Avondale’s Avenue District

Proposals for Community Driven Development

By Samantha Brockfield

Photos: Avenue District Landscape Project
Fall 2009
The Avenue District is a neighborhood within Avondale, a community which stands to be significantly affected by I-71 interchange proposals:

Avenue District Boundaries
1. Forest Avenue/North
2. Erkenbrecher Avenue/ South
3. Burnet Avenue/East
4. Dury Avenue/West

This project will focus on The Avenue District as a pilot for comprehensive community development Avondale. The District is defined by neighborhood character: land use, housing stock conditions, tenancy, history and demographics. Other potential districts could include:

- Harvey bounded by Glenwood, Vine and Forest
- Area between Harvey, Reading, Ridgeway and Forest
- Glenwood from Reading to Greenwood
This project outlines proposals for community driven development of streetscape, recreation, and green-space. Relevance to I-71 interchange: Flow of traffic and resources to regional destinations bounding this district can be used to:
- Improve quality of life for Avondale residents
- Promote economic development through community collaboration
- Harness relational resources to create a vibrant local economy

Vision, Goals and Stakeholders

Vision: Foster sustainable growth in Avondale’s Avenue District by mobilizing residents and stakeholders around neighborhood improvement projects.

Goals:
Develop project proposals around the issues residents have identified as priorities in their neighborhood.
Method

Background: Through my co-op at Local Initiatives Support Corporation I was placed with Avondale Redevelopment Corporation (ARC) to manage a landscape improvement project and organize a block club. This gave me the opportunity to work with district residents and stakeholders from June 2009 - present. This studio project begins with the issues and concerns of Avenue District residents as well as existing conditions analysis.

Sources of community input:
ARC homeowner opinion survey data
Door to door Interviews
Phonecalls
Community meetings

Sources of existing conditions analysis:
ARC building conditions survey data
Community Building Institute materials
City of Cincinnati EZ Trak - vacancy
Hamilton County Auditor - property values
CAGIS

Proposal: Resident driven redevelopment of the district bounded by Children's Hospital, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden and Burnet Avenue revitalization.

Elements:
Improve Building Conditions
Rehab Key Vacant Properties
Recreational Greenspace
Streetscape improvements
Resident on-street parking

SWOT Analysis
Strengths: Highest homeownership rate in Avondale, long-term owner occupancy, beautiful historic housing stock, central location, proximity to regional destinations, investments in affordable housing and retail business district.

Opportunities: Improved relationship with Children's Hospital and Cincinnati Zoo, harness institutional resources to improve physical conditions and quality of life for residents, leverage economic investment in Burnet Avenue revitalization.

Weaknesses: Deteriorating housing stock, absentee landlords, litter, congested on-street parking

Threats: High crime perception, mistrust from history of institutional expansion, economic downturn, foreclosures

Proposed projects engage the following stakeholders and programs:
Avondale Community Council – youth council community garden program, workforce development program,
Center for closing the health gap, Avondale do right! –Community garden program, collaboration with Community Action Agency workforce development program
Greater Cincinnati Urban League – Workforce Development, landscape academy
Uptown Consortium – Community Safety Initiative Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Injury Free Coalition – playground building
Avondale Redevelopment Corporation – foreclosure redevelopment, demolition, NSP (Neighborhood Stabilization Program)
The Model Group – Affordable and senior housing; retail business district
Uptown Consortium – Burnet Avenue Revitalization
Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden – Dept of Horticulture partnership with community for landscaping & gardens
Rockdale Academy / Community Learning Center Keep Cincinnati Beautiful – Great American Cleanup
## Top 5 desired street improvements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Litter Removal</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Landscape improvement</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Parking issues</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Street repair</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Increase street lighting</td>
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## Top 5 Avondale Concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Crime: guns / drugs</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Lack of youth activities</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Need for Retail</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Increase Homeownership</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Renovate Vacant buildings</td>
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## ARC Opinion Survey, continued

(Shows # people per response)

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<td>57</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police Presence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police Contact</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crime Level</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level of Safety/Satisfaction</td>
<td>Very Safe</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsafe</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Loans or Grants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes grant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No loan</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No grant</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Repairs Made In Last 2 Years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
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### TOP 5 CRIME ISSUES

1. Drugs & Guns  54
2. Theft/Robbery  19
3. Loitering   10
4. Juveniles   7
5. Prostitution  5

### TOP 5 REPAIRS NEEDED

Cited by residents

1. Roof & Gutters  18
2. Landscaping  15
3. Front Porch   12
4&5. Painting & Interior  11
Street Improvements and Key Issues

**Forest**
- Retaining wall: 12%
- Abandoned buildings: 18%
- Street lights: 16%
- Littering: 10%
- Sidewalks: 22%
- Pave streets: 11%

**Hearne**
- Landscaping: 18%
- Rehab vacant buildings: 18%
- More street lights: 16%
- Sidewalk repairs: 16%
- Speed bumps: 16%

**Erkenbrecker**
- Parking: 10%
- Litter control: 20%
- Street lights: 10%
- Affordable housing: 25%
- Landscaping: 10%
- Pave streets: 10%
- Homeownership assistance: 4%

**Northern**
- Increase landscaping: 24%
- Rehab vacant buildings: 16%
- Street repair: 16%
- Litter control: 16%

**Wilson**
- Crime prevention: 26%
- Parking: 16%
- Landscaping: 18%
- More police patrols: 18%
- Litter control: 18%

**Larona**
- Increase landscaping: 25%
- Litter control: 25%
- Façade improvement: 25%
Housing Stock Conditions

Most of the buildings are in good or fair condition. Buildings in poor condition are scattered throughout but are concentrated in the North of the district. Critical sites are located at the corners of Wilson and Forest and Dury and Forest.

Source: ARC building conditions survey
Map: Community Building Institute
### Existing Conditions: Housing

(Number of properties in good, fair, poor or critical condition)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>FAIR</th>
<th>POOR</th>
<th>CRITICAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gutters</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps, walkways, ramps</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yards / Landscaping</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garages &amp; Detached Structures</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porches &amp; Balconies</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Walls</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roof</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doors</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>858</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>51</td>
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</table>
Low interest loans and grants for homeowners

Forty nine percent of homeowners surveyed expressed interest in low interest loans and grants for exterior home improvements. An exterior home improvement program is needed to assist district homeowners who are struggling with the costs of maintaining their properties. This program would offer assistance on an application basis by leveraging private and public support to create a pool of funding sources. Several budget options have resulted from the US Recovery Act, namely the Neighborhood Stabilization Program and Energy Efficiency Block Grants.

Program Budget:

- HUD Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP)
- Bank Grants through Local Initiative Support Corp. - PNC and Chase Bank
- Place Matters - Funding pool
- Community Action Agency
- People Working Cooperatively
- Energy Efficiency Block Grants

This program should be based on recommendations from Avondale Redevelopment Corporation (below) as well as input from homeowners on funding types and uses.

AVENUE DISTRICT EXTERIOR HOME IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (ADEHIP)

Program Description

Purpose:
The purpose of this program is to protect the community of Avondale from the blighting effect of properties that do not meet local building and maintenance codes. The Avenue District Home Exterior Improvement Program (ADEHIP) enables eligible single family homeowners residing in the program target area the opportunity to make repairs to maintain quality housing and create a positive effect in the surrounding neighborhood. The program's mission is to encourage homeowners to invest in upgrades to the exterior of their property located in the Avenue District. Residents will be eligible for program funding on a rolling basis. The Avondale Community Council Housing Committee (ACCHC) through a partnership with the Homeownership Center of Cincinnati will provide the following loan types:

- Five year forgivable loans to homeowners: Program enables eligible homeowners in the ADEHIP target area to make repairs or improvements to their homes. Loans are offered to homeowners who meet program qualifications.
- Owner occupied single family homes and duplexes are eligible for funding.

Funding will be provided on an ongoing application basis. Complete applications will be accepted into the program until funds are depleted for the program.

Amount and Type of Funding:
Funding for each project will be determined by the need demonstrated by the Homeowner. The Program Administrator and ACCHC will review all applications for reasonableness of costs before determining the amount of the funding. The ACCHC’s maximum subsidy under this program is $10,000.
Eligible use of Exterior Home Improvement Grant Funds:
For each homeowner assisted, the first priority will be correcting cited exterior building code violations, such as peeling, cracking or chipping paint; deteriorated and broken caulking; decayed or damaged trim, missing or loose roof shingles; damaged flashing; loose or broken gutter and downspouts. Additional work which addresses maintenance concerns may be included as long as all cited code violations are corrected first.

Work on sidewalks, driveways, and garage repairs may be included to correct cited code violations, but should be limited to 20% of the total cost per home.

Other eligible uses:
- Exterior doors and windows
- Exterior lights (affixed to house) (i.e. porch light, motion sensor lights)
- Landscaping
- Porches
- Steps
- Roofs, gutters, and downspouts
- Peeling, cracking, or chipping exterior paint
- Damaged trim

Ineligible uses of ADEHIP grant funds:
- Land or building acquisition
- Accessory structures (i.e. new shed or garages)
- Labor of Owner/Sweat Equity
- Swimming pools, Jacuzzis, new decks, new skylights, or any other luxury items
- Room additions, finishing basements, adding bathrooms, adding new garages
- Window air conditioners, washers and dryers
- New central air conditioning
- New carpeting
- Any interior repairs or improvements are ineligible.

Homeowner Requirements:
Homeowners are required to meet the following qualifying factors, along with the eligibility criteria for an Avenue District Exterior Home Improvement loan.

- The applicant(s) must be the fee simple owners and present a clear title on the property for which the application was made.
- The property for which the application is made must be the primary residence of the homeowner.
- The property taxes must be paid or a signed agreement to pay on file with the City Treasurer.
- Bankruptcies must be discharged for at least two (2) years.
- There must be a current homeowner’s insurance policy in force.
- The applicant’s home must be located in the ADEHIP target areas.
- If homeowner moves within five (5) years of the completion of the project, he/she must repay the entire loan amount upon closing.

All submissions for this program must be for the exterior repairs or improvements of owner occupied housing. The exterior home improvement loan applications will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. A project may be a minimum of one story and a maximum of two and one-half stories.

Outcome:
- Bring approximately 15-30 homes into compliance with local building and maintenance code.
- Eliminate blighting effect of properties.
- Encourage reinvestment in the community.
- Provide exterior improvements to a minimum of 20 homes within Avondale

Source: Avondale Redevelopment Corporation
Proposed Vacant Property Redevelopment

Redevelop key vacant properties:
331(5) Northern Ave and 3493 Wilson Ave

Maximize impact by selecting properties in sensitive areas, leveraged with other housing redevelopment projects.

Funding options:
HUD Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) - redevelopment / demolition
HUD Recovery Tax Credit (TCAP)
LISC recoverable grant (pre-development, workforce, green building)
OH Housing Finance Agency
Oh Capital Corporation for Housing
Chase Bank
PNC Bank
City of Cincinnati Rental Rehab Program
Street Conditions

Existing Conditions:
- Litter
- Insufficient lighting
- Vandalized retaining walls
- Potholes

This section of Wilson Ave from Erkenbrecher to Hearne is a gateway from Children’s Hospital into the Avenue District. Parking congestion, darkness, overgrowth and graffiti make this area unattractive and unsafe.
Proposed Street Improvements

Street improvements at sections of Rockdale and Wilson Avenues will create safe walk routes and enhance connectivity between the neighborhood and local institutions. Proposed improvements include lighting, street and sidewalk repair, streetsweeping and public art along district streets.

**Wilson Avenue (Erkenbrecher to Hearne)**
- Eliminate parking lanes on both sides
- Widen sidewalk on West side

Public Art Projects

Problem: Unsightly retaining walls attract litter and grafitti to targeted redevelopment areas

Locations: Wilson Avenue (Hearne to Erkenbrecher) & Rockdale Avenue (Wilson to Larona)

Opportunity: Community Mural Project

**Before**

(Above) Wilson Ave.
(Below) Rockdale Ave.

**After**

Cleanup & Mural Potential Partners:
- Children's Hospital
- Avenue District Block Club
- Avondale Youth Council
- Give Back Cincinnati
Parking Congestion

Existing Conditions

- Institutional expansion has created severe competition for on-street parking
- Underutilized off-street parking facilities

This issue has become a deep concern among district residents. During the day the streets are filled with cars owned by Children's Hospital employees. Nights and weekends they are swamped with people visiting the Zoo. This is extremely frustrating for residents without driveways. Even those that do have had to take their own measures to ensure they have driveway access, posting signs, placing cones, painting notices, and calling police regularly to report parking violations. The parking problem not only a frustration about congested physical space, it is also a daily reminder of the contentious history of institutional expansion.

Entire blocks of houses were demolished to create surface parking lots for employees. A new multi-million dollar garage was built as part of Uptown Consortium's Burnet Avenue Revitalization Plan. Yet these facilities are underutilized while district streets remain congested.
There are many different options for resident only parking:
- Days / Hour restrictions (Hospital employee parking is an issue Monday-Friday 9:00am-5:00pm)
- No event parking (Zoo events attract a large number of families)
- One / two side parking lanes

All options will require permits for residents which raises issues around cost and visitor parking. Signage and police enforcement are also necessary. Perhaps most importantly, Children’s Hospital and The Cincinnati Zoo should look at ways to incentivize the use of existing parking facilities by employees and visitors. These decisions must be a collaborative effort between neighboring institutions, Avenue District residents, Avondale Community Council, City of Cincinnati and District Four Police Department.
Residents are concerned about the lack of activities for youth. The neighborhood has lost three playgrounds in the past 10 years which were never replaced, including one at Larona which was demolished for Zoo parking. In this neighborhood there are currently 6 habitat homes for families with children as well as home daycares. While Rockdale Academy is a Community Learning Center, their facilities are not readily accessible to residents. Cincinnati Public Schools is in the process of developing the former Rockdale site into recreation space, however the level of community access has yet to be determined.
Proposal: Recreation & Greenspace

Problem: Overgrown, underutilized, littered space in heart of the Avenue District

Location: 232-240 Northern Ave

Residents have organized a task force to transform this three parcel vacant lot into a multi-use community space for recreation, civic and social gathering.

Condition: 3 parcels, formerly housing, large vacant lot, litter, overgrown vegetation, weeds, poison ivy, retaining wall, graffiti

Current Status:
Owned by MSD
ARC Lease land from city (pending)
Avenue District Block Club – task force planning
Water meter installation (pending)

Stakeholders:
Avenue District Block Club - residents
Cincinnati Children's Hospital
Avondale Redevelopment Corporation
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden
Rockdale Academy
Avondale Community Council
Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD)
The Model Group
Children's Hospital
Uptown Consortium
Keep Cincinnati Beautiful
Give Back Cincinnati

Note: History, location & stormwater
The Zoo has made a commitment to MSD to get off the stormwater grid. The lot is owned by MSD and is next to Zoo surface parking which was created through property acquisition resulting in the loss of recreation facilities.

Precedent Images: Project for Public Spaces
Case Study: Philadelphia

“A 2005 study quantified the effect of greening vacant lots and planting street trees in the New Kensington neighborhood. Planting a street tree increases the value of nearby homes by 15%. Turning a blighted vacant lot into a clean and green space increases the value of adjacent homes by 30%.” *

Cincinnati would be wise to learn from Philadelphia’s innovations using green solutions to an aging stormwater infrastructure:

“Philly’s Water Department has embarked on experiments in urban agriculture as a way to reduce the environmental impact of maintaining its vast lawns. Its first venture, a partnership with Sommerton Tanks Farm, has already turned a profit growing delicious, healthy food on a mere half acre of Water Department land in the heart of the city. The city’s stormwater infrastructure is old and fast approaching replacement age. To lessen the impact on these pipes the department is implementing the methods of natural drainage. It’s helping to install porous asphalt at local schools and rain gardens that absorb water on school playgrounds. It’s also spearheading and effort to use the city’s numerous vacant lots to capture and purify precious rainwater and reduce toxic runoff into local waterways.” *

This lesson is especially relevant in the Avenue District, where residents complain of sewage backup on the street directly across from a vacant lot owned by Metropolitan Sewer District. A community garden on this site would contribute greatly to the district in terms of clean-up, property value and engagement. With leveraged support we could even use the project to create local jobs:

“In his first term as Mayor John Street championed the cleanup of 40,000 vacant lots and partnered with the Philadelphia Horticultural Society and other groups to maintain and plant trees on abandoned property throughout the city. The “clean and green” lot program works with minority contractors and non-profit neighborhood groups through subcontracts with Philadelphia Green and has created jobs for more than seventy neighborhood residents. *

* - Wiland and Bell: Edens Lost and Found: How Ordinary Citizens are Restoring Our Great American Cities

(below) A watercolor by Sophia Kottenhahn Leslie, a fifth-grader from Claymont Elementary, will represent her state in the Arbor Day Foundation’s National Poster Contest.

These projects are great opportunities to empower local youth to take action in their neighborhood.
This diagram shows a summary of Avenue District Projects including existing relationships, current redevelopment efforts and project proposals:

(Legend, opposite page)
Proposals: Overview

**LEGEND**

- **Existing**
  - Gateway
    - Rockdale Academy
  - Parking facilities

- **Projects currently underway**
  - Model Group properties
  - Possible Fitness Track
  - Burnet Ave Redevelopment

**Proposal Areas**

- Redevlop key vacant properties
- Public recreation & greenspace
- Wilson Ave connectivity
- Resident-only onstreet parking
- Rockdale Ave connectivity