



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Collaborative solutions for a promising future*

# 2017 Annual Report

## REIMAGINE WASHTENAW

### BACKGROUND

ReImagine Washtenaw is a 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 vibrant, multi-modal, 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, Washtenaw County Road Commission, and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study.

### CORRIDOR IMPLEMENTATION

The 2014 Washtenaw Avenue [Corridor Improvement Study](#) contains the communities' vision for the corridor as well as implementation steps to achieve that vision. OCED provided technical assistance to update land use plans and zoning codes, and to develop and adopt detailed [Design Guidelines](#) as part of those plans and codes. This work ensures that the walkable, lively, and attractive neighborhoods envisioned are achieved. OCED has also been instrumental in executing several physical improvements in the corridor, from sidewalk infill to traffic signals. While there is still work to be done to ensure all local governmental partners have the tools to realize the corridor vision, all partners continue to dedicate resources to advance the project.

#### Sidewalk Infill

In the fall of 2017, Pittsfield Charter Township completed a large sidewalk infill project, along the south side of Washtenaw Avenue, between Carpenter and Golfside. This project used Community Development Block Grant funding through the Urban County and OCED, bridging the largest sidewalk gaps in the corridor. Additional infill along the corridor is planned for 2018.

#### Pedestrian Safety Improvement Study

The area east of Carpenter Road in Pittsfield Township is near multi-family housing, the County Service Center, commercial and retail services, and a neighborhood anchored by an elementary school. This area lacks facilities to allow the high number of pedestrians to safely cross Washtenaw Avenue. In 2016 ReImagine stakeholders, including Pittsfield Township, Washtenaw County, The Ride, Michigan Department of Transportation, and Washtenaw County Road Commission conducted a pedestrian/transit user/bicyclist survey to verify the area requires pedestrian safety infrastructure. The results of the study not only demonstrated the need for a mid-block crossing at the County Service Center, but also a new traffic signal at Glencoe Hills Drive (described below). The mid-block crossing would complement a public transit Super Stop adjacent to the County Service Center, which has been planned since 2013 when the County partnered with The Ride to establish a 12-space Park and Ride within the reconstructed parking lot. The advancement of a mid-block crossing near the County Service Center continues



to be actively explored by a coalition of MDOT, Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS), Pittsfield Charter Township, and OCED. It is anticipated the mid-block crossing might be constructed in 2019 and 2020, with the intent to coordinate with The Ride for installation of a new Super Stop.

### **Glencoe Hills Drive Traffic Signal**

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) increased the scope of the 2016 mid-block pedestrian/bicycle/transit user survey to include a study of this intersection for a possible traffic signal. MDOT determined that a signal was warranted, and was able to include the new signal installation as part of an existing contract for the region, advancing it quickly for 2017 construction. These efforts reflect MDOT’s recognition of the importance of the Washtenaw Avenue corridor and support of the local multi-jurisdictional initiative and local commitment. The mast-arm design utilized was a higher design standard option, given the long term development plans and importance of the corridor, but required a substantial local match for the upgrade. Additional local funding was secured from Pittsfield Township and The Ride, and the project was quickly completed in the fall of 2017. Three new pedestrian crossings with high visibility crosswalk striping were included, and now provide a safe route for hundreds of residents and transit users daily.



### **Regional Transit Planning**

While the Regional Transit Authority’s (RTA) millage did not pass in November 2016, some important corridor transportation planning was completed as part of the RTA’s Master Plan. The ReImagine Washtenaw Project Manager and Joint Technical Committee were involved with the RTA’s development of the Michigan Avenue Corridor Master Plan, which encompassed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Elements along the Washtenaw Avenue corridor. In 2018, the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority began a planning study called “BRT Lite” to advance key aspects of the BRT plan, including Queue Jump Lanes, Super Stop Prioritization, Transit Signal Priority, and an updated corridor transit service analysis.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

While project partners have accomplished much to advance and implement the ReImagine Washtenaw plans, there are ongoing opportunities to be considered to safeguard the collective vision that has resulted from years of tireless efforts to truly transform the corridor:

### **ZONING IMPLEMENTATION**

Each community belonging to the ReImagine Washtenaw coalition should adopt a basic set of zoning requirements that will result in land use patterns that reinforce the agreed upon corridor character:

Zero Lot Line Development at Nodes: For those areas designated as “nodes,” all future development should be required to be placed at the future/planned right-of-way line to provide for a walkable district. A maximum setback of 10 feet should be adopted.

Minimum height/density at Nodes: Any redevelopment should require a minimum of two-story development within “nodes,” with required retail on the ground floor, and parking on the side or rear.

Minimum Frontage: For redevelopment plans at “nodes,” a minimum of 70 to 90% of the frontage should be required to be building frontage. In order to create a walkable district, there need to be continuous building storefronts to generate sufficient street level activity and critical massing of building.

Design Guidelines: The Detailed [Design Guidelines](#) developed in 2014 should be referenced in local development standards, with all new developments and significant building alterations being required to meet a minimum set of design criteria. Without good design, effective place-making and walkable, vibrant transit-oriented districts will not be achieved.

### ***FUTURE RIGHT-OF-WAY EASEMENT ACQUISITION***

The 2014 Corridor Improvement Study provides a comprehensive survey of the corridor, and exact dimensional future public easement acquisition needs, in order to achieve the [Complete Street cross-sections](#) planned for the corridor. Communities should work with the ReImagine Washtenaw Project Manager to coordinate acquisition of these additional public easement areas as properties are redeveloped or expanded, as these are appropriate times to seek necessary easements that will allow the implementation of the long-term vision. This will ensure that, over time, adequate future right-of-way is assembled. The Project Manager will assist the local planner with determining required easements referencing the 2014 Study.

### ***PUBLIC ART AT SUPER STOPS***

Super Stops are bus stops with modern transit amenities that will provide for an enhanced transit experience. Refined Super Stop [specifications were published on August 17, 2016](#), which are being further refined with the current BRT Lite study, and will serve as the guiding design document for the construction of Super Stops. While The Ride will be primarily responsible for construction of Super Stops, local commitments to additional enhancements, such as public art, will be encouraged. Local governments should consider possible funding sources for public art in the community. The Ann Arbor Arts Alliance was involved in early public art planning for the corridor, and may be a resource to determine strategies for public art funding.

## **REIMAGINE WASHTENAW PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY**

Washtenaw County OCED has provided project management staff for the ReImagine Washtenaw initiative over the last 9 years, and remains very committed to its success. Due to the long-term vision for the corridor, a more sustained financial program should be considered from all partners. Regional planning and transportation initiatives are often best led by a regional partner. Equally important are the local partners where land use and infrastructure investment decisions are made. OCED looks forward to more consistent and long-term financial support to continue to advance the ReImagine Washtenaw project. OCED plans to continue to provide the staffing required for the long-term implementation of the vision, and for it to be a continued part of the overall regional economic development strategy. A longer term investment commitment from ReImagine Washtenaw partners to support key staffing for this work will provide the necessary stability for the position and ensures the regional coordination necessary to bring this critical vision to life.