

## **Infill Transit-Oriented development**

### **Walnut Hills**

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### **Vision**

The vision of this project is to create a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in Walnut Hills along East McMillan Street to recapture the vibrancy of the neighborhood's past as a hub of activity and a desirable community to live in. Through the introduction of a mixture of diverse housing and retail options, essential neighborhood services and public spaces all within walking distance of an improved transit system, Walnut Hills can become a community of choice. With the light rail and street car routes potentially running through the neighborhood, Walnut Hills' marketability will only be improved with greater accessibility by local and regional public transit.

### **Goals:**

Transportation - To implement the development of a new multi-modal transit hub along Gilbert Avenue that will accommodate buses and the streetcar having a connection to the light rail corridor along Interstate 71

Economic Development - To stimulate economic redevelopment within and immediately surrounding the community's blighted neighborhood's business district through the attraction of greater amount of transit relevant mixed-uses. To provide a source of temporary and permanent jobs for residents and commuters through the creation of the Transit-Oriented Development

Neighborhood Development - To re-shape Walnut Hills a desirable mixed-income community in the form of a compact development served by transit with an attractive business district, safe, walkable streets, and a diversity of residents.

### **Triple Bottom Line of Sustainability**

#### **Economic sustainability**

The development of a TOD will serve as a catalyst for sustained economic development in the community. Employment generation can be expected from jobs created in the short-term from construction and contract work and the more permanent long-term from business creation.

Professional and service jobs that are created will create opportunities for employment for qualified Walnut Hills' residents who may in turn spend money within the community. This continuous cycling of money in the community ensures as little as possible is lost to outside sources helping secure the future of many local residents and business owners. Favorable conditions created through improved accessibility and development incentives will attract the attention of established businesses and encourage the creation of new ones, contributing to the local tax base.

#### Environment

A TOD will see the creation of a community focused around a new transit hub that will allow for unmatched local and regional connections. This accessibility will encourage greater transit ridership and less private vehicle use which will reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> being released into the atmosphere. Also the intensive use arising from the intended mixed-use development projects

#### Social

Increased mass transit use and a revitalized neighborhood business district are plains which bring Walnut Hills residents and outsiders together in the community. The creation new housing that will be available to all income levels putting lower-income residents side-by-side with residents of higher-income groups and thereby avoiding gentrification. This will greatly improve the image of the community and an improved identity can begin to develop.

#### Project Description

The project calls for the creation of a new transit hub on the block immediately west of Gilbert Avenue between McMillan and Taft. The multimodal hub will see the convergence of the METRO bus routes which pass Walnut Hills and will also accommodate a possible future streetcar line running up Gilbert Avenue. There will also be a connection to the future light rail line that will possibly be running alongside I-71 corridor. Walnut Hills' centrality, as a quick and easily accessible location between Cincinnati's largest employment centers of Downtown and Uptown will see the hub being a transfer station and act as an anchor point for transit outside of Downtown. The hub itself will be an open-air canopy structure designed for mainly for buses to turn off Gilbert Avenue

and McMillan to drop off and collect passengers. Across from the drop-off/collection point will be retail and services such a new bank, convenience shop, coffee shop, food retail, etc.

Along with the transit hub will be the introduction of new transit-relevant uses – uses that lend themselves to the use of mass transit systems – that will facilitate redevelopment projects throughout the business district along McMillan Street mostly in the form of mixed-use developments. These projects will see the re-use of neglected, vacant properties and new construction creating opportunities for retail, office, residential uses. Residential development will be of relatively higher densities to sustain the transit feasibility and offer different typologies in the form of apartments, condominiums and townhomes. There will be no displacement of existing residents as one-third of all residential units will be geared toward low-income earners whilst the remainder will be market-rate units ensuring a mixture of tenants and owners.

A major portion of the project is the enhancement of the pedestrian environment through planning and zoning legislation and streetscape projects throughout the TOD. Streetscape improvements which will include landscaping, street furnishings, public art, street trees and lighting will be introduced throughout the TOD creating an inviting, comfortable and exciting environment for the pedestrian. Block sizes and building heights will also be taken into account to maintain a scale that is not overpowering to the pedestrian. Also building facades and public-right-ways will be active along with programmable public spaces.

A parking structure with first floor active use will also be constructed adjacent to the block of the transit hub to accommodate park-n'-ride, kiss-n'-ride commuters and business customers. The final number of spaces provided by the parking structure will be determined the type and amount of residential and businesses that locate along the corridor.

### **Rationale**

The rationale behind this proposal is to build off the community's natural advantage of a good location and a need to rescue its ailing businesses district and dwindling population. A number of properties along McMillan between the I-71 and Gilbert currently stand as eyesores being held by absentee owners waiting for the right opportunity to come along. Securing some of the larger properties (see **Figure 1** below) such as those in the blocks between Concord and Copelin Streets, and May and Kenton Streets could be the initial projects that if done right could be catalysts for future development.



Figure 1 Existing Conditions

The proposal strongly takes into account the streetcar and light rail proposal studies and incorporates them into the plan. Community stakeholder input voiced a desire for an increase in housing, population growth and a general improvement in neighborhood image all things which the implementation of a TOD will address. The 45206 plan for the community outlines some goals which have already been formulated by the community and have been integrated in this proposal.

### Funding Strategies

Federal and Local Grants: Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)  
 HUD/DOT/EPA partnership for Sustainable Communities Grant Program  
 Transit Agency: SORTA; Light rail transit agency  
 Cincinnati Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD) Consent Decree  
 Private Investment

### Precedents

Del Mar California (3.4 acres)(retail area: 20,000 square feet)

The Del Mar Station is a good example of a successful Transit Oriented Development that resembles Walnut Hills in the fact that it lies between Los Angeles and the edge of Old Town Pasadena and acts as

a gateway to the it, it lies close to a highly trafficked freeway similar to that of I-71 and there are also historic structures nearby within it which influenced certain design features. Transit-relevant land uses in Del Mar include civic, retail, housing in the form of mixed-use buildings and public plazas. The light rail line and station lie at the center of the project with bus lines having a stop across the street from the site. The project density was 100 units per acre which was achieved by constructing 7 storey building that were creatively stepped back having the greatest massing in the center and lower massing near the street fronts also allowing natural daylight to reach the plaza (Congress for New Urbanism)(see **Figure 2** below).



**Figure 2 - TOD in Del Mar, California: stepped building form**

Residential developments within Del Mar feature stacked flats, townhomes, lofts and courtyard housing with the architectural detail being sensitive to styles of both past and present such as Mediterranean revival, industrial loft, craftsman, etc. Parking for was included in both below and above grade parking that has been wrapped or lined to disguise it. Having a mixture of inhabitants was crucial to Del Mar's objective of creating a diverse and unique urban space and so housing options reflect a range of prices from market rate to below market –rate. A portion of the development has been reserved for lower-income families and individuals (Congress For New Urbanism)

### **Bibliography**

- Congress for New Urbanism. <http://www.cnu.org/node/1503>
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.  
[http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program\\_offices/sustainable\\_housing\\_communities/grant\\_program](http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities/grant_program)

### **Images**

Figure 1 Source: Anthony Bridgewater

Figure 2 Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/koshalek/2553857667/sizes/l/>