WALNUT HILLS REVITALIZATION PROPOSAL
Walnut Hills Team 5

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Vision Statement
We envision a revitalized neighborhood business district along East McMillan Street centered on a transit hub at Peebles corner. We propose a new neighborhood market to act as a communal gathering space that enlivens East McMillan Street, connects the cultural and business districts, and provides grounds for the exchange of food, art, and other local goods. In response to greater highway access, we recommend a new office district north of Martin Luther King Drive in place of current low-income housing, and accommodation of these residents with infill development of vacancies in Walnut Hills.

Goals, Strategies and Actions
In order to foster economic development in Walnut Hills, it is necessary to generate jobs and increase the amount of tax revenue for the community; each of the following components of the framework plan would achieve both of these goals. Retaining characteristic businesses that represent the neighborhood, expanding the thriving businesses, and removing those businesses that do not appeal to the area could help improve the infrastructure. In particular, infill of vacancies along East McMillan Street (shown in red) with service businesses would support and retain the revenue of the Walnut Hills residential community, as well as offer the conveniences of a walkable lifestyle. Incorporating new clean and green industries, such as a paper processing and recycling center in a new regional industrial and office district, north of Martin Luther King Drive (in blue, at the top of the diagram), would appeal to a new population and reduce the carbon footprint of the community’s industry base.
These economic districts would support one another, in that East McMillan Street would provide sit-down restaurants and a post office useful for the office and industrial workers, and the new office development would increase the neighborhood tax base and support the revitalization of the McMillan business core. In addition, the services and conveniences of McMillan business district would capture the revenue the existing office district (shown in blue) in southwest Walnut Hills. By allowing new office and commercial industries to acquire existing buildings, the historical aspects of Walnut Hills can be preserved and the materials recycled to promote sustainability in the community. Also, new buildings such as institutional employment centers that would improve the economy should be constructed using innovative technologies to conserve energy or reduce their pervious areas, which would lessen their environmental impact.

Redeveloping the residential neighborhoods in Walnut Hills would entail the improvement of the quality of life for those living in the community. Improving existing housing and building new appealing residential units would not only retain the current population, but it would also help to increase the population of the community for new jobs provided through economic development. This will also preserve inner-city living so that more people would consider walking or biking instead of using a vehicle, which reduces carbon emissions. By relocating residents from the northern neighborhood (shown in gray, in the left-hand diagram), currently characterized as crime-ridden, dilapidated area, into improved housing the southern parts of Walnut Hills, these residents will enjoy the opportunity of a walkable lifestyle near the McMillan business district. Improvement of the neighborhood business districts would enliven community areas, provide a point of destination for consumers both inside and outside the community, and decrease the area’s environmental footprint by encouraging more walkable settings.

By enhancing the quality and quantity of cultural and civic amenities in the area with the enhancement of the cultural district (shown in purple), Walnut Hills would gain more of an identity as a community, attract new residents and visitors, and revitalize some of its vacant buildings. High quality educational facilities, like the new Frederick Douglass Elementary School in Walnut Hills, are vital for neighborhood redevelopment. Good schools improve the quality of life for children and school employees in the area. Young adults and other workers can improve their employment skills through better educational programs. Also, many schools provide large amounts of green space and could be furnished with green technology to improve the environmental quality of the community.
In order to improve the environmental aspects of the community, we looked at several plans to increase the amount of green space in Walnut Hills. More appealing landscape and gateways would increase the number of social gathering places in the area, raise land value in the area, and encourage walkability and an outdoor lifestyle. Better stormwater management would help educate the community of the sustainable practices, and the possibility of reusing stormwater would reduce water costs for residents while the amount of combined sewer overflows in Walnut Hills would greatly decrease. Mitigating the existing brownfields in Walnut Hills would allow for cleaner land and better air quality for residents, which in turn would increase land value and reduce industrial blight. Preserving green on the streets improves the quality of life for walkers and preserves land value and natural resources in the area. Instilling more programmed parks and recreation in the central areas of the neighborhood increases the number of public gathering places in Walnut Hills, increases the value of adjacent land, and improves air quality in the area. In line with this thinking, we intend to build upon the existing parks with green linkages along major thoroughfares of East McMillan Street, Martin Luther King Drive, and along the new I-71 ramps, and introduce central programmed, green space to Walnut Hills.

Our improved highway design increases visitor accessibility to Walnut Hills, access to neighborhood businesses, and decreases travel distance. A better designed street network allows for better pedestrian and bicycle access and improves access and visibility of local businesses while revitalizing the street life. We intend to build upon the important transport hub at East McMillan Street and Gilbert Avenue by providing appropriate transit-related services at Peebles Corner, which will increase social interaction in the area and increase consumer mobility. This will help attract future multi-modal lines including the streetcar and light rail. Furthermore, this enhancement of the multi-modal system will decrease the number of single-occupant vehicles and reduce emissions in the area. Additionally, a freight system in Walnut Hills would service community needs, allow greater access/more efficient transportation of goods. More prevalent bicycle and pedestrian paths will encourage active community interaction, attract businesses and consumers, and decrease the carbon footprint of residents in Walnut Hills. More adequate parking in the business district would appeal to suburbanites and be a convenience for consumers. Additional parking could be constructed with pervious pavers to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff in Walnut Hills.
## Rationale

The East McMillan Street corridor will be enlivened from its current condition (seen in the right-hand image) as the heart of mixed-use services to support, retain, and increase Walnut Hills residents. Through conversations with Kathy Atkinson, a neighborhood representative, the deteriorating buildings along East McMillan Street would be most effectively reestablished with sit-down restaurants, post office (as the existing one in the southern part of Walnut Hills plans to close), laundry facility, video store, and florist. Historically, East McMillan Street did have a video store and florist, so residents would like to see these services return, and the current staples to build upon are Beck’s Hardware and Louis Meats. These alterations would correspond to several goals in Cincinnati 45206:

1. East McMillan Street, Picture by M. Vernon
Land Use / Zoning Goal 2 – Create a land use plan for commercial corridors along Gilbert Avenue, McMillan, William Howard Taft Road, Lincoln Avenue, Woodburn Avenue, and Madison Road.

Economic Development Goal 1 – Strengthen and improve the economic viability in the community business districts.

This design would also correspond to suggestions made by The Mayors’ Institute on City Design by creating a commercial core around Peebles Corner and creating a local enterprise zone.

In conversations with Cincinnati traffic engineers, we learned that Peebles Corner is the third busiest transport hub in the city. In order to take advantage of its hub location and respond to greater 1-71 accessibility, we propose Walnut Hills builds upon its transport hub at the intersection of East McMillan Street and Gilbert Avenue to take advantage of converging “Metro” bus routes 1, 11, and 31. The building vacancies at this corner would appropriately be replaced with transit-related services such as media center and coffee shop. Furthermore, the street vendors and businesses along East McMillan Street would benefit from the influx of potential customers, and in turn, upgrade or infill businesses in existing buildings. This idea correlates with Cincinnati 45206 in two ways:

Transportation Community Outcome Vision 2010 – Transportation through the community will include environmentally clean, safe, user-friendly buses that will be seen as major assets for the community and will serve as a transportation connector for the City’s mass public transportation system.

Transportation Goal 1 – Identify a site for a potential public transportation hub to serve as the connector for any rapid transportation system that will be used by the City of Cincinnati.

Additionally, these multi-modal transport goals support two of the three principles in Section 8, “Transportation/Infrastructure Improvement Recommendations,” in the GO Cincinnati report:

1. Leverage transportation resources to create and reinforce walkable, transit-oriented, mixed-use development.
2. Create an integrated multi-modal transportation system for people and goods.

We would also like to provide for improved streetscape on East McMillan Street, including the revitalization of deteriorating infrastructure, bicycle racks, prominent building and transport signage, and a new gateway market entrance between the existing Kroger and CVS stores in order to encourage community street life. This improvement corresponds with the “Steps in Providing

Resources to Start-up Businesses” in *The Mayors’ Institute on City Design* along with *Cincinnati 45206* goals:

- Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure Goal 4 – Stabilize and expand leisure opportunities for residents in the community.
- Land Use / Zoning Goal 2 – Develop a community-wide streetscape program and a façade improvement program in the business district.
- Economic Development Goal 3 – Improve the safety, cleanliness and visual identity of the business district.

In order to connect this neighborhood business district with the cultural center and provide community gathering space, an adaptable neighborhood market will be designed. This market will function as a grocer, florist, and a central neighborhood park during off-market hours. The market will also serve as a nucleus for artistic events, street vendors, community gardens, and outdoor dining. In a May 2009 article, Findlay Market reported a 27.9% increase in consumers over the past year, as well as a significant influx in new businesses and residents to Over the Rhine neighborhood. This supports the proposed Walnut Hills market in terms of Cincinnati community response and the catalyst for neighborhood revitalization. Furthermore, this design satisfies “Steps in Providing Resources to Start-up Businesses” in *The Mayors’ Institute on City Design* and two goals of *Cincinnati 45206*:

- Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure Goal 4 – Create opportunities, events, and programs to fill identified gaps in recreational and leisure activities for the community.
- Economic Development Goal 1 – Maintain and increase business owners’ participation in the existing business district associations.

With the existing Kroger grocery store projected to move out of Walnut Hills in two years, the neighborhood will no longer have a grocery store. In anticipation of this move, an outdoor market will be placed adjacent to Kroger and eventually expand to occupy the interior with a neighborhood-owned food market. The interior would be subdivided and converted into a prepared foods eat-in area and the storefront would include specialty food services such as a bakery and seafood counter, which would support the existing neighborhood staple, Louis Meats. The remaining space in the store would serve as a food market with refrigerated food and drink. This plan coincides with several conclusions in *The Mayors’ Institute on City Design*, including: [3] http://soapboxmedia.com/devnews/0605findlaymarket.aspx
“creating a local enterprise zone,” storefront improvements, and “Steps in Providing Resources to Start-up Businesses.”

We propose that the vacant, historical buildings on the west side of Kemper Lane, next to the Walnut Hills Library, be filled with live-work studios to support the abundance of artists in Walnut Hills. The market grounds mentioned earlier would provide monthly gallery openings, arts education classes, and artisan fairs to support these artists. This idea corresponds with The Mayors’ Institute on City Design suggestions of “Focus on the Arts” and “Create a local enterprise zone,” along with Cincinnati 45206:

Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure Goal 1 – Explore the feasibility of identifying residential space for artists within the arts and entertainment districts.

Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure Goal 2 – Identify and increase use of the community’s artistic assets and resources.

The outdoor market will occupy the current Kroger parking lot, retaining half of the parking, which is currently underutilized (as seen in the diagram). New public parking will be provided nearby on William Howard Taft Road near the intersection of Kemper Avenue. Additionally, a new public parking lot will be placed on William Howard Taft Road, adjacent to the United Dairy Farmers store in order to accommodate the market and McMillan Street business district. This responds to Cincinnati 45206:

Economic Development Goal 4 – Develop and implement a plan to provide convenient and safe parking that will adequately support the thriving business districts by providing additional parking to support increased activity in the McMillan Street business district.

The existing tri-cultural centers of Bush Recreation Center, Walnut Hills Library, and the Frederick Douglass Elementary School (in corresponding order, above images) would be strengthened with supporting arts, entertainment, and green spaces. We specifically propose an urban arts center and concert venue to
engage the neighborhood and surrounding communities, which would look similar to the
precedent images shown on the previous page. Additionally, a daycare facility and park,
replacing the Cadillac car lot (which could be relocated to Martin Luther King Drive after
the new highway access is constructed), will support parents working in the various
Walnut Hills business districts. This correlates with Cincinnati 45206 in the following
ways:

Housing Goal 4 – Preserve historic and architectural character by identifying
targeted blocks for the renovation of vacant buildings and developing a strategy
for marketing vacant areas.

Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure Goal 2 – Identify and increase
artistic assets and resources by developing a community arts center to introduce
Walnut Hills’ youth to opportunities in the world of art and to nurture the
potential talent of youth within the community.

Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure Goal 4 – Stabilize and expand
leisure opportunities for residents in the community by creating opportunities,
events, and programs to fill gaps in recreational and leisure activities.

Education Goal 2 – Develop, maintain, and maximize neighborhood schools as a
center of community life for the residents of the community by designing
programs and activities that are available during evenings and weekends.

Land Use / Zoning Goal 2 – Develop a land use pattern that defines specific uses
for recreational areas such as active and passive community parks.

We propose a new green business district north of Martin Luther
King Drive in place of the existing low-income, crime-ridden
housing district. Those who currently reside in this area will be
provided other affordable housing options in Walnut Hills, such as
that southwest of the intersection of Gilbert Avenue and McMillan
Street, which will then infill vacancies that offer proximity to the
McMillan Street business services. This responds to many goals
stated in Cincinnati 45206:

Housing Goal 2 – Increase affordable housing opportunities.

Housing Goal 5 – Protect the historic housing stock.

Land Use / Zoning Goal 1 – Develop a land use plan that safeguards historic
character, encourages single-family residential housing, promotes the value and
benefits of residential resale, maintains a stable residential population, and
addresses vacant, abandoned, and distressed properties.
With this new regional office district, the neighborhood will be bound with major bookend employers to the north and south, which increases the neighborhood tax and consumer base. The location of the new regional office district follows the recommendation of the GO Cincinnati report, which identifies the Madison Road as a “New Growth Opportunity Area” because of its excellent proximity to I-71 and the Central Business District. The plan specifically states:

“Recommendation for Cincinnati’s New Growth Opportunity Areas” – Reclaiming market share of the regional office market will involve the provision of modern office structures that are high in demand amongst growth industry office users.

Vacancies along Gilbert Avenue near these districts will be filled with lunchtime eateries, like the one shown to the right, and convenient services such as a copy/print centers and dry cleaners to accommodate office workers. Also, McMillan Street business services including the post office and sit-down restaurants will gain the revenue of these employers. This would satisfy the following goals of Cincinnati 45206:

Land Use / Zoning Goal 2 – Develop a land use pattern that defines specific uses for properties in the Gilbert Avenue commercial corridor.

Economic Development Goal 1 – Strengthen and improve the economic viability of the community by promoting the Peebles Corner/McMillan Street business district, recruiting and maintaining diverse businesses that meet the needs of local consumers, and ensure the businesses will offer retail, products, and services based on the needs identified by the residents.

A unique mixed-income neighborhood can be established by incorporating new middle-to high-income housing near Eden Park with downtown views to accommodate those working in the community business districts, and create a unique mixed-income neighborhood, which corresponds to the following goals listed in Cincinnati 45206:

Housing Goal 1 – Increase owner-occupied housing and showcase housing character and opportunities within the community.

Housing Goal 3 – Market the community as a place to live and raise a family.

Land Use / Zoning Goal 1 – Develop a land use plan that encourages single-family housing, promotes the value and benefits of residential resale, and maintains a stable residential population.

In order to enhance the overall image of the neighborhood and link the existing green spaces of Eden Park, German Cemetery,
and Victory Parkway, we envision a greenway along the proposed Interstate 71 access ramps as well as the conversion of McMillan Street, Gilbert Avenue, and Martin Luther King Drive into green avenues. Also, the market and improved cultural center provide more green space in the heart of Walnut Hills, which may help improve the visual identity of the McMillan Street business district. The enhanced visual appeal of the community may attract potential commercial businesses that can benefit from the inherent amenities of valuable inner-city real estate and convenient highway access. In doing so, the following goals of Cincinnati 45206 would be met:

Land Use / Zoning Goal 2 – Develop a land use pattern that defines specific uses for recreational areas within the community by preserving existing parks and green spaces, providing for the development and maintenance of additional green spaces and recreational facilities, and establishing active and passive parks to benefit the community as needed.

Economic Development Goal 1 – Strengthen and improve the economic viability in the community business districts.

Economic Development Goal 3 – Improve the safety, cleanliness, and visual identity of the business districts in Walnut Hills.

Establishing prominent gateways to Walnut Hills at east and west ends of McMillan Street, as well as the gateway entrance to the market along McMillan Street, similar to the one shown to the left of Pike Place market in Seattle, would enhance the image of the neighborhood business district with clear signage and prominent landscaping, which coincides with the following Cincinnati 45206 goals:

Economic Development Goal 1 – Strengthen and improve the economic viability in the community business districts.

Economic Development Goal 3 – Improve the safety, cleanliness, and visual identity of the business districts within the community.

Designating a bicycle path that ends in Eden Park complete with bike lanes, parking infrastructure, and repair shops will attract cyclists to Walnut Hills. This is concurrent with Cincinnati 45206 as follows:

Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, and Leisure Goal 3 – Stabilize and expand leisure opportunities for residents in the community by developing walking, hiking, and bicycle trails through Walnut Hills and encourage community residents to take advantage of opportunities to exercise and
improve health and fitness.

Additionally, the Bicycle Master Plan, shown to the left, from the City of Cincinnati website, currently identifies mostly “use with caution” (yellow) routes through Walnut Hills. To create more “preferred routes” (blue) from Eden Park and Victory Parkway, we propose a bike path that runs through the cultural center and McMillan business district of Walnut Hills, in order to bring in new consumers and encourage the physical activity and health of Walnut Hills residents.

### Framework Plan Proposal

The framework plan proposal, shown on page 14, illustrates the major ideas for the revitalization of Walnut Hills, and the interrelationship of these concepts in our overall vision. The neighborhood commercial spine along East McMillan Street has an important central location, and runs east-west across the neighborhood of Walnut Hills. Various beauty shops, discount stores, and a couple chains, including CVS/pharmacy and Kroger, currently characterize this area. We propose that the vacancies and redundancy of discount stores be replaced with mixed-use services for residents such as a laundry facility and video store. As shown by the dashed red circles, almost all residents have access to this neighborhood commercial district within a 5- to 10-minute walk. The yellow gradient on housing is strongest within this 5-minute circle, illustrating that we recommend a density of housing in close proximity to East McMillan Street.

The neighborhood market is shown in green at the center of the plan, extending as pathways and pocket parks across the blocks from Victory Parkway, until it ends at the northeast nexus of Peebles Corner. It will serve to enliven community life on East McMillan Street and activate the blocks between the business center and cultural center (shown in purple to the north). This new green space would be programmed for various uses including a community garden, which builds upon the existing community gardens in the residential areas of Walnut Hills. The garden would likely be used by neighboring senior residents and for the education of school children, and the produce harvested could be appropriately sold at the food market. Additionally, local artists could use the grounds for a number artistic events and festivals for both residents and outside attendees. The elementary school could potentially use the green space for sporting events and other after-school activities.
The outdoor food market itself would operate 3-4 days a week, and otherwise function as a gathering space for community interaction and the other various activities mentioned above. However, the indoor grocery shop would remain open 24-hours/day. The outdoor shed would shelter about 30,000 square feet of space for merchants and farmers. In 2 years, when Kroger moves, the 35,000 square foot building could be subdivided in a mix of food-related programs. The façade facing East McMillan Street could potentially be opened up with windows as a storefront space, and occupied by a café and bakery. The west side facing the outdoor market would be used as an eat-in area with indoor and outdoor dining. The two vacant buildings, totaling about 11,000 square feet, on the same block would be most appropriately reclaimed for artist studio and gallery space to help activate life of the market with gallery shows and outdoor artist displays. About half the parking (65 spaces) on this block would be retained, and the rest would be compensated for with new parking (of about 60 spaces) off of Taft Road, between Kemper Lane and Park Avenue.

The light purple areas indicate existing cultural buildings, which we plan build upon and enhance in the dark purple areas with 7 specific cultural amenities, namely: (1) Walnut Hills Conduit, (2) Design Studio, (3) Bush Senior Center, (4) Kemper Theater, (5) Day Care, (6) Community Building, and (7) Neighborhood Green. This is an ambitious master plan, which would be completed in stages, and rely on the concurrent revitalization of the East McMillan Street business district. First, the 14 houses on Park Drive, between Chapel Street and Yale Avenue, will be converted into artist live/work studios, which will help facilitate the redevelopment of the business district. At the same time as business redevelopment, the construction of “Mini City Hall,” called for in The Mayors’ Institute on City Design to serve as helpful resource center with a direct connection to local government, will be located across from the Library at the site of an existing car repair shop. Once the business district shows signs of vitality, the Kemper Theater, Community Design Studio, and other amenities can begin development.

In creating this cultural center, the neighborhood will bring in artists and create a destination that will attract new residents and outside visitors to Walnut Hills. This cultural district, will also connect to a new sub-cultural district to the south of East McMillan Street, fueled by the Neusole Glass Studio’s move into Walnut Hills. The new bicycle path, shown in purple will go through the cultural center, business district, and middle-class housing to increase exposure of these attractive areas of Walnut Hills, and perhaps fuel businesses for a bicycle repair shop and other related recreational services.

New and existing office areas are designated by a blue-hatch, and located adjacent to I-71 where they will benefit from the improved BR-01 ramp accesses at Martin Luther King Drive, Taft Road, and East McMillan Street. The new office area north of Martin Luther King Drive will relocate residents to improved housing within the neighborhood. A large amount of vacancies exist in the neighborhoods west of Gilbert Avenue, which would be appropriately filled with these dislocated residents. Therefore, the density of residents would increase near the commercial core, increasing the consumer base, and encouraging a better quality of life in terms of walkability and sociability among residents.

The red-hatched areas show regional, commercial areas that will offer convenient services and lunchtime restaurants for those working in the office districts, at the north and south ends of the neighborhood. These commercial areas will cater to business
people so that this new group of neighborhood users does not alter the character of East McMillan Street businesses to fit their needs, and alienate Walnut Hills residents. Instead, East McMillan Street will provide some conveniences such as a post office and sit-down restaurants to support regional office workers, but the red-hatched areas along Gilbert Avenue will be more catered to their needs. As a result, Walnut Hills captures the revenue of these new office workers, but does lose the character of its residential neighborhood.

Since the existing green space in the neighborhood is located at peripheral parks, namely Eden Park and the German Cemetery, and along the bordering Victory Parkway, we recommend green space along the major corridors of Martin Luther King Drive, and East McMillan Street to knit together a cohesive green image for the neighborhood. These streets will be upgraded with landscaping as green avenues to improve neighborhood image for the large flux of people that pass through these Walnut Hills arterials. In addition, we propose that the new braided ramps along I-71 are enhanced by green space along their borders to improve the neighborhood’s appearance and potentially attract new businesses and residents.

In combination, these various strategies for the revitalization of Walnut Hills will create a stronger tax base through local business along East McMillan Street and the support of regional office areas in the neighborhood. Through a mixed-use of services, Walnut Hills will capture the revenue of its residents and business people, which will help sustain its economic vitality. The central market will act as a community hub of activity, and activate the blocks between the business and cultural center, while also providing grounds to support the business of street vendors, local farmers, and artists. The cultural center will support the existing community of artists and provide the facilities to attract new artists, and generate a stronger cultural image in Walnut Hills. The introduction of new green space along corridors, and in the center of the neighborhood, will increase pervious area, improve neighborhood image and sustain a healthy, active community. Through the implementation of these strategies, we hope to retain the existing vitality of Walnut Hills and strengthen it socially, sustainably, and economically, according to the triple bottom line.
Illustrative Examples

[1] E. McMillan St, Picture by Michael Vernon  
Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, OH

downtown streetscape, Vancouver, Canada

Findlay Market, Cincinnati, OH

Kroger Parking Lot, Walnut Hills Cincinnati, OH  
Diagram by Kate Tans

Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, OH

Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, OH

Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, OH

The Cascade Theatre, Redding, CA

Gallery Row, Vancouver, Canada

[10] Existing Housing, Picture by Michael Vernon  
Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, OH

Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, OH

Tlaloc Restaurant, San Francisco, CA

Downs Barn Boulevard, Milton Keynes, Great Britain
Pike Place Market, Seattle, WA

bike path, Berkeley, California

bike routes, Cincinnati, OH

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