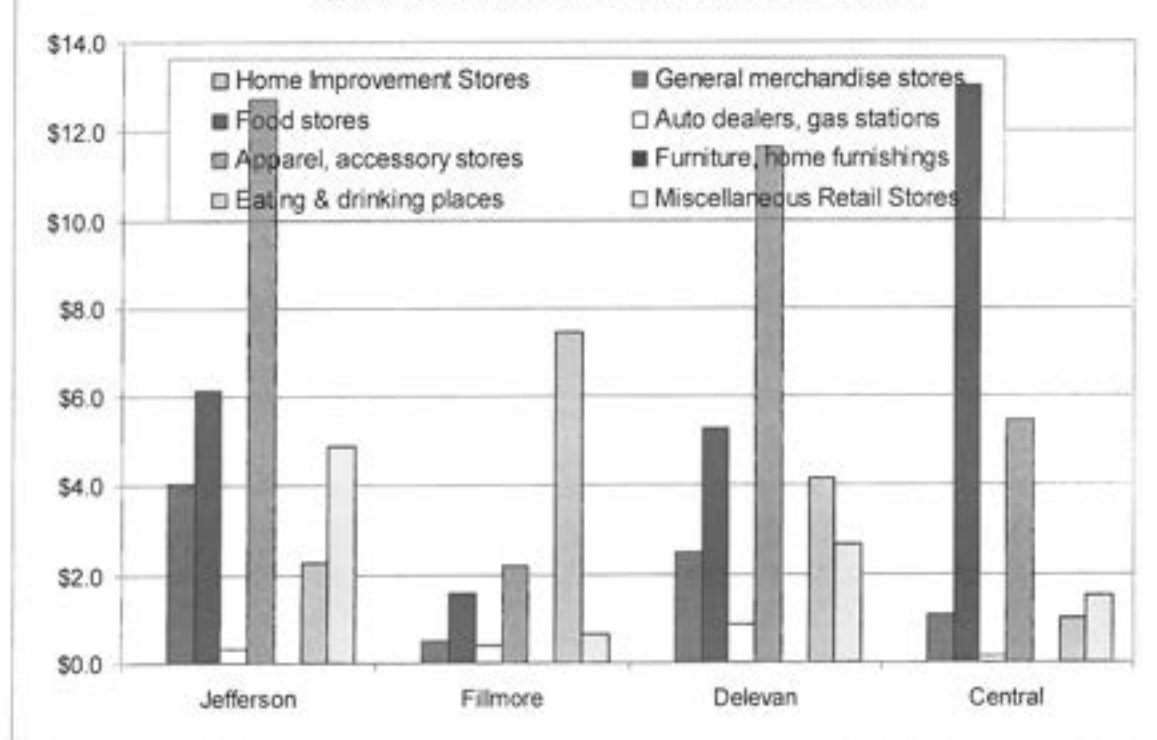
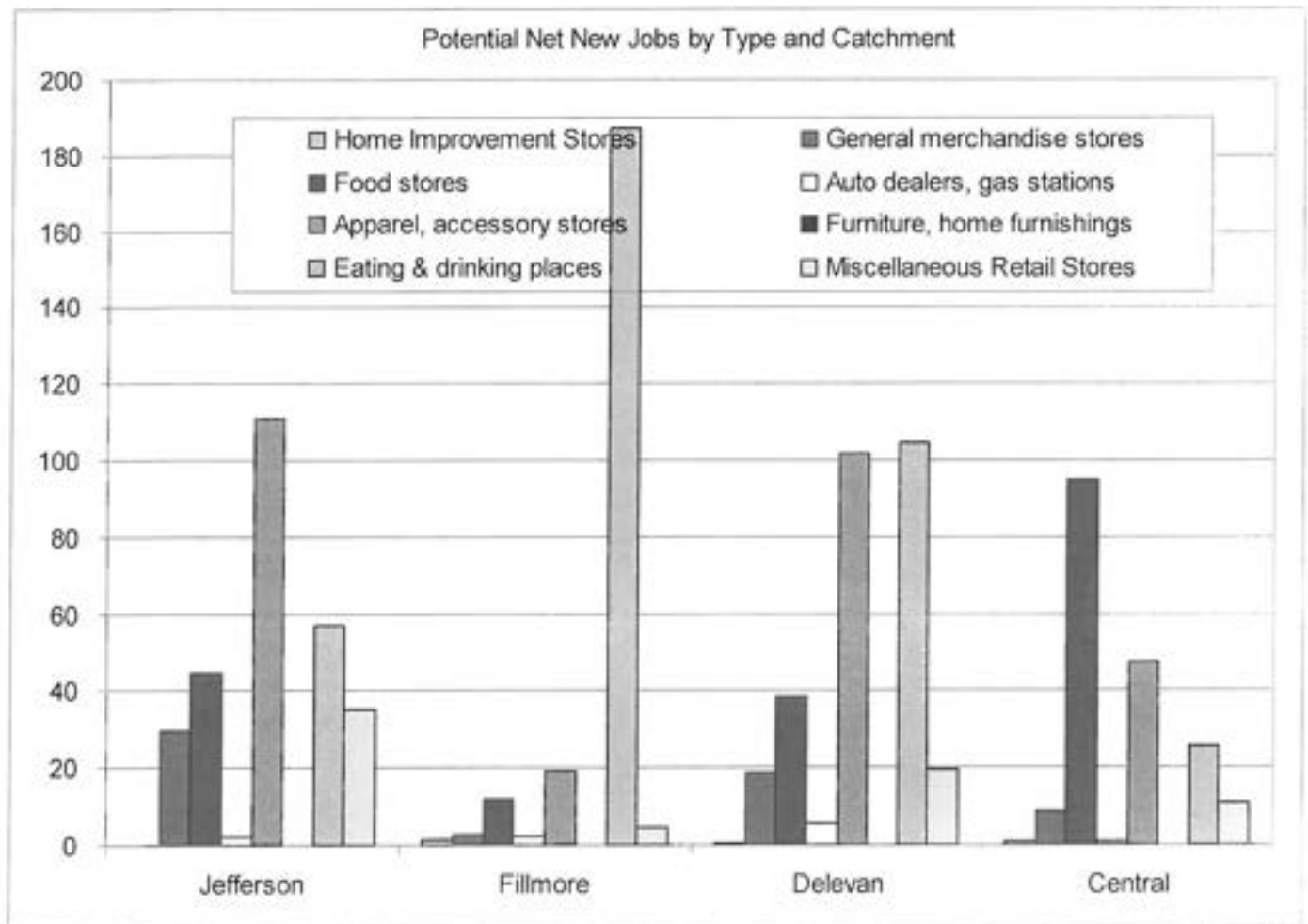


Chart 8: Jobs at New Stores



The market analysis indicates that the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor is the least developed of the four commercial districts in Masten. Nonetheless, even under current circumstances it can support substantial increases in retail activities. However, it is believed that the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor possess competitive advantages, which if exploited, could turn the corridor into a thriving retail center.

**Part Two: The Neighborhood Context: The Martin Luther King, Jr.
Neighborhood**

Martin Luther King Jr.

■ Reaching For the Turning Point



Housing and Neighborhood Conditions

Masten Neighborhood Master Plan

"A Community on the Move"



The Office of Urban Information
and
The City of Chicago
Department of Urban, Planning, and
Community Development

Plan No.

4/1

Site and Situation

The Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) neighborhood is situated in southern border of the Masten neighborhood. The neighborhood's western boundary extends along Route 33 and the Humboldt Parkway. Best Street and Walden form the southern border, while East Ferry and Northland form the northern border. Donovan and Klefer represent the eastern boundary.

The focal point of the MLK neighborhood is the Martin Luther King, Jr. Olmsted Park. It is the neighborhood's most important asset and shapes its character. MLK is divided into western and eastern neighborhoods, which are connected by the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor. Collectively, Fillmore Avenue and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park form framework to guide the community building process. MLK is strategically located. Proximity to Route 33 provides a connecting link to all parts of the metropolitan region. Moreover, the neighborhood is close to several important employment centers: downtown Buffalo, Canisius College, Sisters Hospital, Erie County Medical Center, and American Axel.

Map: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood



The People of Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood

The Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is in deep trouble. No other neighborhood in the Masten District is more threatened. This is problematic because Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is the cultural center of Black Buffalo. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Park is the most sacred social space in the African American community. It is the site of the Juneteenth Celebration of slavery's end. It is the favored site for family, school, and organizational reunions.

Indeed, most celebrations in the African American community center on Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. The Buffalo Museum of Science has become the town center for the African American community. Whenever there is a need to discuss issues that are important to the African American community, the meetings are always held at the Buffalo Science Museum. Many people make a yearly pilgrimage to the statue of Martin Luther King, Jr. in MLK Park.

Even so, conditions in the neighborhood have reached crisis proportions. During the 1990s, the population in MLK dropped from 5,827 to 4,368, a decline of 25%. The population loss in MLK was greater than in any other neighborhood in the Masten District. About 96% of the residents of MLK are African Americans, the highest proportion of blacks living in any Masten neighborhood.

The neighborhood has a large number of children and youth (34%) and residents in their working years (51%). At the same time, it has large percentage of elders (16%). So, residents at the two extremes of the lifecycle are well represented in this neighborhood. On this point, MLK has the highest proportion (18.2%) of children (5-14) and the highest proportion (10.4%) residents in the 65-74-age cohort. Indeed, MLK has a median age of 25 years, making it the youngest neighborhood in the Masten District. So, in this community you have a big concentration of youth and elders.

Females and non-family households dominate the household structure, and most children live in these types of households. 69% of all households in MLK fall into this category, and 52 percent of these households are with children under 18 years. Married couples head only 26% of the households, and only 9% of these households have children under 18 years. Among Masten neighborhoods, the MLK neighborhood has the highest proportion of low-income groups. Fifty-four percent of the population have incomes below \$20,000 a year, the median household income is only \$18,000 annually, and 37% of the population live at or below the poverty level. Unemployment is at 9% and the labor force participation rate (47%) is the second lowest in Masten. In all of the socioeconomic indices, the MLK neighborhood ranks near the bottom.

Housing and Neighborhood Conditions

The MLK neighborhood, for planning and community development purposes can be divided into three sub neighborhood units. The neighborhood to the west and east of Fillmore Avenue comprise two neighborhood sub units, while the area south of Northampton, surrounding the MLK Park represents a third neighborhood sub unit.

Housing is one of the most significant assets in the MLK neighborhood. The preservation, rehabilitation, and modernization of housing are critical to the radical transformation of this neighborhood. While some good housing units are found in the MLK neighborhood, most of the housing units are in poor or marginal condition. While some very good housing units are found in the neighborhood, poor housing is omnipresent, and *every street* in the neighborhood has bad housing units interspersed with good units. Such conditions undermine neighborhood optimism and depress housing values.

Nonetheless, the neighborhood has important assets and should become a developmental priority. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, one of Buffalo's Olmsted Parks, anchors the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. The housing stock, while declining, nevertheless is architecturally similar to the units that are so popular on the West Side. These beautiful homes represent an asset, which could become attractive to upwardly mobile citizens, immigrants, and newcomers to the City.

The housing stock in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood has been neglected and now shows the visible signs of decline. The median year that houses were built in the Martin Luther

King, Jr. neighborhood was 1940, with only 110 of the 2,468 housing units in the neighborhood being built in 1960 or later. Most of the new housing units in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood appear to be concentrated on Woodlawn, on the eastern side of Fillmore Avenue.

Figure 1: New Housing Units on Woodlawn [located on the eastern side of Fillmore Avenue]



Most of the housing stock, however, is older units built in 1950 or earlier. A big problem is that about 60% of these houses are renter occupied, and these renter occupied units are dispersed among owner-occupied units. Poor maintenance among most of the housing units in the neighborhood has caused prices to be greatly depressed. The median value of houses in the MLK area is \$26,000. Within this context, most of the owners are long-residents. For example, the median year of occupancy for owner-occupied dwellings is 1971, while the median year of occupancy for renter units is 1995.

The structural nature of this problem lies in the age structure of homeowners in MLK. Forty percent of the units (728) found in the Masten neighborhood are owner occupied. A whopping 62% are owned by residents 60 years and older. The 45 –59 age cohort owns Sixteen percent. Only 22 percent of the units are owned by residents 44 years and younger. Two problems flow from this analysis. The first is that most of these owners probably do not have the discretionary income to maintain their properties. This means that keeping these houses in good repair with appealing facades and residential sites will be challenging. Given the depressed nature of the housing market in this local, resale of the units will be very problematic. Third, unless a successful intervention strategy is formulated, the outmigration will persist.

At the same time, most of the housing units in this neighborhood are large structures that will be expensive to rehabilitate. Yet, this is a built up area with large numbers of vacant lots only on a few streets: Roeder, Box, and on the streets south of Urban. The housing stock is the type of early 20th century structures that have been so popular on the West Side. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and the Fillmore Avenue Commercial District anchor this neighborhood.

Photo 2: Three Family Home



Photo 3: Two Family House



Figure 4: One story single-family unit



Recommendations

Revitalization in the MLK neighborhood should occur in phases. The first phase should focus on the redevelopment of neighborhoods around the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. In this phase, the entire neighborhood from Northland to the park will be redeveloped, along with the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor (which will be discussed in detail in the next section). This approach will allow the redevelopment to extend from the neighborhood's major asset, and it will reimage the community. As part of this phase, Woodlawn will be extensively landscaped and streetscaped. Most of the housing on this street have been built within the last ten years and extensive landscaping is the only requirement for improving this part of the neighborhood. After completing phase one, the western part of the neighborhood should be redeveloped, and then the remainder of the neighborhood. The idea is move outward from Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, the neighborhood's main asset, and then redevelop the western neighborhood, which borders Route 33. Because of its high visibility, redevelopment of this area will help in the neighborhood reimagining process.

1. Establish a neighborhood *renaissance zone* (NRZ) to stimulate revitalization of Martin Luther King, Jr. Park community.
2. Urge banks to establish a neighborhood renaissance mortgage program in the NRZ to encourage the purchase of homes in Fillmore-Leroy.

3. Establish a housing rehabilitation and modernization program with loans and grants to all property owners in the NRZ, regardless of income, to spawn the physical improvement of the neighborhood.
4. Establish a home equity assistance program in the NRZ to guarantee equity and to stimulate the purchase of homes in the neighborhood.
5. Establish a *crime bubble* in priority development areas in the NRZ to ensure safety in those places.
6. Establish a team of residents to participate in a District program where problem properties are identified, mapped, and redeveloped.
7. Redevelop the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor to create a positive neighborhood image.
8. Paint the Kensington Expressway railings that front houses located along the Humboldt Parkway.
9. Landscape and beautify the industrial lands that front the houses on Woodlawn.

Part Three: The Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor Redevelopment Plan

The Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor extends from East Ferry to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park (MLK Park). It is both the Gateway to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Olmsted Park and the spine that services and holds together the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. The Martin Luther King, Jr. segment of Fillmore Avenue is one the most important commercial corridor in the City.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is the cultural center of Black Buffalo. MLK Park is the most important social space in the African American community. It is the site of Juneteenth, which celebrates the abolition of slavery, family reunions, and other gatherings. The Buffalo Science Museum, located in the MLK Park, has become Black Buffalo's Town Center. Whenever the African American community needs to be informed about important civic issues, meetings most often held in the Science Museum. Moreover, not only does the neighborhood possess an attractive, but rundown, housing stock, it is home to an Olmsted park and one of the region's two soul food restaurants.

The transformation of Fillmore Avenue into a vibrant commercial corridor is key to the revitalization of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. A basic tenet of the Masten District Neighborhood Plan is that commercial thoroughfares are the windows through which people view everyday life and culture. If the corridor is attractive and vibrant, people will believe the surrounding commercial corridor is attractive and vibrant. Likewise, if the corridor is dilapidated and rundown, people will believe the surrounding neighborhoods are also dilapidated and rundown.

The goal is to turn Fillmore Avenue into a thriving commercial corridor that services both the MLK neighborhood and a regional market niche; a commons that holds the neighborhood together, provides it with high quality goods and services, and serves as a symbol of pride, progress, the vibrancy of King's Dream in the Buffalo-Niagara region. And as the Gateway to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, a revitalized Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor would accentuate the Olmsted Park and help turn the entire area into a major tourist venue.

The Development Plan

The Site and Setting

The Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor is a mixed residential-commercial district that extends from East Ferry to Martin Luther King, Jr. Park. About one-mile long, land use in the corridor is characterized by an eclectic assemblage of structures with conditions that range from very deteriorated to excellent condition. The hodge-podge of buildings include one and two-story houses, live-near dwellings with a store on the first floor and apartment above, storefront and traditional churches, vacant lots, and commercial structures. Many of the structures have nothing in common with the surrounding buildings, which is accentuated by differences in height, architectural design, purpose and theme. At the same, this great diversity gives Fillmore a distinctive, and potentially powerful, urban look and feel.

The redevelopment scenario has been a spontaneous, random, and haphazard one. Consequently, the corridor has no focus or theme. Churches dominate land use. This stretch of Fillmore has nine churches with a new one under construction. One result of the proliferation of faith-based institutions on Fillmore Avenue is that the many of the best commercial buildings have been converted into faith-based institutions. The retail mix was assembled by chance, which led to a jumble of dissimilar businesses located in the corridor. For example, there are seven restaurants, three delis, four automobile sales and repair companies, two beauty salons, a bank, cleaners, two barbershops, carwash, pharmacy, a consulting firm, liquor store, and tavern, a fish

market, and bakery. One problem with this grouping of businesses is they do not produce cumulative shopping—that is, people shopping at multiple stores before leaving the area.

While most of these firms do have neighborhood customers, they are nonetheless heavily reliant on customers living outside the neighborhood to support their businesses. In essence, most businesses in the corridor are oriented toward a regional rather than neighborhood market.

Obstacles to Development

1. **Development of the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor is not connected to market niche and theme.** Neighborhood commercial corridors must be developed in the same way as small retail centers. They must have a specific market niche, a retail mix that encourages cumulative shopping, and create a vibrancy that attracts new businesses to the area. Without identifying a market niche to drive its development, the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor will not benefit or profit from its competitive advantage.
2. **Fillmore has a foreboding, dilapidated, and rundown appearance.** The corridor is characterized by unkept structures, omnipresent trash, blighted vacant lots, and boarded-up buildings. This condition gives the corridor a menacing, unsafe appearance that makes people want to avoid the area. Changing the appearance of the corridor must be an essential part of its transformation.
3. **Fillmore needs to be built out to attract new businesses, create a sense of vibrancy, and profit from its competitive advantage.** Site demolitions have destroyed a number of commercial establishments along Fillmore Avenue, while many other commercial spaces have serious code violations. Faith-based institutions occupy other commercial structures. The shortage of suitable commercial establishments is a huge obstacle to the redevelopment of the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.
4. **The Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood is a poor community on a rapidly descending trajectory.** This neighborhood is in deep trouble. During the nineties, MLK neighborhood lost 25% of its population; as it declined from 5,827 residents to 4,368, and the vacancy rate soared to 25%, almost double that of the citywide vacancy rate of 15%. Over 54% of the residents have incomes below \$20,000 and 37% of the population live at or below the poverty level. Moreover, it has a large dependent population. About 32% of the population is 19 years or younger, while 16% is 65 years or older. Most significantly, seniors own about 64% of the owner-occupied units in the MLK neighborhood. Unless the neighborhood's housing market is strengthened, the community will face an unprecedented crisis in about 15 years, when the current owners die. *The development of the Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor is inseparable from the revitalization of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. As a consequence, the redevelopment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood and the redevelopment of the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor must move in tandem.*
5. **Business owners on Fillmore Avenue need access to loans, grants, and incentives to encourage business development and expansion.** Business owners on inner city commercial corridors face numerous obstacles building their businesses. Not only does an uninviting commercial corridor hamper them, but also they have trouble accessing loans, grants, and insurance. Gaining access to capital and other growth incentives is key to turning Fillmore into a vibrant commercial corridor. Not only this, but often these firms have a poorly developed workforce, which curtails development.
6. **Fillmore Avenue has a weak business and civic association.** One of the keys to redeveloping commercial corridors is the development of a strong business and civic association to guide the developmental process. Such associations bring together both business and community leaders and create a venue for identifying developmental

Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor in 2015

"MAKE the Dream come true"

Martin Luther King Jr. Park Neighborhood

■ The Radical Reconstruction of Fillmore Avenue



Masten Neighborhood Master Plan

"A Community on the Move"



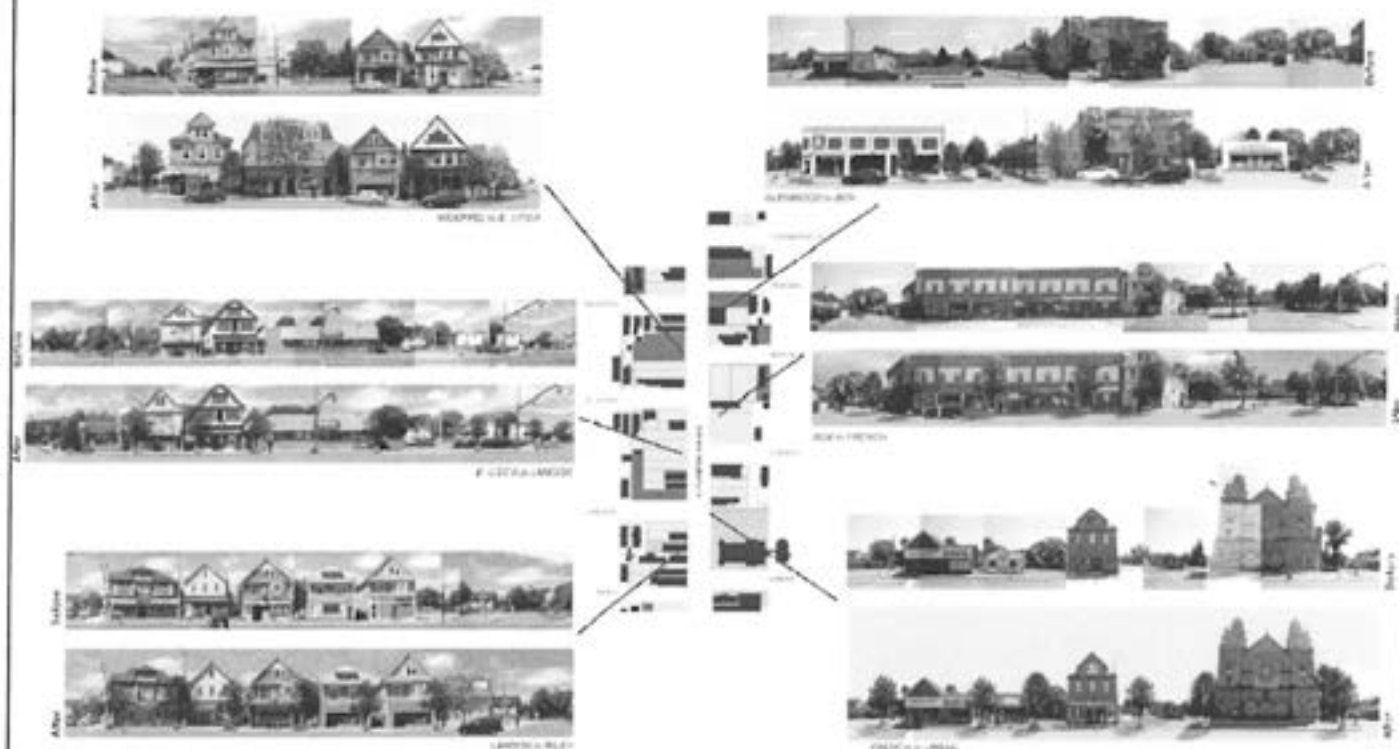
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Masten Neighborhood Master Plan

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■ The Radical Reconstruction of Fillmore Avenue



Masten Neighborhood Master Plan

'A Community on the Move'



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targets and outlining the activities needed to bring about the successful revitalization of the corridor.

The Competitive Advantage

The marketing study shows there is an excess demand for retail goods, dining, and personal service in the Masten District to support the development of four commercial districts, including Fillmore Avenue. This suggests there is sufficient demand in the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor market area to support the establishment of new retail outlets, providing those new stores are of comparable quality to those serving other areas of the City.

Fillmore Avenue also has the capacity to strengthen its share of the regional market if it identifies its right niche. The corridor's strategic location near several major employment centers—Tri-Main Center, ECMC, American Axel, Sisters Hospital, and Canisius College—proximity to Route 33, and the location of the two major regional assets in the community—Martin Luther King, Jr. Olmsted Park and the Buffalo Science Museum—gives the corridor a competitive edge in increasing its share of the regional market.

Three interrelated objectives must be reached before Fillmore can reach its potential as a vibrant and thriving commercial corridor. **First, the corridor must be transformed into an attractive and delightful place that make shoppers feel safe and comfortable.** Only by creating an environment that provides visitors with pleasant and charming retailing, service, and dining opportunities will the visitors, workday, and neighborhood shoppers to the area increase. Moreover, given its strategic location, particularly easy access to Route 33, by physically transforming Fillmore Avenue, it is also possible that more affluent residents in neighboring districts would use new retailing outlets. The success of Mattie's, GiGi's, and most recently the new Tops Supermarket and the possibilities of creative marketing (such as workplace delivery of lunches, cleaning, etc.) indicate that this is quite possible.

The projection that expected demand will exceed current sales is based on the assumption that population and income levels will remain constant over time. *On this point, it should be stressed that the excess of demand over supply is quite substantial and that modifying population or income to account for upward or downward shifts will not change the broad conclusions as to the possibilities for new retail developments.*

Second, the corridor must attract a cluster of retail outlets that cater to the needs of neighborhood residents and identify a market niche that allows it to capture a larger share of the regional market. Currently, the corridor does not adequately service the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood and environs. This significant economic leakage hampers the development of the corridor. At the same time, by expanding its share of the regional market, the corridor will ensure its success. **Third, the corridor must be made safe. The perception and reality of safety must exist.** Neighborhood residents, workday customers, and regional visitors will frequent a revitalized commercial corridor if it is an attractive and safe place.

Recommendations

1. **The Market Niche:** *The Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor should become a center for used furniture, appliances, discount goods, and repair shops.* There exists a huge market for these services. These types of shops and stores exist, but they are scattered across the region. Allen Street and Hertel Avenue used to be the center for these types of goods, but they graduated to antiques, leaving a market void. Fillmore Avenue could fill it. It is anticipated that these shops and stores would attract customers at the neighborhood, city, and regional levels. Specifically, the retail outlets would attract low-to-moderate-income groups, college students, the elderly, others on fixed incomes, and bargain hunters of all types.

responsible for securing businesses to rent or purchase space. This same approach must be applied to the development of the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.

The Fillmore commercial corridor cannot be developed unless it is physically transformed. This must be the highest priority in the redevelopment scheme. The strategy should be to retain the existing architectural character of the neighborhood. Within this framework, it is possible to build on the eclectic nature of the buildings and structures in the corridor and add beauty to the corridor through landscaping, streetscaping and the use of vivid colors and public art (Figures 1-3). The graphics show before and after photos of the entire commercial corridor. The idea is to provide a sense of what the corridor is and can be.

3. **Develop Live-Near structures with retail outlets on the first floor and apartments on the second and third.** The idea is to create apartments above commercial establishments as part of the plan to increase density and activity on the corridor. People bring life to any locality. The increased density will also help attract businesses to the area by increasing pedestrian traffic on the corridor. The apartments along the Fillmore Avenue corridor should be designed to attract young, upwardly mobile empty nesters from across the racial landscape.
4. **A neighborhood redevelopment strategy must be initiated to complement the revitalization of the commercial corridor.** The specific recommendations for the MLK neighborhood are placed elsewhere in the plan and will not be restated here. The point is that the commercial corridor and the surrounding neighborhood are interlocked and must be redeveloped as a single unit.

The commercial corridor would seek to attract used clothing stores, including the Goodwill stores, wholesalers, used car parts, and upholstery and shoe repair shops. Additionally, a year-round indoor flea market should be set up. An indoor flea market, which might be billed as the *Fillmore Avenue Garage Sale*, could be held on weekend throughout the year. People from across the region will be encouraged to come to the *Garage Sale*, set up a table, and sell items. A small fee will be set to rent space.

The vacant lot behind the Police Station C on Ferry could become an *Auction Yard*. During the spring and summer, *car trunk sales* could be held weekly. People would simply drive to the *Auction Yard*, and then sell items directly out of the trunk of their cars. Vendors selling food, drink, and *non-car trunk items* would pay a fee to operate at the *Auction Yard*. On alternate days, an outdoor flea market could be held at the *Auction Yard*. Efforts could even be made to hold *police auctions* at the *Auction Yard*.

The plan is to use the flea market and the truck sales to bolster the corridor's reputation in the region as a major discount center and to bring pedestrian traffic into the corridor. Once there, there is a strong possibility that they will purchase other items or stop at Mattie's to have lunch or dinner. The goal is for the specialty shops and retail activities to generate a multiplier effect that stimulates other business activity in the corridor.

In the second phase of development, to augment the used and discount stores and repair shops, efforts should be made to attract a few nationally known enterprises to the area, such as Tim Horton, Radio Shack, and maybe even a highly successfully local company such as Inner City Gear. As these stores proliferate, it is anticipated that shops and stores targeting convenient goods and services to local residents will also seek locations in the area.

To tap this market niche the following objectives must be obtained.

- a. **The City must develop a set of incentives to encourage businesses in the used furniture, appliance, discount and repair sectors to relocate in the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.** These businesses are scattered across the region. So, their relocation to Fillmore should not negatively impact any one area. On the other hand, by creating an economic agglomeration in the used furniture, appliance, discount, and repair sector a multiplier will be created that bolsters the development of all firms located in the cluster. The City, County, Erie County Industrial Development Agency, the Masten District council member, and the Fillmore Avenue project director should work closely to develop incentive package that will encourage businesses to relocate.
 - b. **Commercial space must be designed and developed that caters to businesses in this sector.** The development of a physical infrastructure to support these businesses must be carried out in partnership with the city and county's economic development agencies. This build out should be part of the strategy to physically reconstruct the Fillmore commercial district.
 - c. **An aggressive marketing campaign must be developed to promote the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor as a center for used furniture, appliances, discount, and repair stores.** The campaign will be designed to make business owners and perspective entrepreneurs aware of the advantages of locating businesses in this sector in the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.
2. **The Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor must be built out and transformed into a charming and delightful place.** The key to transforming the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor is to treat it the same as a retail plaza. To attract businesses to a plaza, it must be built out and landscaped. Once this happens, the plaza manager is

*Garage and
Auction Yard*

5. **Standard guidelines for facades must be established and codified.** Uniform façade treatment is one of the keys to redeveloping the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor. The standards should provide all businesses along with the corridor with a range of choice, which meet specific standards. A series of focus groups with residents and business owners should be used to select the standards. Then, the council members should introduce the appropriate legislature. Because existing businesses will not have to comply, every effort should be made to secure voluntary compliance.

The design guidelines and options that are developed to help business and property owners make improvements should be user friendly and offer specific information about each building, allowing owners to look to the guidelines to make the improvement process easier, while helping them learn ways to accent their building's particular attributes using attractive, cost effective methods.

6. **Establish a Business Improvement District (BID) in the Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor.** BIDs are important business development strategy that has been successfully used in many places across the United States. A Business Improvement District is a method used to finance and manage improvements in a commercial district in order to restore and/increase business activity in a locality. The BID is designed to provide additional and supplemental services such as business retention and recruitment, enhanced maintenance and safety and security, business services, promotion and marketing, and physical improvements to the streetscape.

The BID is financed by property owners within the district who agree to an additional assessment to their real property taxes, which is then exclusively dedicated for improvements that will benefit the entire district. The municipality collects the assessed funds and provides them to the BID, which directs them to enhanced or additional services that are not traditionally offered by the municipality. The funds from a BID are used only to supplement municipal services and are not permitted to replace those existing services.

There are three primary advantages of a BID. The first is the ability to provide additional and enhanced services that improve the business environment. The second is the ability to professionally manage retail and commercial services, much like those offered in retail plazas and malls, which will strengthen the BID's economic capacity. The third primary advantage is the predictable and reliable source of funding that a BID offers. The actual structure and focus of the BID depends on the locality and the desires of business and property owners in the corridor. The key to a successful business improvement district is careful planning and determination of the specific focus and activities of the BID.

Significantly, the establishment of a BID sends a message to City Hall and potential investors that the business and property owners along the corridor are serious about the redevelopment of their locality. This will attract additional resources and investments in the corridor.

7. **Beautify, Promote, and Market the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor as the Gateway to Martin Luther King, Jr. Park.** These activities are based on the simple notion that business and property owners and residents must tackle and solve all problems within their reach, while working with government to solve those problems beyond their capacity. The beautification program should focus on a range of activities, such as:

Beautification focus

- Keeping the commercial corridor clean
- Placing decorative trash containers throughout the corridor
- Increasing the number of decorative flower pots in the corridor
- Developing a public arts program. Work with Langston Hughes Center and the arts community to make this happen. Augment the Martin Luther King, Jr. banners with other banners that celebrate the history of the Fillmore Avenue and the African American community
- Transform every vacant lot in the district into low maintenance passive garden
- Develop a spectacular entrance to the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor at East Ferry and Fillmore Avenue. The entrance should be situated on the northern side of the street.
- **Removal of boards on the windows.** This effort should center on replacing plywood window covers with decorative window covers. Even though a building is abandoned or vacant it does not have to be an eyesore. The owners of properties should be identified and made a part of this effort.

Cultural Focus

- Create a series of community events for the year. There should be a minimum of three. These activities could include concerts, a soul food fest (similar to a Taste of Buffalo), and a black arts festival (similar to the Allen Town Art festival).
- Cultural programming should be established for the corridor. Establish poetry readings, arts discussions, black history month celebrations, and other activities that bring people into the area for special occasions. Sponsor a radio program that deals with issues affecting Black Buffalo, which is sponsored by the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor. Highlight the activities and human-interest stories of area business people and have them published in the black press.
- Faith based focused activities. Meet with faith based leaders and develop a series of programs relating to the activities of their churches. For example, each year the faith-based institutions could have a gospel fest featuring the choirs—Battle of the Gospel Choirs could be the theme.

Market Focus

- Develop a brochure around *the theme of The Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor: The Regional Discount Center*. The idea is to get business and property owners to think about the value of opening a business on Fillmore Avenue.
 - Merchant Discount tickets should be distributed to encourage use of businesses in the corridor. The goal of the discount tickets will be to get increased numbers of patrons to use the facilities in the corridor.
8. **Establish an incubator without walls (IWW).** The IWW will be responsible for providing a range of services for business in the corridor, including access to capital, insurance, and technical assistance job training and job training and development for their workforce. The IWW will also be responsible for creating a structural link between the corridor and City Hall. The goal is to work with City leaders to ensure that business

and property owners in the corridor have access to all programs and benefits offered by government.

9. **The Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor must be made safe and secure.** Key to turning the commercial corridor into a great shopping venue and neighborhood commons is to create the perception and reality of safety. Efforts should be made to work with the City to get foot patrols in the area and to developing a crime mapping program that enables residents and business and property owners to work closely with the police department to track problem areas both in the corridor and surrounding neighborhood.
10. **Develop and implement a legislative strategy to facilitate development of the corridor.** A working relationship should be established with the council representative from Fillmore to create a legal framework to assist in the development of the corridor.
11. **The approach to Fillmore Avenue should be made comprehensive.** Plans for the redevelopment of the commercial corridor should be integrated into a single plan for the restoration of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood, including the MLK Park, the Buffalo Science Museum, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. There should be a single comprehensive plan, which is used to drive the entire developmental process.
12. **A team consisting of the private, philanthropic, government and business and property owners in the corridor should be established to formulate ideas for financing the redevelopment of Fillmore Avenue.**
13. **Develop a portfolio on the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor and neighborhood to attract investors to the area.**

Time Table

The plan is a ten-year plan that includes small incremental goals and major objectives. It will be divided into two-year, five-year, and ten-year segments. Activities and benchmarks will be established for each of these segments, which will provide a clear pathway to chart movement toward the long-range goals.

- **The Year One and Two Plan:** The first two years of the project will focus on activities beautify, promote and market the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor, strengthen existing corridor businesses, promote and market the corridor, and construct the foundation need to ensure meeting year five goals.

Build the Development Foundation

1. **Gain support of the business and property owners for the Fillmore Avenue Commercial Corridor Plan.**
2. **Establish a Business Improvement District in the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.**
3. **Increase police presence on Fillmore Avenue**
4. **Implement plan to turn Fillmore Avenue into a center for used furniture, appliances, discount goods and repair shops and the cultural center of MLK neighborhood.**

Secretary

5. **Develop a comprehensive plan that ties together the various components associated with the development of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood:** the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor development plan; the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park restoration plan, and the Buffalo Science Museum plan. This strategy will make it possible to promote the entire area and demonstrate how the development of one component accentuates the development of other components. Part of this strategy will be the convening of a steering committee to oversee the development of the entire neighborhood.
6. **Develop a comprehensive building and vacant lot inventory.** A profile should be developed of every structure on Fillmore Avenue and an assessment made to determine the amount of work required to make each structure ready of commercial occupancy (need to know what is required for basic rehabilitation and to bring the building up to code). The City or ECIDA should explore the feasibility of obtaining control over as many properties as possible in the corridor. All City owned properties should be put together as a single package, which will facilitate attracting private investors to the area. Concurrently, an assessment should be made of all vacant lot in the corridor and a plan made for the type of commercial/residential structures that should be built on the site. Based on this data, a development plan should be put together for the corridor. The plan will be to formulate a build-out plan for Fillmore, which includes the type and location of new structures and a rehabilitation strategy for existing structures. The goal is to determine the commercial capacity of the corridor. The plan will make it possible to develop a marketing tool for the street designed to attract new businesses to the area.

The development plan should also include an assessment of the market potential of apartments above the commercial shops. A goal of the plan is to increase density and energy in the corridor by developing apartments above the commercial establishments. The idea is to bring life to the corridor by making it a 24/7 residential-commercial neighborhood and the heart of the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. Knowing the increased commercial and residential capacity of the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor will make it possible to project the potential revenue stream, which is essential for attracting investors to the area.

7. **A marketing study of the local neighborhood needs to be made.** The marketing study that informed this plan looked at the entire district. Now is the time to focus specifically on Fillmore Avenue. This study would involved a number of focus groups and scooping sessions designed to gain insight into consumer wants and needs and to determine the types of activities that will draw people to the corridor on a regular basis. Moreover, there is a need to do surveys of users of Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, including the Science Museum to determine what types of shops and stores would attract them to the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.
8. **Develop guidelines for facades and business improvement.**
9. **Seek commitments to support the redevelopment of Fillmore Avenue.**
10. **Set up the Incubator without walls.**
11. **Strengthen the Fillmore Avenue Business Association:** Set up the association as a 501C3 organization, elect officers, and develop a program of action based on the redevelopment plan.

12. Formulate the MLK neighborhood redevelopment strategy that will compliment revitalization of the commercial corridor.
13. Offer discounts and other incentives to increase usage
14. Write grants to secure additional funding
15. Attract investors to the area

Beautify, Promote and Transform the Commercial Corridor

1. **A landscape architect should be hired to develop a landscape and streetscape designed that can be implemented during the phase one-redevelopment process.** The physical appearance of Fillmore needs to be changed immediately. The build out process should be completed within the first five years, but the process of transforming the image of the place must start immediately. The landscape and streetscape scheme will focus on ways to immediately change the area's appearance. This plan will include plans for removing the plywood panels on buildings, the installation of public art, and vacant lot beautification scheme.
 2. **Implement the landscape and streetscape beautification plan.** This plan should incorporate the use of African American and Fillmore Avenue history into the development scheme. A partnership should be established between OUI, the Center for Urban Studies, the Black Studies Department and the Historical Society to develop such a strategy.
 3. **Implement the beautification focus**
 4. **Implement the cultural and marketing focus**
 5. **Develop and implement strategy to keep Fillmore Avenue Clean.** This task involves hiring a firm or individual who will be responsible for keeping trash picked up, emptying garbage containers, and maintaining the vacant lots and passive gardens.
- **Year Three – Five Plan:** In years three to five, the programs instituted in year one and two should be continued. The main focus during years three and five will be to launch a major rehabilitation and build out program to complement the stepped up marketing effort to transform Fillmore into a regional center of used furniture, appliances, discount stores and repair shops and as the cultural center for MLK neighborhood.

During this period, the flea market and the trunk sales will be initiated.

- **Year Six – Ten Plan:** During this four-year span, the build out and rehabilitation strategy will be completed. Efforts will be made to attract national firms such as Radio Shack, Tim Horton and others to the locale.

Finance

Several strategies will be employed to finance the redevelopment of the Fillmore Avenue commercial corridor.

- The establishment of a BID is one way to finance many of the small-scale improvements needed to transform the corridor. Working with business and property owners to obtain a BID should be a top priority.
- The Erie County Industrial Development Agency should play a role in putting together the financing of the build out for the commercial corridor. They should work closely with the corridor business owners and the City to explore various funding possibilities.
- The City should identify private developers who might be interested in playing a large role in the redevelopment of the corridor. The City owns significant tracts of land in the corridor. If enough land can be assembled, a developer might be interested in approaching the redevelopment activity similar to a retail plaza.
- A major effort should be made to attract national investors to the area. Firms such as UrbanAmerican, L.P., based in New York City, the Coca Cola Foundation, based in Atlanta and Beverly Hills based Johnson Development Corporation have a long standing interest in inner city retail development. Discussions with these firms should be initiated to attract them to the region.
- Given the potential for redevelopment, tax increment financing should also be explored.
- Grants should be pursued to secure funding for many of the smaller scaled projects.