



REIMAGINE WASHTENAW

PROGRESS UPDATE

ReImagine Washtenaw is a truly collaborative, regional planning effort that began in 2009, with clear goals to transform the Washtenaw Avenue corridor from a sprawling, auto-oriented corridor, into a multi-modal, vibrant, mixed-use corridor that more efficiently moves people within the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti urbanized areas. Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development (OCED) provides leadership and project management in conjunction with the Cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, and Pittsfield and Ypsilanti Charter Townships. Other key partners include the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority, Michigan Department of Transportation, and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study. ReImagine Washtenaw coordinated closely with the Regional Transit Authority, in planning improvements along the Michigan Avenue Corridor, whose route includes Washtenaw Avenue.

SETTING THE STAGE

Using 2012-2015 HUD Sustainable Community Challenge Grant funding, significant goals were advanced by the ReImagine Washtenaw coalition.

- Master Plans and zoning codes were updated in the City of Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti and Pittsfield Charter Townships to provide for walkable, Transit-Oriented, mixed-use developments.
- Detailed [Design Guidelines](#) were developed for the corridor, which were incorporated or referenced by the City of Ypsilanti and Pittsfield Charter Township in their updated codes.
- A [community charrette was held for the Golfside/Washtenaw intersection](#), including various build-out scenarios using the latest zoning code and Design Guidelines, and residential Target Market Data. The charrette provided possible build-out phasing for the corridor, which allowed the team to determine realistic surface parking requirements, and also the tipping point for the need for parking decks in order to achieve critical land use densities to truly support vibrant, walkable, transit-oriented development.
- Finally, a [Corridor Improvement Study](#) was completed in 2014 following extensive public involvement using the HUD funding, and has been [adopted by all four local units of government](#), and Washtenaw County. MDOT was involved in the plan development and continues to support continued implementation. This Study provides detailed roadway [Complete Street cross-sections](#) within each jurisdiction along the entire corridor, transit and pedestrian facility locations and concept designs that follow both context-sensitive designs and Complete Street policies. Comprehensive traffic congestion modeling was also performed, which demonstrated the effectiveness of mitigating future traffic congestion, should the corridor improvements be implemented. This Study remains the most important tool in guiding land use, transit, pedestrian, and transportation improvements along the corridor.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the adopted goals began in earnest in 2015. The following are key activities completed or underway:

WORK PLAN

A [2-year ReImagine Washtenaw Work Plan](#) was developed in 2015, with guidance and direction from the Joint Technical Committee. The Work Plan provided a list of both short term and long term projects to advance the project. It provides various focus areas and individual projects, in order of prioritization. Rather than being an exhaustive list of projects to actively pursue, it's viewed as a menu of projects that should be pursued as opportunities arise, given the limited staffing and resources.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Mid-Block Crossing with HAWK near EMU: MDOT, EMU, AAATA, and the City of Ypsilanti collaborated to install a [mid-block crossing with HAWK signal](#) between Oakwood and Cross, adjacent to EMU campus. The design of the crossing was upgraded, with additional funding support from EMU, to mast arms that were powder-coated black, matching the design of West Cross. Similar attention to design for future traffic control, signage, and pedestrian safety improvements are planned, recognizing the importance and collective emphasis on improving this corridor in a meaningful way.

Mid-Block Crossing and Glencoe Hills Signalization: OCED, on behalf of ReImagine Washtenaw, has coordinated a project with Pittsfield Charter Township, MDOT, AAATA, and the Washtenaw County Road Commission to make pedestrian safety improvements in the vicinity of the County Service Center and Glencoe Hills Apartments. Preliminary results of a [survey of pedestrian and bicyclist activity](#) in this area by Washtenaw County and Pittsfield Charter Township, indicate a need for a mid-block crossing facility. Follow up traffic and pedestrian surveys by MDOT support the need for full signalization of the Glencoe Hills Drive intersection with Washtenaw Avenue with pedestrian crossings. While additional design and funding is needed, it is encouraging to note that MDOT has been very cooperative and supportive of the identified improvements.

SUPER STOPS

OCED and AAATA extended a contract with SmithGroupJJR, the firm that completed the Corridor Improvement Study, to develop detailed specifications for "Super Stops" and construction drawings for at least one super stop location. Super Stops are bus stops with modern transit amenities that will provide for an enhanced transit experience. These include, for example, heated bus shelters with digital display of the next bus arrival, landscaping, public art, bike hoops, lockers, lighting, and benches. The [specifications were published on August 17, 2016](#), and will serve as a guiding design document for the construction of the 16 planned Super Stops along the corridor.

- Ypsilanti Charter Township secured a future Super Stop easement from Fresh Thyme grocery store at the corner of Golfside Road.
- Construction drawings were completed for a Super Stop across from Arborland, in the City of Ann Arbor, and that project is now pending, with further utility coordination required.
- The Washtenaw County Facilities Department agreed to reserve an area for future Super Stop construction in front of the County Service Center, and dedicate 12 spaces within the new parking lot to the AAATA for Park N Ride spaces for commuters. This area is now prepped for a Super Stop.

OCED and AAATA are actively seeking other locations to construct Super Stops, including seeking funding and construction support from the private sector.

COORDINATING CDBG FUNDING FOR SIDEWALK INFILL

OCED has also worked with Pittsfield and Ypsilanti Charter Townships to coordinate annual CDBG funding allocations through the Urban County to construct sidewalk infill along the corridor, and OCED staff has coordinated these projects. Construction of the Pittsfield Charter Township sidewalk infill was planned for 2016, but will be re-bid for spring 2017. Ypsilanti Charter Township has contracted with the Road Commission to acquire necessary easements for their sidewalk infill project, and it's currently planned for 2017 construction.

PUBLIC ART

A [Public Art plan](#) for the Washtenaw corridor was developed by the Ann Arbor Arts Alliance in 2014, using HUD Challenge Grant funds. The plan focuses on the opportunity to incorporate public art within Super Stops. OCED and AAATA engaged the Ann Arbor Arts Alliance to collaborate on incorporating public art within Super Stops. A proposal for wrapping bus shelters in public art, similar to the "Power Art" program in the City of Ann Arbor where traffic control boxes were wrapped in art, was an initial suggested public art approach developed in collaboration with AAATA and the Arts Alliance. The Arts Alliance provided a proposal to assist with the procurement of public art in the future, as funding becomes available to construct new Super Stops. Local funding support will be required for public art components of Super Stops, particularly if more elaborate public art is envisioned.

DEDICATION OF FUTURE RIGHT-OF-WAY EASEMENTS

The Corridor Improvement Study calls for additional public easements or right-of-way area along the corridor in order to achieve a Complete Street in the future. OCED, on behalf of ReImagine Washtenaw, has coordinated future easement and right-of-way needs with the individual local unit partners and AAATA (where Super Stops are involved) in ensuring the proper easements are secured. Several easements have been secured to date.

COORDINATION WITH THE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Representatives from all ReImagine Washtenaw partners served on the Michigan Avenue Transportation Alternatives Technical Committee, which guided the development of the [Michigan Avenue Locally Preferred Alternative Report](#). This report outlines planned RTA-sponsored transportation improvements along the Washtenaw Avenue corridor. The Michigan Avenue corridor follows Washtenaw Avenue between the Cities of Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. OCED staff (among other stakeholders like AAATA) had multiple meetings with RTA staff and consultants to ensure proposed Michigan Avenue transportation improvements were consistent, and supported the ReImagine Washtenaw plans.

CITY OF ANN ARBOR ENGAGEMENT

OCED has been responsive to the unique needs and interests of each local unit of government partner in implementing the ReImagine Washtenaw vision. The County has begun to assist city stakeholders and planners to review current city zoning to explore possible amendments to advance the project. In addition, OCED sits on the City of Ann Arbor Land Use and Access Priority Team, charged with implementing land use and transportation recommendations of the City of Ann Arbor's Climate Action Plan. The Team has included focus on the Washtenaw Avenue corridor in terms of opportunity for increased density and mixed-use developments, and transit improvements, which result in reduced carbon emissions.

MIXED-USE FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

The ReImagine Washtenaw vision relies on the notion of dense, mixed-use, transit-oriented developments to achieve increased transit use, walkability, and vibrancy. However, the corridor has not yet experienced true mixed-use development. The ReImagine Washtenaw Project Manager is actively engaged in gaining a more clear understanding of why developers are not constructing mixed-use. OCED recently conducted a [Mixed-Use Proforma Development Feasibility Analysis](#), which reveals that dense, mixed-use development along the corridor is not currently financially feasible, in either the Ypsilanti or Ann Arbor markets, without additional development incentives. The County will engage local unit partners in

developing strategies for what incentives may close this financial gap, in order to encourage denser, mixed-use development within planned transit nodes along the corridor.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING GOALS

OCED has been actively engaged in identifying and advancing affordable housing challenges for the region. With the publication of the 2015 Housing Affordability and Economic Equity Analysis, OCED formed a regional leadership group charged with exploring and implementing specific recommendations in the Analysis. The Washtenaw Avenue corridor presents a significant opportunity to increase the supply of affordable housing, particularly within the City of Ann Arbor. However, increasing housing choice and density along the entire corridor will also improve access to employment, services, and education for all residents of the area.

REIMAGINE WASHTENAW FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Washtenaw County OCED has provided project management staff for the Reimagine Washtenaw initiative over the last 6 years. While the HUD Community Challenge Planning Grant provided project management funding from 2012 through 2014, resources to support the staffing necessary to see this important work continued were provided through an agreement between Washtenaw County, the four adjacent local units of government, and the AAATA. Each local unit of government committed to \$5,000 annually in 2015 and 2016, while the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority contributed \$15,000 and OCED contributed \$35,000 annually.

Implementation of this long-term vision requires attention and dedication, and OCED plans to continue to provide the staffing required for this work as a part of an overall regional economic development strategy. Continued investment from Reimagine Washtenaw partners to support the key staffing for this work ensures the regional coordination necessary to bring this critical vision to life.

If the vision for this corridor is achieved, the corridor will serve the business community, residents, and commuters much more effectively. Land use will be denser and less reliant on cars, walking and biking will increase, and planned improvements will mitigate increasing traffic congestion. With a higher-functioning corridor that encourages dense, mixed-use transit-oriented development, not only will the corridor local units of government will also realize higher tax revenues that come with denser, more walkable developments.