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# **Commercial Revitalization of Old Town: What effect will it have on the surrounding neighborhood**

**A Plan B  
Master's Degree Paper**

**Submitted To:  
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**May 1999**



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## **Executive Summary**

Lansing's Old Town has benefited from the on-going commercial revitalization efforts of the past 11 years. When Old Town was selected to participate in the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative (NMSI), community members formed a new community development corporation, the Old Town Commercial Association (OTCA). Although OTCA may develop additional programs in the future, its only program to date is Old Town Main Street. The results of these revitalization efforts are quite evident. Old Town is quickly becoming a popular shopping and entertainment district.

Recommended in this report is that the Old Town Main Street program look at the area as two distinct commercial zones: a regional arts district and a neighborhood shopping district. The two commercial zones are not divided by strict boundaries; businesses of both types are sprinkled throughout North Lansing. The arts district is the more mature commercial area and is an obvious niche in arts-related businesses and entertainment. Arts businesses are located primarily between Washington Avenue and Center Street along Grand river Avenue and its side streets.

As a revitalization effort, Old Town is ready to transition from the catalyst to growth phase, with some catalyst work still remaining; but growth issues are already on the horizon. As an organization, however, Old Town Main Street is quite young. This transition will not be easy as a new organization takes on the management of a mature revitalization effort.

Again, Old Town is a very exciting commercial district, one that is enjoying an extraordinary amount of well-earned success. Commercial revitalization appears to come

naturally to Old Town's leaders, who have shown great instincts since the earliest efforts.

As people recognize their skills and use them strategically, this area has a bright future.

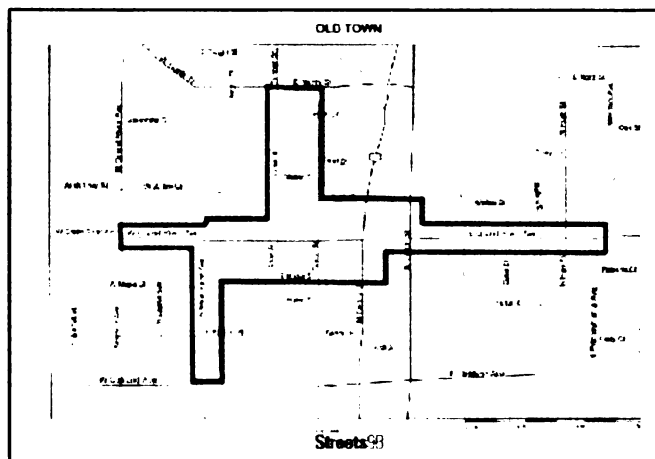
## **CHAPTER I: Introduction**

In many inner-city, low income neighborhoods, the role of the neighborhood business district (NBD) and the community “Main Street” has been overlooked in the redevelopment of the overall community. Economically strong, healthy neighborhood business districts provide both convenient and needed retail services and employment opportunities to residents, circulate dollars within the community, and promote stability. Effective programs and services designed to encourage and enhance growth and stability in these neighborhoods must address both the economic and physically challenging issues related to the revitalization of the business district through the creation of jobs, an increase in the personal/disposable income of community residents and the redevelopment of commercial properties.

The purpose of this paper is to review the impacts of the Main Street Initiative Project on reviving the historic Old Town District and the adjoining commercial area in North Town Lansing, Michigan.

### **Location Map – Old Town**

The indicated boundaries make up Old Town, which is situated in North Lansing and about one mile north of the Capitol.



**Map 1.1**



The analyses will focus on the outcomes commercial revitalization of Lansing's Old Town will have on the surrounding neighborhood. This case study will demonstrate that the commercial revitalization efforts in Lansing's Old Town will positively affect the surrounding neighborhood physically, economically, and socially.

I believe that the growth of the commercial district in Old Town will gradually have a spillover affect on the adjacent neighborhood creating economic revitalization for the local community.

### ***I. Plan of the paper***

This Plan B paper submission encompasses six chapters. The first chapter provides a general introduction to the topic, defines the paper's purpose and scope, and the need for the research. In addition, a problem statement, methodology, and hypotheses are presented.

Chapter Two provides facts about the National Trust's National Main Street Center, as well as how Lansing's Old Town embraced the project and worked with the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative (NMSI) to accomplish the initial goals and objectives. This will be a guide in establishing a framework for the analyses presented later.

The focus of the paper is presented in Chapter Three. This chapter provides a general overview of Lansing's Old Town Neighborhood. It provides a historical, socioeconomic, land use, and physical conditions and characteristics description.

The commercial district is outlined in Chapter Four, which outlines the general characteristics of North Lansing and Old Town.

Finally, Chapter Five presents conclusions, which show those commercial revitalization efforts in Old Town, can effectively bring economic and social stability to the community.

## ***II. Methodology***

On a number of occasions between January 1998 to present at the Old Town Main Street-main office I have met with Lisa Carey, Director of Old Town, and Heather Burnash, AmeriCore Vista volunteering in Old Town, to define the parameters of my study. Prior to the meeting, a general outline for the project was developed, and based on specific information I gathered, the scope for the remainder of the project was clarified. Several site visits to Old Town were conducted, which included consultations with Old Town Main Street personnel. These meetings and site surveys enabled me to become familiar with the area and tour the neighborhood for which data would be gathered and analyzed throughout the semester.

After becoming acclimated to the neighborhood, the needed information for the study such as commercial information, housing surveys, consumer surveys, and census data were collected. Analysis of housing and commercial stock was accomplished through walking tours and windshield surveys based on a three-point criteria scale. Census data for 1970, 1980, and 1990 were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau website for the State of Michigan. Desired figures such as total population, housing characteristics, and racial breakdown for the neighborhood were gathered and put into charts and graphs to enable easy reading and analysis. Zoning information was obtained from the zoning ordinances and zoning maps of the city compiled by the City of Lansing Zoning Department. Community characteristics were analyzed by visual surveys, which

identified the physical traits of the neighborhood. The compilation of these data sources allowed for a comprehensive analysis of Old Town Main Street Commercial District and the adjacent neighborhoods.

### ***III. Analyses:***

This paper contains five chapters beginning with a brief introduction and concluding remarks regarding Old Town Commercial District and the affect it has had on Northtown. The population and census section establishes a demographic profile of the neighborhood. The Commercial District section examines the external visual appearance as a whole, as well as U.S. Census Bureau statistics relating it to the marketability to both consumers and businesses. The final chapter of the report deals with community and commercial characteristics and explores ways to reconnect the community to the commercial district for those who live there, and those who visit.

### ***IV. Need for Research:***

Residents and Neighborhood Association members in the Old Town area are somewhat discontent with some of the commercial revitalization efforts made thus far in the area. Friday, April 10, 1998, I met and talked with Thelma Osteen, President of the North Lansing Neighborhood Association. Her concern with commercial revitalization of Lansing's Old Town was that it did not benefit the local residents. Her organization would like to see affordable restaurants, more general shops such as gift shops, dry-cleaners/laundry facilities, convenience stores and less specialty shops, and no late night entertainment facilities. Furthermore, Ms. Osteen said they have asked the city to put



additional park benches and cook out grills in William A. Brenke (fish ladder) Park. (See Figure 1.1). The organization would like to have a place where children can play, and families can convene.

**William A. Brenke Park**



**Figure 1.1**

Photograph by Stephanie Monroe,  
April 17, 1998.

## **CHAPTER II: About the National Main Street Center**

The two national sponsors of the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative are Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the National Main Street Center (NMSC), an affiliate of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. These two national organizations found common ground in their interests in revitalizing urban neighborhoods, and each brings a particular strength. The NMSC brings its skills and a proven approach to downtown commercial revitalization, and LISC brings its skills in housing development and finance, and a respected track record of support for non-profit community-based organizations providing leadership to neighborhood revitalization efforts (Old Town Main Street Initiative Fact Sheet).

The National Main Street Center (NMSC) and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) selected Lansing's Old Town to participate in a national demonstration, the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative (NMSI), which pools the resources and expertise of the NMSC and LISC in a comprehensive urban neighborhood renewal strategy that merges housing and commercial revitalization efforts. Lansing's Old Town is one of six neighborhood business districts selected to participate in this four-year demonstration.

The NMSC is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Created by a Congressional Charter in 1949, the National Trust is a nonprofit organization with more than 275,000 members. As a leading advocate of historic preservation in the United States, it is committed to saving America's diverse historic environments and to preserving and revitalizing the livability of communities nationwide. Economic growth,

urban revitalization, and the creation of new jobs are all issues the National Trust addresses through the rehabilitation of historic resources.

In 1977, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, concerned about continuing threats to Main Street's historic commercial architecture, launched a pilot program – the Main Street Project – to develop a comprehensive revitalization strategy that would stimulate economic development within the context of historic preservation. In 1980, the National Trust created the NMSC to help communities throughout the nation conserve their most significant economic and civic resources, their historic commercial buildings.

The NMSC assists local partners to plan and implement a comprehensive revitalization strategy for their commercial districts. The NMSC accomplishes its mission through the Main Street “Four-Point Approach”.

## **I. The Four-Point Approach**

The four point approach of NMSC encompasses the following:

1. **Organization** establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in the commercial core. Through these partnerships, the Main Street revitalization program is able to provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy of the district. Diverse groups from the public and private sectors must work together to maintain a successful program.
2. **Economic Restructuring** strengthens the district's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. These aims are accomplished by retaining and expanding existing businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, by converting unused or underutilized space into productive property, and by sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of the district's business people.
3. **Design** takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in the commercial district by directing attention to the improvement of all its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, window displays, parking, and traffic circulation. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all of these areas, to educate people about design quality, and to expedite improvements in the district.



4. **Promotion** takes many forms, but the goal is to rekindle community pride in the commercial area and change people's attitudes from negative to positive. Promotion increases sales through special retail events, brings new audiences to the district for festivals and celebrations, and builds the district's image through marketing campaigns. All of these activities serve not only to attract shoppers, but also to attract investors, developers, and new businesses.

## **II. The Eight Principles of Main Street**

While the Main Street Four Point Approach provides the format for successful revitalization, implementation of the four-point approach is based on eight principles that pertain to all areas of the revitalization effort:

1. **Comprehensive.** Commercial district revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful and lasting results, a comprehensive approach must be used.
2. **Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help develop skills so that more complex problems can be addressed and more ambitious projects undertaken. Starting with small projects creates progress and momentum at the same time.
3. **Self-help.** Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the project successful. The NMSC provides direction, ideas, and training; but continued and long-term success depends upon the involvement and commitment of the community.
4. **Public/Private Partnership.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical stability of the district. Each sector has a role to play, and each must understand the other's strengths and limitation so that an effective partnership can be forged.
5. **Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging or businesses that have become local institutions. Main Street cannot create new landmarks or institutions; existing local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.

6. **Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies equally to each element of the program, from storefront design to promotional campaigns to educational programs.
7. **Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.
8. **Implementation-Oriented.** Activity creates confidence in the program and every greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger activities as the revitalization effort matures (Resource Team Report for old Town Main Street Program, 1997).

### **III. The Lansing Component**

In March 1996 a group of Old Town business owners formed the Old Town Commercial Association (OTCA) to lead commercial revitalization efforts. The Association applied for and received one of six national grants from the National Main Street Center (NMSC), a demonstration program in neighborhood commercial revitalization. The four-year program is called Neighborhood Main Street Initiative (NMS). The other sites are urban neighborhoods in Tacoma WA, Richmond VA, Providence RI, Philadelphia PA, and Oakland CA. (The Greater Lansing Business Monthly, January 1997). Funding for the project comes from a number of sources. Primary funding is in the form of a \$300,000 assistance grant from the NMSC and the National Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) office. While no money actually changes hands, NMSC and LISC offer technical support in the form of expert consultants and trainers throughout the four-year period. Operational funding for the first year was secured through the city of Lansing (\$60,000), the Local LISC office (\$15,678), and the

These case studies show that the psychological well-being of everyday people is powerfully linked to the well-being of their communities. And these stories also tell us that ordinary people, whether they are independent merchants, residents, or volunteers, can take charge of their community's future and surmount great obstacles to make their Main Street the place where people come together.

### **CHAPTER III: North Town Profile**

The North Town neighborhood borders Lansing, “Old Town” commercial district. This area was one of six sites selected nationally to participate in the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative, a demonstration program in neighborhood revitalization. The goal of the program is to bring commercial vitality and stability to struggling urban communities.

As with other urban communities, Northtown is not exempt from the challenges of maintaining a healthy community and economic stability. Northtown is an area where more than half of the housing stock is rental (Assessors Office, 1999) and in need of rehabilitation. Residents believe that an increase in rental units has brought problems to their area such as drug dealing and gangs (Strategy Planning Forum, 1999). To date, Northtown has formed a community organization that focuses on educating the residents on how to upgrade the quality of life in their neighborhood. They are working toward a common goal of not only preserving the present housing stock, but also bringing unity into the area that transcends cultural and religious barriers.

#### **I. A Brief History of North Lansing**

The area referred to today as “Old Town” is where Lansing actually started. The original settlement was on the Grand River and along Grand River Avenue. The proximity to the falls on the Grand River attracted industry, which allowed the area to thrive. (The Greater Lansing Business Monthly, 1997).

To get a mental picture of Lansing at these early times, imagine a vast forested area on either side of the river, broken by the occasional marsh and a few scattered cabins. The area of Grand River and Turner Street, with its few cabins, dam and mill, was as close to evidence of an organized settlement as there was. However, within five

years a thriving community was carved out of the forests and well established along the river, with three distinct areas of settlement:

- Lower town (north Lansing)
- Upper town (near the confluence of the Grand River and Red Cedar River); and
- Center town (near the newly established state capitol and current town center).

Of these three areas, North Lansing, as the most established, was by far the most prosperous and lively.

With the ongoing lumber boom and the location of facilities in North Lansing around the dam, the area continued to be the primary business district of Lansing up to the Civil War period. It was not until the lumber boom tapered off and the economy crashed in 1893 that the life of the community began to more completely focus toward the area around the capitol.

Although gradually declining in prominence, North Lansing remained an important area of the city, and the principle shopping district of city residents living north of Saginaw Street. This continued prosperity is reflected in the continuous new building, which took place from the Civil War to the Great Depression. It is also reflected in the many fine homes built in the area during this time, some of which still survive.

The end of the Second World War had dramatically reduced North Lansing from its original status. The area that had been the cradle of the community had become an increasingly marginalized section of the city. The antique architecture, which forms the basis of its current charm, was viewed with disdain during the 1950s and 60s. Development was directed elsewhere. The direction of investment capital away from the area combined with economic downturns of the 1970s to force North Lansing down a

familiar path of urban decay. The stores began to board up their windows, their upstairs offices were converted to low-rent apartments. The former Grand Hotel at the corner of Center Street and Grand River Avenue became a cheap rooming house. The North Town Theatre closed and was finally torn down. The buildings looked ever shabbier and the neighborhood began to take on a skid-row character, said Paul Emory, Chairman of the Old Town Commercial Association. The North Lansing neighborhood seemed doomed to the kind of downward spiral that destroyed so many other urban neighborhoods. However, the peculiar outgrowth of the social consciousness movement of the 1960s took the form of an energized influx of young “bohemian types” to North Lansing during the 1970s. Interest in preserving and restoring the North Lansing business district resulted in the acquisition of public funding to repair buildings and improve the look of the area. It is largely due to these efforts that as much of North Lansing survives as does today.

The efforts at preservation begun in the 1970s lost momentum in the 1980s with the Reagan-era cuts in funding for urban renewal. But people continued to hope for a renewal of North Lansing, and in the early 1990s a new wave of preservation and development began, and this time it seems to be successful, with a number of small shops, restaurants, nightclubs, and businesses locating in the old buildings.

There are still a number of buildings in serious jeopardy in North Lansing, the above-mentioned old mill structures being just one example. These old mills are slowly crumbling into the Grand River. They have been allowed to reach such a level of decay that it might well be too late to save them without completely dismantling them. As North Lansing is the repository of so much of our local history, North Lansing is the

preservation of Lansing's history. It is as vital to our identity as a community as the river that runs through the middle of town.

#### **A. "Old Town"**

Lansing's old Town commercial district is located on a scenic stretch of the Grand River, about ten blocks north of the State Capitol building. The district's main street, Grand River Avenue, extends approximately one mile through the commercial area, intersecting the Grand River. Old Town encompasses Lansing's original settlement area and still contains beautiful examples of Italianate, Romanesque, and Neo-Classical architecture dating from the 1860s through the 1920s. A four-block area in the heart of Old Town is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Several local monuments distinguish Old Town as an area unique to Lansing: the Brenke Fish Ladder, a railroad gatehouse, dam, stone hydroelectric plant, and tightly grouped historic coal silos all serve as reminders of the industrial history of the district. A boardwalk runs alongside the Grand River connecting Old Town to the central city and beyond.

A variety of businesses fill Old Town's buildings. Well established firms include a bank, bait and tackle shops, a media firm, bar, musical instruments shop, antiques and used furniture, auto store, food stamp office, and three small industries. Many new businesses have opened their doors in the past two years and you are now likely to see art galleries, computer firms, higher end retailers, and coffee shops. Toward the eastern end of the district, several ethnic restaurants, a bar, and a barbershop have saved the neighborhood for a number of years. Many of Old Town's buildings have undergone or are scheduled for renovation, yet others are still in urgent need of repair. About one quarter of the structures have residential space on the upper floors, though only about half

of that space is presently occupied. A 54-unit townhouse development is planned for a riverfront lot adjacent to Old Town.

The recent history of the North Lansing Historic Commercial District has seen a declining level of activity since the 1970s, although there has been a continuing interest, especially, on the part of business owners to revive the area. Little happened in the 1980s as far as revitalization, but periodically newspaper articles would appear expressing the interest of developing an art community in North Lansing. The common thread of interest since the 1970s has been establishing the area as an artistic haven.

For a period in the late 1970s the revitalization efforts were successful in raising the awareness and spirit of the area. The dedication of Turner Park was symbolic for many people in that it was a new beginning for North Lansing. Though the area was cleaned up with façade restorations, new streets and sidewalks, a bike path, and tree plantings, little seems to have been done about economically developing the area. People talked of what they envisioned the area to be, but not of how they were going to accomplish that vision. Arts and crafts shops in an old town atmosphere was typically the vision mentioned for the North Lansing Historic Commercial District. The goal might have been to spruce up the commercial district and then promote economic development afterwards. The issue of how to get outside people to come to the North Lansing area does not appear to have been of concern in the 1970s. Despite the grant money and improvements coming into the area a complete revitalization did not occur in the 1970s. One answer to what happened to the drive for revitalization seems to be that no preconceived plans for economic development were implemented or followed.



At one point the Community Design Center, the North Lansing Community Association, and the Lansing City Government were working closely with one another to achieve desired improvements in the area. A shift in the level of cooperation between the groups seems to have occurred around 1980, which allowed for the focus on developing North Lansing to dwindle. Eventually, the CDC left the area in the early 1980s and without it acting as consultant to the city the communication between North Lansing and the City of Lansing was lessened. The combined efforts of different groups working for the same goal in North Lansing lost its momentum. Through different organizations a greater number of residents were involved with the revitalization efforts. Residents, business owners, and neighboring projects like the Turner-Dodge House created a broader community focus in the North Lansing Historic Commercial District. Changing residential patterns and completion of the Turner-Dodge house restoration took away some of the momentum that had built-up in the late 1970s. The lack of a development plan and decreased participation in revitalization efforts brought North Lansing's renaissance to an end.

A significant amount of grant money was put into the revitalization of the North Lansing Historic Commercial District. That amount of financial support has not occurred since the late 1970s. The dream of developing the area has continued to the present. Efforts to revitalize the North Lansing Historic Commercial District seem to be as strong as they were during the period of renovations. More time and research is being spent on not just how to beautify the area, but how to economically develop it as well. Ideas and changes are slower than they were in the 1970s, but the people involved now are being more thorough in their efforts. Members of the Old Town Task Force are carefully

researching specific plans for economic development and perhaps are learning what the mistakes of previous revitalization projects were. In 1993, nearly twenty years later, the strive for revitalization and prosperity in North Lansing is as alive now as it was then (Rutz, 1995; 13-14).

## **B. Organizations**

### ***1. Community Design Center***

The Community Design Center (CDC) began working in the North Lansing area in the early 1970s. The CDC was a non-profit organization working in the Lansing area. Funds for the operation of the CDC came from the federal government under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA). The CDC was designed to educate, train, and employ students in community based planning and design skills. Throughout the mid to late-1970s the CDC played an integral role in the North Lansing Commercial District. Hoping to use the old Comfort Station at 313 E. Grand River Ave. for office space, the CDC prepared drawings for future renovations. In 1975, the CDC was able to complete some renovations and began using the Comfort Station as its headquarters.

The CDC was involved in various community activities in North Lansing. It participated in the efforts to get the North Lansing Commercial District on the National Register (which was accomplished in 1976), established Turner Park and acted as design consultants to the city. During the Phase I and Phase II renovation projects of the late 1970s the CDC played a strategic role. Acting as design consultants, members of the CDC met with property owners who were interested in participating in the renovation programs. After consulting with owners and inspecting building facades the CDC

prepared the working drawings to be used in the renovation work. The CDC also prepared conceptual sketches for proposed streetscapes (Rutz, 1995; 10).

## 2. *North Lansing Community Association*

Established in 1975, the North Lansing Community Association (NLCA) was the first community organization in Lansing. The original purpose of the NLCA was to advocate for community improvements throughout the entire Lansing area. Their focus of activities encompassed a larger spectrum of the city than typical neighborhood associations were concerned with. The NLCA worked closely with the CDC in efforts to revitalize the North Lansing Commercial district during the late 1970s. The role of the NLCA in North Lansing has been as an advocate for promoting interest in the area and community stability. The NLCA has organized numerous fundraising activities, published a local paper, The North Lansing Gazette, and has been instrumental in encouraging Lansing municipal government to provide for improvements to the area.

Initiating a new tradition in North Lansing, the NLCA sponsored the first FunFest in 1975. That year the festival coincided with the dedication of the Turner Park wall murals. For several years the FunFest was a large affair featuring a parade and carnival. When insurance costs became too high the carnival was eliminated from the FunFest and in subsequent years the size of the annual festival has decreased. The NLCA continues to organize block parties, raffles, and block sales to raise funds for the continued operation of the organization.

Examples of the NLCA's efforts toward acquiring municipal support include the purchase of Turner Park, the rent-free use of the Comfort Station, and the fight against pornography. The NLCA lobbied City Council to purchase the 24 by 18 feet vacant lot at

the corner of Turner St. and Grand River Ave. In 1975, the lot was purchased by the city of Lansing for \$1,600 and made into a small park. In 1980, the Comfort Station, which previously housed the offices of the CDC, was given to the NLCA. Money from a grant was used to make improvements to the heating system and in June of 1982 the Comfort Station was officially dedicated to the NLCA. The organization still uses the building as its headquarters. The City of Lansing provides the building with no rent being charged. The NLCA is required to pay the insurance costs and half of the heating bill. The fundraising money is used to pay for these bills. In 1990, the NLCA waged a campaign to fight the threat of pornography moving into the business district of North Lansing. Petitions were circulated and sent to City Council and, although one establishment moved in, others were successfully kept out.

At the height of its influence the NLCA had approximately 40 participating members. Although the organization is still active its participating membership has dwindled to about one-fourth of its original size. Relative to its smaller membership the NLCA has also narrowed its citywide focus to concentrating on just North Lansing (Rutz, 1995; 11).

### **3. *Business and Arts Development Association***

In recent years members of the business community, who are interested in revitalizing North Lansing, have formed the Business and Arts Development Association. The group began meeting in 1991, and has been active in promoting the assets of the North Lansing Historic Commercial District. In 1993, the group changed its name to Old Town Business and Arts Development Association in order to create a newer, more positive image. The focus of the Old Town Business and Arts Development Association

has been to preserve the historic qualities of the district and establish an area of arts and entertainment. The organization, also, operates the non-profit Otherwise Art Gallery.

Members of the Old Town Business and Arts Development Association joined forces with the North Lansing Community Association in the summer of 1993 to form the Old Town Task Force. The combined group of business owners and residents is working together in a renewed push for recognition of the significance of the North Lansing area. The Task Force is active in continued public exposure and conducting research into the possibilities of getting the area listed on the Lansing Historic District Register as well as research into finding ways of making the North Lansing Historic Commercial District economically sound (Rutz, 1995; 11).

#### *4. North Town Art Center*

One of the newest organizations formed in North Lansing is the North Town Art Center. Established in 1992, the center offers summertime art classes to Lansing area children. Scholarships are funded through local businesses and individuals (Rutz, 1995; 11).

### **C. Land Use**

A commercial district grew along Grand River Avenue and Turner Street. Much of the original architectural character remains though a building of newer origin and style occasionally disrupts the district's harmony.

Although North Lansing is architecturally handsome, it suffers from a lack of economic vitality. Today, many retail establishments are operating slowly while neighboring buildings are completely vacant.

Several light industrial land uses are east of the business district. The visual appearance of this area is unattractive, while accompanying storage areas are potential hazard to the public (City of Lansing, 1978). West of the business district is an office development along North Washington Avenue, which serves as a positive asset complimentary to the North Lansing Historic District. Buildings, which were once Lansing's finest in size and architectural style, have been restored and converted to office usage (City of Lansing, 1978).

One major problem faced in 1978 land use issues per the City of Lansing is still a problem for the community today which is public parking. It is currently unorganized and inefficient in servicing the commercial areas.

#### **D. Current attributes in Old Town**

Lansing's Old Town is not only a showcase for the area's most contemporary and trendy artists, but it is also a great place to brush up on a little history. Specifically, the history of architecture. Old Town holds the proud distinction of housing the greatest concentration of well-preserved Victorian-style buildings in Lansing, many of which are recorded, in the National Register of Historic Places.

Probably the most beautifully restored building in Old Town is the Innovations Art Gallery (226 East Grand River). Historically, the building was the home to Lansing State Savings Bank built about 1927 on the site of the 1885 People's Savings Bank. A Romanesque triumphal arch frames the entrance.

Developer David Ferguson purchased the old Estes Furniture warehouse at 1223 Turner St. with plans to develop a \$1.5 million riverfront office complex/restaurant. The refurbished building will sit next to Ferguson Development Co.'s \$5 million

condominium project, which continues the ongoing facelift in the neighborhood just north of downtown.

A beefed-up Greater Lansing Convention and Visitors Bureau will occupy about a third of the 30,000 square foot building. Ferguson also is negotiating to put a restaurant on the main floor overlooking the river (Lansing State Journal, 25 June 1997).

Efforts to revitalize the Old Town Commercial District seem to be as strong as ever. More time and research are being spent on not just how to beautify the area, but how to economically develop it as well. Ideas and changes are slower than they were in the 1970s, but the people involved now are being more thorough in their efforts. Members of the Old Town Task Force are carefully researching specific plans for economic development and perhaps are learning what the mistakes of previous revitalization projects were. In 1999, nearly twenty-six years later, the thrust for revitalization and prosperity in North Lansing is as alive now as it was then.

## **II. Introduction to Population**

The demographic features of a community, which include age, gender, race, education, and growth rates, determine where a community is headed. The community of North Town and North Lansing as a whole is the target of this report. Past and current trends in employment, education, and raw census data can provide a foundation on which to develop projections of what is and will most likely happen. The community of North Town has traditionally been a strong residential, industrial, and commercial neighborhood, since the middle of the 1800s. In the early 1900s, the economic growth around the capitol in Downtown Lansing caused some of the businesses in North Lansing to close. The negative effects of economic growth had left the community of North

Town financially troubled, but strong neighborhood groups and many community activists keep the hope in North Town alive.

## **Demographics of Lansing**

### **Population Trends**

Over the past three decades, the Greater Lansing Area has experienced a gradual decline in population, similar to other cities within the Industrial Belt of the U.S. While Ingham County has been experiencing a steady increase in population, primarily because of the overall desire of people within the United States to live in the suburbs, Lansing has experienced a gradual decline in population. The following is a table for comparison at the SMSA/MSA, county, and city levels. This information, though somewhat dated, is important because it establishes a trend of declining population in Lansing. Given North Town's location in the city, the proposed uses should work to encourage residency and visitation to Lansing.

**Table 3.1**  
**Population Characteristics**

<b>Level of Analysis</b>	<b>1970 Pop.</b>	<b>1980 Pop.</b>	<b>1990 Pop.</b>
Lansing-East Lansing SMSA/MSA	378,423	471,565	432,674
Eaton County	68,892	88,337	92,879
Ingham County	261,039	275,520	281,912
Lansing	131,546	130,414	127,321

**SOURCE: 1990 U.S. Census Bureau**



### Population Age Structure

In 1989, the median age of the population of Lansing was 28.9 years according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The greatest concentration of the population in Lansing was within the 25 to 44 years old category. Even though the census is 10 years old, this is still the largest population category today because the largest age cohort in 1989 was in the 25 to 34 years old range. Therefore, this group would currently only be between 35 and 44 years of age. This information is important because it helps to identify the customer market in the Lansing area.

**Table 3.2**  
**Age Characteristics**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of Persons</b>	<b>Percent of Population</b>
Under 15	45,165	23.2
15 – 24	30,932	15.9
25 – 44	69,159	32.7
45 –64	29,303	15.1
65 and Over	19,772	10.1

Source: 1990, U.S. Census Bureau

### Income

The median household income and per capita income information is important because it clearly indicates that Old Town and local residents are financially challenged compared to residents living nearby. Therefore, the proposed uses will have to be affordable if they are going to effectively serve the immediate neighborhood and or the uses must target wealthier populations from elsewhere to bring into Old Town and the surrounding neighborhoods.

### Per Capital Income

As can be seen from the figures provided below, the area around two sites are comparatively less affluent than residents of Ingham and Eaton Counties.

**Table 3.3**  
**Income Characteristics**

<b>Level of Analysis</b>	<b>Per Capita Income (1989 \$)</b>
Eaton County	\$13,740
Ingham County	\$14,896
Lansing	\$12,232
Census Tract 2	\$10,986
Census Tract 3	\$4,056

Source: 1990, U.S. Census Bureau

### Median Household Income

The median household income is high to mid-range for counties within Michigan. Of the two census block groups that comprise this area, block group 2 had the highest median household income of \$15,789, whereas block group 3 had a median household income of only \$8,235. Both median household incomes are very low when compared to the rest of the county.

**Figure 3.4**  
**Median Household Income Characteristics**

<b>Level of Analysis</b>	<b>Median Household Income (1989 \$)</b>
Eaton County	\$35,734
Ingham County	\$30,162
Lansing	\$26,398
Census Tract 2	\$15,789
Census Tract 3	\$8,235

Source: 1990, U.S. Census Bureau

**Other Notables Census Tracts 2 and 3**

Within a one-mile radius of the Old Town commercial district reside approximately 4,940 people. The residents are comprised of a diverse group, by income, age, and ethnic background. The most populous age groups are those in elementary school, and those age 20-40. Census Tracts 2 and 3 were combined to come up with the race percentages. Ethnically, African Americans make up 20 percent of the population, and people of Hispanic race make up 13 percent; other races make up 8 percent, American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut make 2 percent, with 57 percent Whites. Many residents have lived in the area for more than ten years and shop in the district for day to day needs.

**Figure 3.5**  
**Race Characteristics**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number of Persons Census Tract 2</b>	<b>Number of Persons Census Tract 3</b>
White	1053	1729
Black	322	678
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	78	37
Asian or Pacific Islander	7	0
Hispanic	191	469
Other race	115	261
<b>% White</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>% Black</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>% Hispanic</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>15%</b>

Source: 1990, U.S. Census Bureau

Not only is the ethnic character of the community work mentioning, but also education is another important notable. Educational attainment is a growing concern of the community. In the 18 years and over age group surveyed in Census Tracts 2 and 3 combined 8 percent had less than 9<sup>th</sup> grade education, 27 percent had 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, no diploma, 27 percent had high school graduate (includes equivalency), 25 had some college, no degree, 7 percent has a Associate degree, 5 percent has a Bachelor's degree, with 1 percent Graduate or professional degree.

## **CHAPTER IV: Profile of Old Town's Commercial District**

Due to the unavailability of information on the commercial district in Old Town, I turned to information from a report that was completed in Spring 1995 by the Center for Urban Affairs, which looked at North Lansing. In addition, scattered information was collected from the Old Town Main Street Center on businesses located in Old Town.

### **I. Profile of the North Lansing business community**

Information obtained from the North Lansing study on the commercial businesses indicated that the area is very diverse, ranging from small local services to large manufacturers. In six general groupings, retail sales included the largest number of businesses; manufacturing included the fewest businesses, but had the largest average revenue and number of employees. Out of 451 active businesses identified, 179 questionnaires were returned and of those businesses responding had annual revenues of less than half a million dollars and five employees; 10 businesses reported annual revenues of 10 million dollars or more and six reported 100 or more employees.

**Table 4.1**

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**General categories of business in North Lansing**

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Construction and building trades	14%
Manufacturing	9%
Wholesale trades and services	19%
Retail trades	30%
Personal services, including health	15%
Financial and professional services	15%

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Source: North Lansing Business Survey, 1994

Most responding businesses (66%) were incorporated and privately held, most (at least 53%) occupied freestanding business properties, and most (58%) owned their business property; 9% operated their businesses out of private homes. Retail sales and services were most common (74%), but more than half (57%) serviced business clients; nearly a third (31%) did both. Most (76%) provided sales or services on their business premises, more than half (61%) made sales or service calls, and many (37%) provided sales or services by mail and/or telephone; a quarter used all three modes and 5% used only mail and/or telephone. About half of the businesses (46%) were open weekdays only and less than 50 hours total; about a third were open at least one evening after 6 p.m. and 15% were open more than 80 hours a week.

## **II. North Lansing business economy**

North Lansing businesses generated revenues of approximately \$500,000,000 in 1993, more than 80% coming from outside of North Lansing. Businesses costs varied considerably among different types of business, but in aggregate were allotted about equally to labor costs, costs of materials and goods, and all other costs including rent, financing and taxes.

## **III. North Lansing as a place to do business**

Respondents were asked to rate a variety of attributes and problems affecting the business climate in North Lansing. In general, responses were not positive.

Crime emerged as the biggest concern for business people in North Lansing. More than half of the businesses reported being victims of crimes ranging from vandalism to armed robbery; larger businesses and those open during evening hours were even more likely to be crime victims. Most (61%) did not agree that crime "is more a

problem of perception than a real problem.” And many indicated it would have an effect on their decisions to continue business in North Lansing.

**Table 4.2**

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**Business concern for crime in North Lansing**

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“Medium” or “big” crime problem	83%
“Poor” or “fair” crime control	75%
Aspect “most like to improve”	45%
“Large” effect on plans to continue in North Lansing	55%
Business a victim of crime	60%

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Source: North Lansing Business Survey, 1994

Respondents to the survey were clearly concerned about crime in North Lansing, with most (83%) saying that crime is a “medium” or “big” problem. This could keep prospective business owners and visitors from entering North Lansing until crime is under control or the perception of crime under control.

#### **IV. Specifically focusing on Old Town**

According to Carey, the area has had a sound start in the first 18 months of the project. Sixteen businesses have opened along East Grand River Avenue bounded by Washington Avenue and Larch Street. The original four-year goal was to have 30 businesses start. What is more, nine buildings have been rehabilitated since the group came to Old Town, and three others are under development. Finally, with the launch of the “On the Grand” condominium project, the group is over the top on its four-year goal of \$2 million developments.

Similar to the Wisconsin success story, art is also giving new life to Old Town. There are a variety of art galleries in Old Town such as Innovations, The Old Town Frame Shop, the Creole Gallery, and the North Lansing Gallery. There are four out of a dozen Old Town spots with an arty feel. Some are galleries. Others merely have artistic flair such as the new club, Spiral, the renewal of Old Town will extend into the nightlife.

The Convention and Visitors Bureau moved into Old Town after a four-year search for a new home. The Greater Lansing Convention and Visitors Bureau (GLCVB) settled on and moved into the old Estes Furniture Warehouse at 1223 Turner Street in Old Town.

“Last year, the Bureau’s Site Selection Committee unanimously voted to select the building in order to provide visitor accessibility in an efficient, cost-effective manner,” said Thomas Galyon, CLVCB President, “this building will also allow the Bureau to join in the efforts of the Old Town business community by serving as a catalyst for development”.

The property, which is owned by Ferguson Development, underwent an aggressive renovation in order to provide the Bureau staff with a modernized facility with appropriate square footage and ample parking to accommodate visitors to its executive offices and new full-service Visitor Center.

The region’s first and only full-service Visitor Center, which will be located on the first floor, is also part of the Bureau’s master plan for its new home. The Center will be fully staffed and offer a myriad of information about the region including brochures, audio-visual presentation, a gift shop, displays and more. (The Main Street Minute, October 1998)



## **CHAPTER V: Conclusion**

One of the underlying purposes of this paper was to determine what type effects revitalization of Lansing's Old Town commercial district had on the adjacent community. Through this case study it seems that the revitalizing efforts going on in Old Town, though it might be slow, will promote positive growth for the area.

With the growth of retail, there has come suburban sprawl pushing the urban fringe of cities outward away from older districts. Nevertheless, many urban commercial districts have established new market niches for themselves such as art districts like Old Town.

The Old Town Main Street Program Resource Team, during their research of Old Town in 1997, outlined six observations that affected Old Town positively and negatively. Four out of the six observations they outlined in their final report were very important points which I also observed while conducting my research and volunteering my time in Old Town. They are as follows:

1. **Evidence of investment.** Old Town, particularly the arts district, is experiencing strong reinvestment. New stores and major building rehabilitation projects are the strongest sign of this. The investments made in Old Town are absolutely the strongest signal that this area is improving.

2. **Strong image.** Old Town's arts district generates a very positive image. While not everyone in Lansing knows about Old Town, many people do, and the publicity has been great.

### **Innovations**



**Figure 5.1**

Photograph by Stephanie Monroe,  
April 17, 1998

3. **Not enough critical mass.** The arts district does not have enough critical mass to be a strong shopping district. The number of consumer businesses is small and many of them, especially the art galleries, keep unusual hours.
4. **Two zones.** Old Town has two different commercial zones: a regional arts district and a neighborhood-based commercial district. The edges of the zones are not distinct and bleed into each other in several places.

The area should build upon the two market niches and not battle over what is best for the area. The spat between residents and business owners of art galleries and night entertainment could stifle development in the area tapped to become the city's alternative main street. North Lansing residents bitterly fought but, Spiral's lost that fight. Residents were concerned that the new bar would bring noise, violence and parking problems to the area.

According to a June 1998 article in the Lansing State Journal, "most residents say they have no hard feelings for the developers who move into the area. But some privately say art produced in the new studios is little more than pornography painted by gays and lesbians who are overrunning the area." Residents also fear that as this area

booms their property values will skyrocket fueling increased property taxes; some high enough to push residents out, and parking problems.

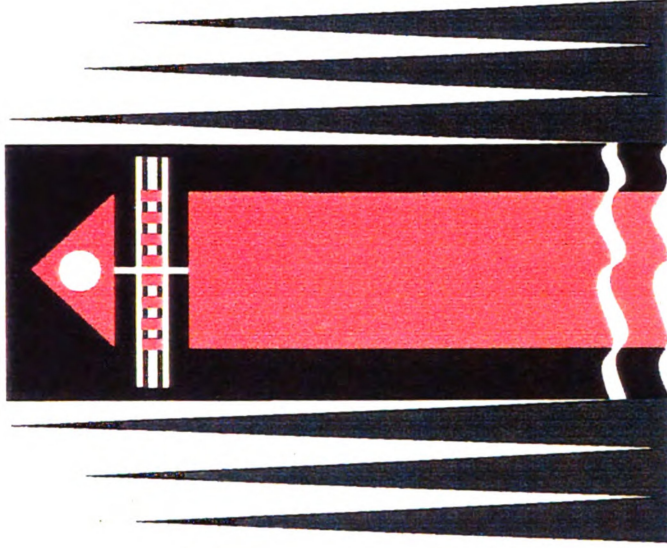
The area is somewhat aggressive in promoting Old Town but advanced efforts need to be made. In an early section commercial businesses discussed crime as a means of keeping business away from the area. Promotions reverse negative images and draw people back to an area to shop and recreate. While the arts district has been heavily promoted, the neighborhood-shopping district is still finding its niche and still needs to build a promotional base.

The adjacent neighborhood concerns are well founded but it is in the best interest of both sides to work together to build a thriving area both groups are proud to call their home and community.

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# **APPENDIX**



# ON THE GRAND

THE GRAND LAKES OF THE WESTERN UNITED STATES  
A SERIES OF LAKES IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES  
THE GRAND LAKES OF THE WESTERN UNITED STATES  
A SERIES OF LAKES IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES



Front Elevation



ONE HILL COUNTRY

# Historic Commercial District



## OLD TOWN LANSING

Old Town Main Street is proud to welcome On The Grand to the Old Town neighborhood! Old Town Main Street is one of six neighborhoods nationwide to be designated in the Neighborhood Main Street Initiative program, sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. The purpose of this project is to revitalize Old Town with a very comprehensive program strategy. We invite you to be part of this energizing effort by considering On The Grand as your home in historic Old Town.

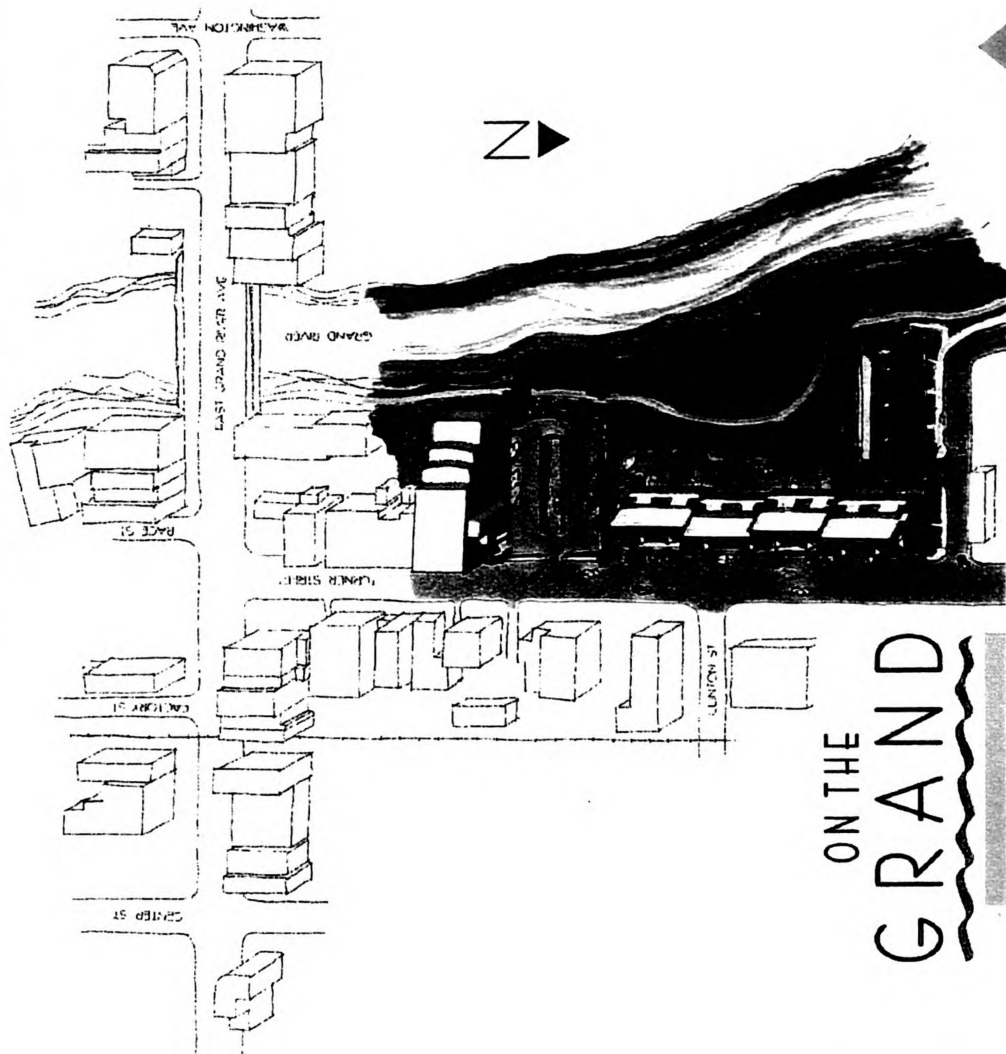
Old Town encompasses Lansing's original settlement area and still contains beautiful examples of Italianate, Romanesque, and Neoclassical architecture dating from the 1860s through the 1920s. A four-block area in the heart of Old Town is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and showcases Lansing's early history. Guides are often seen leading historic walking tours of the neighborhood for visitors, residents, and local dignitaries. Many families have called Old Town home for a number of years.

Today Old Town embraces its history while pushing forward to develop contemporary businesses and activities. From well-established firms to exciting new businesses, Old Town's mix includes ice-cream and coffee shops, computer firms, art galleries, ethnic restaurants and antiques. Burchard and Turner park lie in the heart of the district and connect Old Town to downtown Lansing via the River Trail. All provide an appealing and stimulating environment to residents and visitors alike.

At Old Town Main Street, we are working with the community to continue this trend of a lively and energetic neighborhood that is inviting and safe for all. A variety of events throughout the year attract the community to the Old Town experience. At any given time you might find poetry readings, drummers on the street, Heritage Fest, Gallery Walks, Jazz Fest, Oktoberfest, walking tours, ArtSpace kids creating, or various "underground" exhibits. Old Town is home to all these things and so much more: friendly faces, beautiful scenery, quiet walks, convenient access, creative people, and a great experience.

On The Grand is a part of this exciting effort and we hope you will make Old Town yours and celebrate our past, our present, and our future with us!

Lisa Carey  
Program Manager  
Old Town Main Street

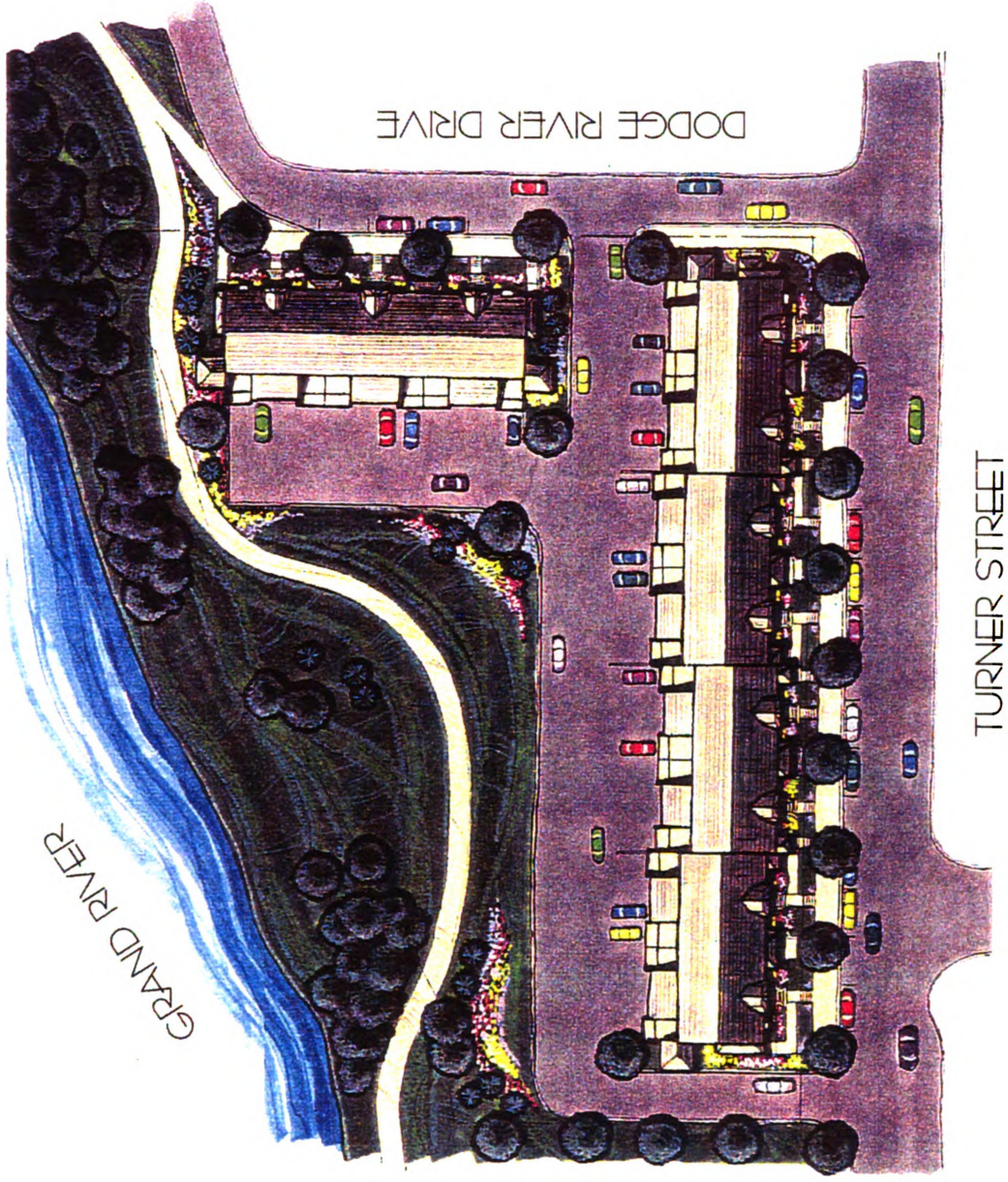


ON THE GRAND



# Site Plan

RENDERING BY JAMES H. HARRIS, JR., ARCHITECTURAL RENDERING, INC. FOR THE CITY OF DODGE, IOWA



TURNER STREET

DODGE RIVER DRIVE

GRAND RIVER

ON THE GRAND



## Side Elevation

Safety Features/Features Overall

### HISTORIC DISTRICT

Save over 50% on property taxes for the next 12 years!

- Unique Design Features
- Electronic Entry Gate
- Garages
- Masonry Walls Between Each Unit
- Sound Proof Design
- Victorian Style Brick
- Beautifully Landscaped
- Thermal Safety Windows
- River Front Property
- River Trail Accessibility
- \$55. Association Fee: Belaire, 1100 sq. ft.
- \$70. Association Fee: Tiffany, 2007 sq. ft.



CHATELAIN





Rear Elevation





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