



CONANT GARDENS

Conant Gardens reflects black settlement in Detroit's northeast side during the first of two large migrations of blacks to Detroit after World War I. The neighborhood was originally designed as a community for white collar employees of the Ford Motor Company. However, it was never developed. Around 1928 blacks began to build houses here and founded the Conant Gardens Homeowners' Association, which still exists. After 1934, Federal Housing Administration loans enabled blacks to buy property in Conant Gardens. The residents built houses in a variety of styles including Tudor Revival and the Craftsmen style. Conant Gardens was named for Shubael Conant, the original owner of the property. In 1837, Conant (1783-1867) became the founding president of the Detroit Anti-Slavery Society.

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Conant Gardens Neighborhood Revitalization Plan

CONANT GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Michigan State University –Urban & Regional Planning

SPRING 2023

UP 894 Planning Practicum

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Acknowledgement of Funding Assistance

Practicum is supported by our community clients and through generous financial assistance from Michigan State University Extension and the Regional Economic Initiative grant received from the United States Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Michigan State University or any federal or state agency.

Executive Summary

Conant Gardens is a predominantly single-family neighborhood in the northeast part of Detroit. It has a rich history as one of the wealthiest African American neighborhoods, but the changes it has seen in the last two decades are symptomatic of the larger-scale difficulties the city of Detroit has experienced. As described by the Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation (CGNDC), a once beautiful and thriving neighborhood is now primarily viewed as an area in decay.

Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation (CGNDC) seeks a strategic plan to inform its neighborhood revitalization actions. The team compiled a socioeconomic profile of the community, conducted an inventory of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT), and surveyed community members through an asset-based community inventory workshop. The recommendations in this report reflect a strategic prioritization for actions, focusing on ensuring strategic connections, partnerships, and community involvement for CGNDC.

Data shows that Conant Gardens core problem is population loss. The loss of population is a significant challenge to the community and is the first step in a cycle of disinvestment. Issues concern socioeconomic decline, lack of essential services, changes in dedicated property ownership, including absentee landlords, and overall environmental deterioration that alter the community's dynamic status and negatively impact financial stability, wellness, and safe environmental conditions.

Other key data points found include:

- The 2021 poverty rate was 48.8%, with almost half of Conant Gardens households below the poverty line. In 2021, the median household income for

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Conant Gardens was \$37,474, 11% below the city's median household income of \$42,000.

- With an unemployment rate of 31.2%, the struggle for household affordability is compounded.
- Cars are the most beneficial mode of transportation in the neighborhood. Conant Gardens' sidewalks are in poor condition and affect pedestrian mobility.
- The single-family home structure is still predominant, but other housing options are desired.
- Data projected for 2027 shows no change in the number of housing units. It indicates a declining trend for occupied units – both by owners and renters – and, therefore an increase in vacant homes.

The neighborhood's need for better pedestrian sidewalks and new and vibrant community gathering spaces are only sustainable if anchored in a housing strategy to retain the current population and attract new residents. As identified in the SWOT analysis, the neighborhood has several strengths and opportunities that can connect with external efforts for neighborhood development. Focusing on physical aspects of the shared community open spaces would positively impact social gatherings. It would provide the community with solid grounds for long-term sustained revitalization around retaining its population and attracting new residents.

The asset-based community inventory conducted as part of project's community engagement, highlighted two major themes:

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- The neighborhood's strengths revolve around intangible assets and existing collaboration ties amongst neighborhoods and organizations that hold pride in their community
- The desires and priorities of the community are centered in improving overall quality of life to all neighbors through improving access to healthy foods, providing playgrounds for children and realizing a safer neighborhood.

The recommendations made reflect the analysis of the data collected and incorporate the results of the community engagement. As a result they show a strategic prioritization for action. The overall focus is to ensure strategic connections, partnerships, and community involvement for CGNDC.

- Build strategic partnerships that allow Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation to prepare for project management.

Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation (CGNDC) was created by community members invested in restoring the neighborhood's assets and further enhancing the quality of life of their neighbors. To achieve their goals and those established in this proposal, it is imperative that CGNDC establish strategic relationships with other community or local actors that can enact change. CGNDC must remain mindful of the changes experienced by the community and open to changing its strategies and projects accordingly.

- Identify opportunities to generate affordable housing while preserving and enhancing the neighborhood's historic architecture.

Detached single-family housing is the prevalent housing type in the neighborhood but is no longer what is needed. Conant Gardens needs to retain its population and attract new residents. The possibility of attracting young renters and new homeowners will depend on offering affordable housing in areas that are accessible

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to recreation, employment, and shopping. The redevelopment of sites in single-family neighborhoods, like Conant Gardens, can be used to address the needs of young renters.

- Provide Conant Gardens with the resources for implementing a green-space network that improves access to healthy foods, gardens, and neighborhood safety.

The health benefits, wealth outcomes and overall well-being resulting from the presence of urban forestry has been well documented (World Resources Institute). The vacant land in the neighborhood is turned into an opportunity to incorporate much-needed green and recreational spaces that provide the community with gathering areas. Furthermore, diversifying the uses of green areas between horticulture and botanical gardens will provide the neighborhood with community spaces that beautify the space with greenery but also aid in the efforts to have better access to healthy and fresh produce.

The green space goal is conceived as a network that allocates the types of green and recreational spaces throughout the neighborhood space considering characteristics of connectivity, accessibility, and security. Locating these spaces throughout the community will allow all residents equal opportunity to use and enjoy the spaces while beautifying and improving the pedestrian infrastructure and gathering spaces of the whole neighborhood.

1. Introduction

Conant Gardens, as a neighborhood and community, is seeing a myriad of changes take place. As described by the Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation (CGNDC), a once beautiful and thriving neighborhood is now primarily viewed as an area in decline. Core issues concern socioeconomic distress, lack of essential services, changes in dedicated property ownership including absentee landlords and overall environmental deterioration that have altered the community's dynamic status and negatively impact financial stability, wellness, and safe environmental conditions.

This project aims to provide the Conant Garden Neighborhood Development Corporation (CGNDC) with a plan that will be the foundation for action implementation. The plan will delineate base strategies for neighborhood stabilization around issues of housing, open public spaces, and walkability. The strategies will define funding possibilities, a timeline for implementation, and strategies for replicability and scalability, when relevant and possible.

Practicum structure

Planning Practicum is a required capstone course for the undergraduate and graduate degree programs of Urban and Regional Planning at Michigan State University. The course gives students a real-world experience of engaging with a project that allows the application of the knowledge and tools gained through the program. The course is student-led and faculty advised, which allows for a transitional experience between academia and professional practice. Student groups are assigned to projects throughout Michigan and are expected to produce a professional report.

Client Information

The Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation (CGNDC) was formed in 2019 by members of Vernon Chapel AME Church. Vernon Chapel AME Church members were keenly aware that the socio-economic downturn and poor financial, health and environmental conditions affected neighborhood residents. To advance the social mission of expanding environmental improvements and essential services, CGNDC obtained 501C3 status in August 2022.

As a federally designated non-profit organization, CGNDC is eligible for competitive funding to support the financial, social and health concerns of the Conant Garden community. CGNDC obtained 501C3 status on August 15, 2022. The mission of the CGNDC is to restore and promote a safe quality of life in Conant Gardens through affordable housing rehabilitation and education to expand skills primarily focusing on low-income families and senior citizens. The development corporation is implementing “Conant Gardens Rising,” a blueprint for neighborhood development and restoration. Working in conjunction with Vernon Chapel AME Church, CGNDC successfully completed rehabilitation of two properties, and assisted with weekly COVID clinics supported by the National Guard, offering COVID testing and vaccinations, during 2021 and 2022.

Data Sources

The following report is based on secondary data available online, and primary data collected on-site. Secondary data was accessed through online services such as Social Explorer and ESRI Business Analyst Online (BAO). Access to these services was provided by Michigan State University. Both Social Explorer and ESRI’s BAO provide updated and georeferenced data upon drawn boundaries, allowing to

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present data exclusively for the Conant Gardens Neighborhood. To complement data on housing, especially housing vacancies and their location, data was gathered through the paid service *Regrid.com*. Other benchmark data for the city of Detroit are from the Census or other reports that are referenced accordingly.

2. Neighborhood History & Characterization

History

The land that eventually became Conant Gardens was owned by Shaubel Conant. The founding father of the Detroit anti-slavery society and an active abolitionist, Shaubel assured that no land-buying restrictions by race would be placed on the land. Conant Gardens saw a rise in population in the 1920's when the automobile industry began to take off. The majority of homeowners in this neighborhood were blue-collar, working-class people. By the 1950's, Conant Gardens was an affluent black neighborhood in Detroit. Like today, many churches were the center of the community.

Detroit area neighborhoods struggled in the 1960's due to the high racial tensions between young African Americans and the police, leading to violence and riots. Escalating acts of violence toward the African American community resulted in the 1967 riots. Homes were burned, and not everyone recovered. Parallel to the ongoing waves of violence, the southern half of Conant Gardens was labeled as a "third class" area when the practice of redlining was legal. As conditions became more adverse many left for outer suburbs as a safer alternative. Furthermore, the classification heavily influenced the housing pattern in the neighborhood. This previously redlined area occupies 56% of the total land area. Currently, it holds the oldest housing units (in terms of year-built) and most vacancies identified (*Conant Gardens Historic District | Detroit Historical Society, n.d.*).

Detroit and her neighborhoods still feel the consequences of 1967 today. Many businesses moved to surrounding areas or out of the county to keep costs low, causing an economic downfall. In 1991, Detroit was the arson and crime capital of

the country. In 2008 foreclosures hit the Detroit housing market hard, forcing people out of their homes. Then, in 2010, Detroit filed for bankruptcy. Today, there is a resurgence in the downtown area of Detroit, but many of the neighborhoods are forgotten.

Site Description

The Conant Gardens neighborhood is located in the Northeast area of the City of Detroit, in Wayne County, Michigan. Its border is bounded to the north and south by Seven Mile Road and Nevada Street; with Ryan Road perpendicular to the east and lastly Conant Avenue which runs diagonally southeast through Seven Mile Road and Nevada Street, respectively (see Figure 1). Conant Gardens has only a few businesses and amenities, five churches, one high school, and one fire station on Hildale Street and Ryan Road. Furthermore, the ease of access to fresh produce and food is a growing concern for the neighborhood and CGNDC. This difficulty in access to affordable or good-quality fresh food classifies the neighborhood as a food desert.

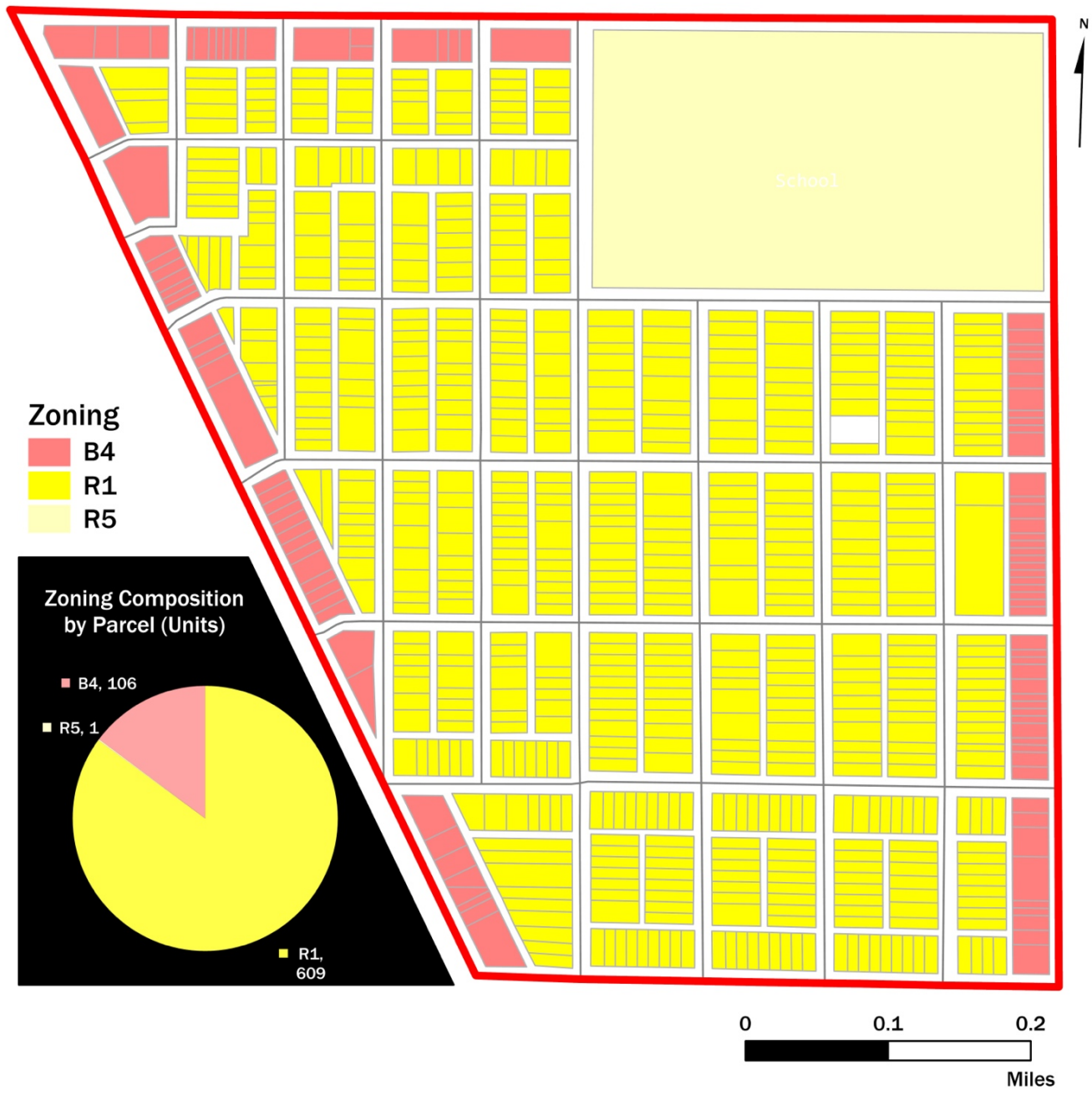
Map 1 Conant Gardens Neighborhood Location and Boundaries



Zoning and Land Use Regulations

The city of Detroit is divided into 29 different zones within its city boundaries. The Conant Gardens neighborhood is mainly comprised of areas zoned as single-family residential R-1 and commercial areas on the outskirts of the parallelogram categorized for B4- General Business District Zone. A single R5- Medium Residential Density comprises the lot that houses Pershing High School, see Map 2.

Map 2 Zoning in Conant Gardens. Source: City of Detroit Zoning and Land Use Regulation

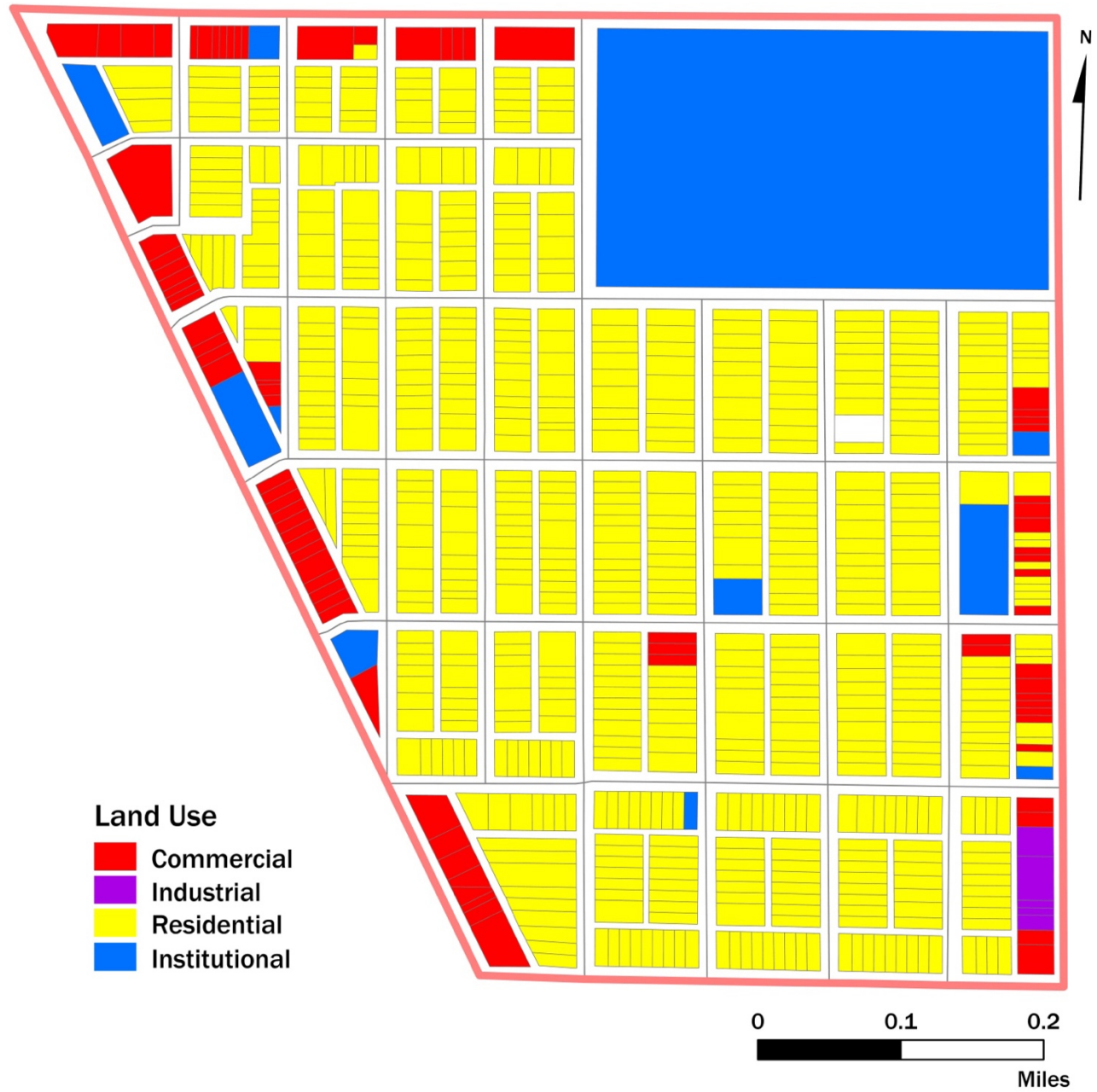


The ordinance restricts R1 zones to low density development and uses permitted by right are limited to single-family detached dwellings. R1 requires a minimum lot area for single-family homes to be 5,000 sq ft. and a minimum lot width of 50 ft. Other than single-family detached homes, some conditional uses in the area are accessory buildings such as greenhouses, hoop houses, or urban farms. Other non-residential uses, such as religious institutions, neighborhood centers, and utility uses necessary to serve the immediate area, may also be permitted on a conditional basis. Public, civic, and institutional uses may also be permitted on a conditional basis. This category would include educational institutions, group day-care homes, neighborhood centers, and outdoor art exhibit grounds. All of which could be of interest for neighborhood revitalization.

Land Use Assessment

When assessing the current land use to the zoning in the Conant Gardens Neighborhood we see a high correlation between the two. The outermost blocks, zoned B4- for General Business District Zone show the most diversity in uses, with commercial mainly on the west perimeter. Map 3 shows that some lots currently hold institutional uses in areas zoned for housing, with Pershing High School being the dominant lot on the northeast corner of the neighborhood.

Map 3 Land Use Assesment of Conant Gardens Neighborhood

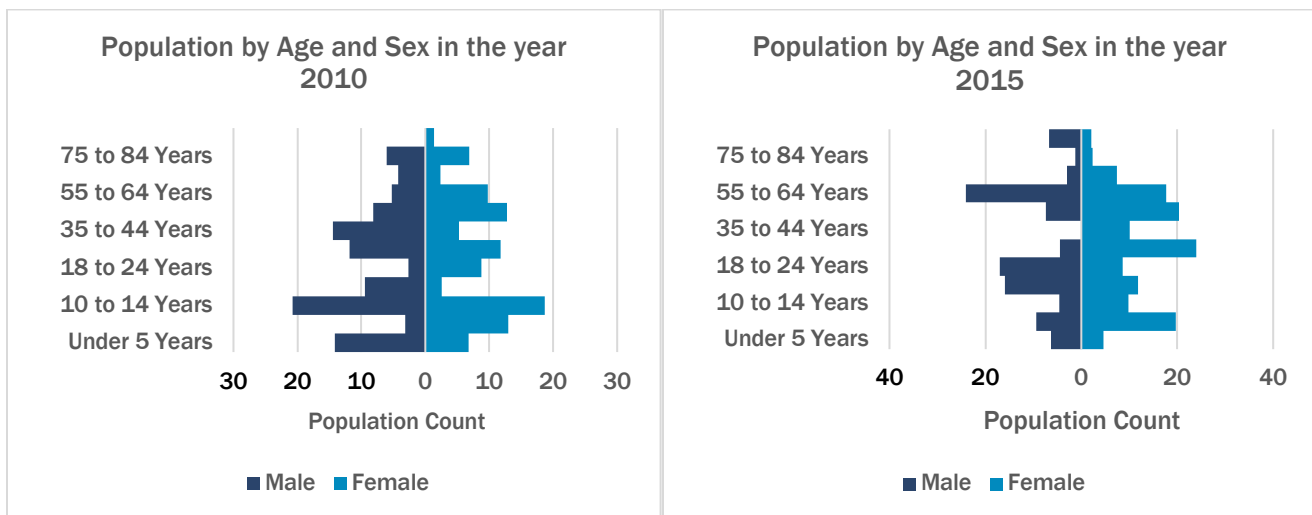


3. Socioeconomic Profile

Population

Conant Gardens population has experienced important changes in the last 12 years. The female population increased consistently throughout the periods studied. Overall, male and females 15- 64 years old are the largest groups, a population of working age, which could be an asset to the neighborhood’s development (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

Figure 1 Population by Age and Sex in the years 2010, 2015 and 2021. Source: Graphs built with data from Social Explorer and ACS 5-year estimates



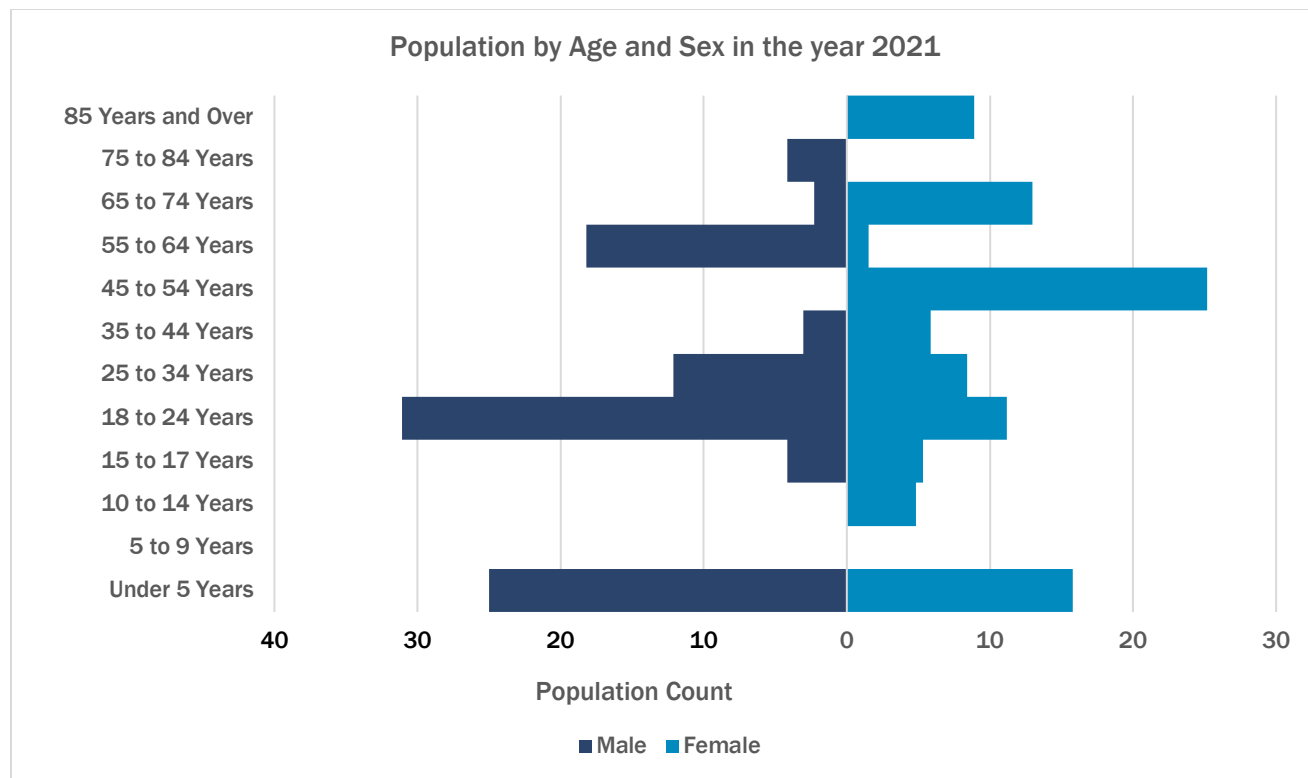


Table 1 Population Count by Age and Sex in the years 2010, 2015 and 2021. Source built with data from Social Explorer and ACS

Sex by Age	2010	2015	2021
Total Population	974	1,310	657
Male	381	477	264
Female	593	833	393

The overall population of Conant Gardens is shrinking. By 2021, the community had dwindled from a total of 974 persons to 657 residents in an area of 0.21 square miles. Widespread disinvestment throughout Detroit, combined with a continuous population loss due to the foreclosure crisis were further exacerbated by out-migration and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, population density declined from a medium-density to a lower density community.

Race

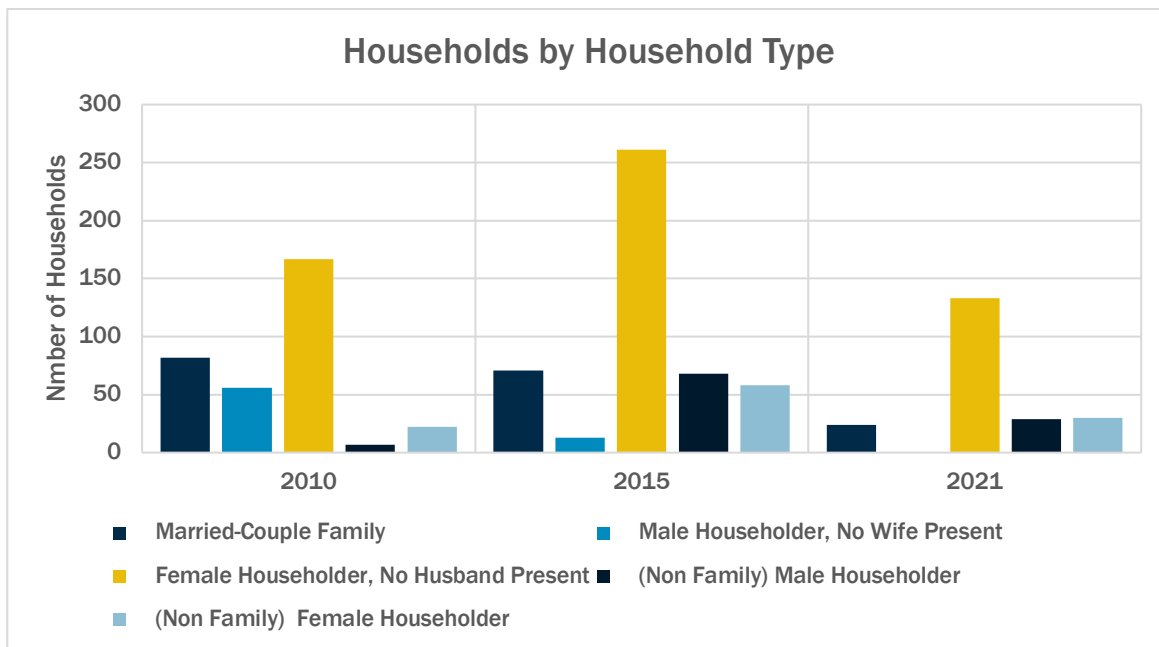
Conant Gardens is a historically African American neighborhood, and today it is still predominantly so with 93.6% of residents identified as African American by the U.S. Census. The tendency is similar to that of the city of Detroit which shows a population 77% African American. Over the course of the last two decades, the neighborhood has remained racially homogenous, amid its population decline.

Household Composition

The Conant Gardens Neighborhood covers an area of 0.21 square miles. The total population is distributed amongst 338 housing units and 356 households¹. Alongside population changes, **households within the community are also experiencing changes in terms of their composition and income.** From 2010 and 2021, married-couple family households have declined by 70%. The rate of female householder -no husband present increased from 2010 to 2015. Although it declined from 2015 to 2021, it still represents the largest household composition at 133 households (see Figure 2). **This changing population composition implies changes in the requirements for housing, services and amenities.**

¹ Households as defined by the American Community Survey (ACS)

Figure 2 Households by Household Type in the years 2010, 2015 and 2021. Source: Graphs built with data from Social Explorer and ACS



Income and Employment

Conant Gardens was once an affluent African American neighborhood in Detroit. However, according to the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD), **at 48.8% by 2021, almost half of the households in Conant Gardens households were below the poverty line.** In 2021, the median household income for Conant Gardens was \$37,474, 11% below the city’s median household income of \$42,000, historically roughly half of the statewide median income (Cassidy, 2019). **With an unemployment rate of 31.2% the struggle for household affordability is compounded.**

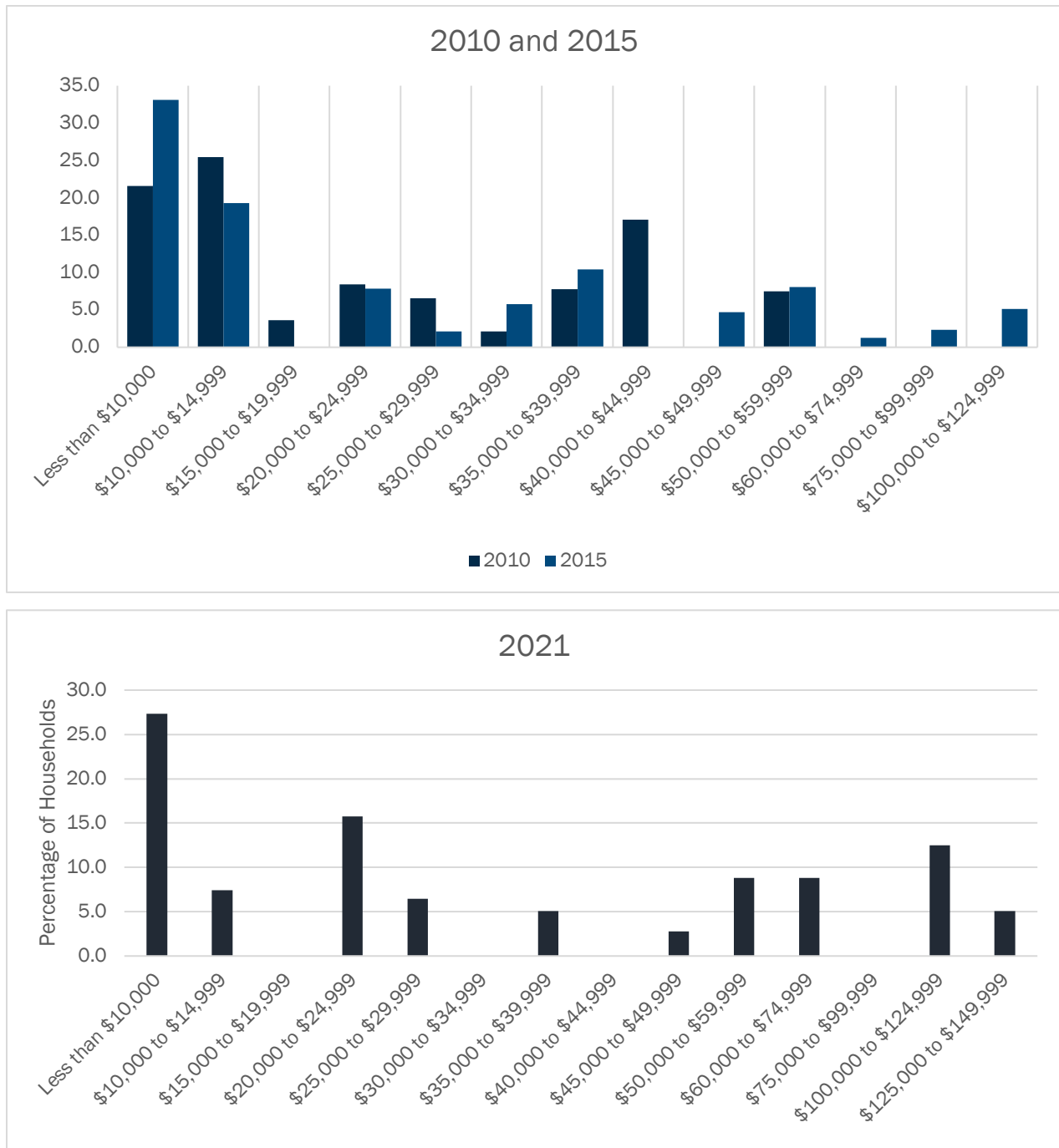
There have been some positive improvements in average household income, which increased significantly between 2000 and 2010. Income slowly climbed from 2010–2015, with the greatest change in households earning less than \$10,000. While the community reported some incomes over \$60,000 in 2021, these households represented only 26% of all households. The majority of households report incomes

up to \$30,000, representing an average of 60% of all incomes over all time periods reported (see Table 2).

Table 2 Households by Income. Source: ESRI BAO Data

<i>Percentages of Household by Income (In Inflation Adjusted Dollars)</i>			
	2010	2015	2021
<i>Less than \$10,000</i>	21.6	33.1	27.3
<i>\$10,000 to \$14,999</i>	25.4	19.3	7.4
<i>\$15,000 to \$19,999</i>	3.6	0.0	0.0
<i>\$20,000 to \$24,999</i>	8.4	7.9	15.7
<i>\$25,000 to \$29,999</i>	6.6	2.1	6.5
<i>\$30,000 to \$34,999</i>	2.1	5.7	0.0
<i>\$35,000 to \$39,999</i>	7.8	10.4	5.1
<i>\$40,000 to \$44,999</i>	17.1	0.0	0.0
<i>\$45,000 to \$49,999</i>	0.0	4.7	2.8
<i>\$50,000 to \$59,999</i>	7.5	8.1	8.8
<i>\$60,000 to \$74,999</i>	0.0	1.3	8.8
<i>\$75,000 to \$99,999</i>	0.0	2.3	0.0
<i>\$100,000 to \$124,999</i>	0.0	5.1	12.5
<i>\$125,000 to \$149,999</i>	0.0	0.0	5.1
<i>\$150,000 or more</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0

Figure 3 Percentages of Households by Income in 2010, 2015 and 2021. Source: Graphs created with data from Social Explorer



The working age population of 16 to 65 years, has consistently represented approximately 60% of the population in Conant Gardens. Of this age group, the decrease in non-working residents from 48% to 30%, reported between 2015 and

2021 (see Table 3) could be a result of the population loss described earlier more than integration into active employed status. The working population also decreased significantly, from 52% to 23%.

Table 3 Employments Status for Total Population 16 years and over. Source: ESRI BAO Data

<i>Employment Status for Total Population 16 Years and Over</i>		
	2015	2021
<i>Population 16 Years and Over</i>	958	510
<i>In Labor Force</i>	52%	23%
<i>Civilian</i>	52%	23%
<i>Employed</i>	29%	14%
<i>Unemployed</i>	23%	9%
<i>Not in Labor Force</i>	48%	30%

The unemployment rate of Conant Gardens in 2021 was 22.7%, which is significantly higher than the national average of 3.9%. This in turn relates to the issues Conant Gardens faces in regards to high levels of poverty. Over half of the population is under the poverty line.

Within a 5-minute walking radius of Conant Gardens, data from the American Community Survey shows that of a total population of 657, only 131 were employed in 2021. When the radius is expanded to show the area covered by a 10-minute walk, the overall population increases to 2,976. The increase in total population also implies an increase in employment numbers, with 663 people employed. However, the increase in absolute numbers is not representative of an increase in employed population, or employment opportunities, as the numbers represent 19% and 22% of working population in the 5-minute and 10-minute walk radius, respectively.

Crime

Detroit has a history of violence that can be traced back to the 1940's and to Detroit's worst year for homicides in 1974. Then the 714 homicides earned the city the nickname "Murder capital of the world" (Detroit Free Press). The city is ranked 7th most dangerous city within the United States and 2nd in the State of Michigan. The Detroit Free Press has reports that "Detroit in 2020 had a rate of 2,248 violent crimes per 100,000 residents, behind only Memphis, Tennessee, as the highest rate in the country among cities with more than 100,000 residents" (Detroit Free Press).

Electronic system challenges of the Detroit Police Department causes many assaults to go unreported, skewing the reported number of crimes and potentially generating bias in the crime database. Vacancies and out-migration from the city can be correlated with the high indices of crime.

The nature of data collection from Data Driven Detroit indicates the location of a crime by blocks instead of parcels, which could cause inaccuracies in determining the spatial pattern. Figure 4 shows a significant growth of offenses registered in 2022, with 110 offenses, as compared to 2020 and 2021, with 80 offenses. Map 5 showing the relative crime hot spots indicates that recorded crime incidents within Conant Gardens have been relatively decreasing until 2021, likely due to the inaccurate system prior to 2016 and insufficient police systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. In any case, 2022 recorded crime threats are relatively lower in the southwestern corner compared to the rest of the neighborhood.

Figure 4 Total Crime Offenses by Year

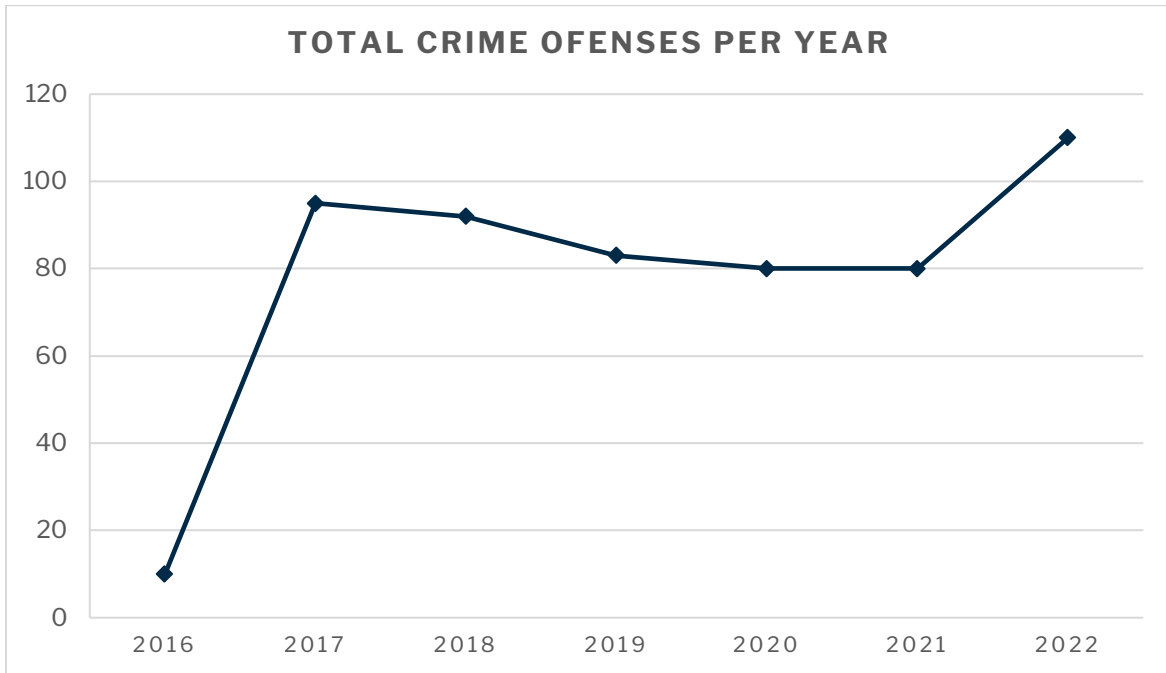
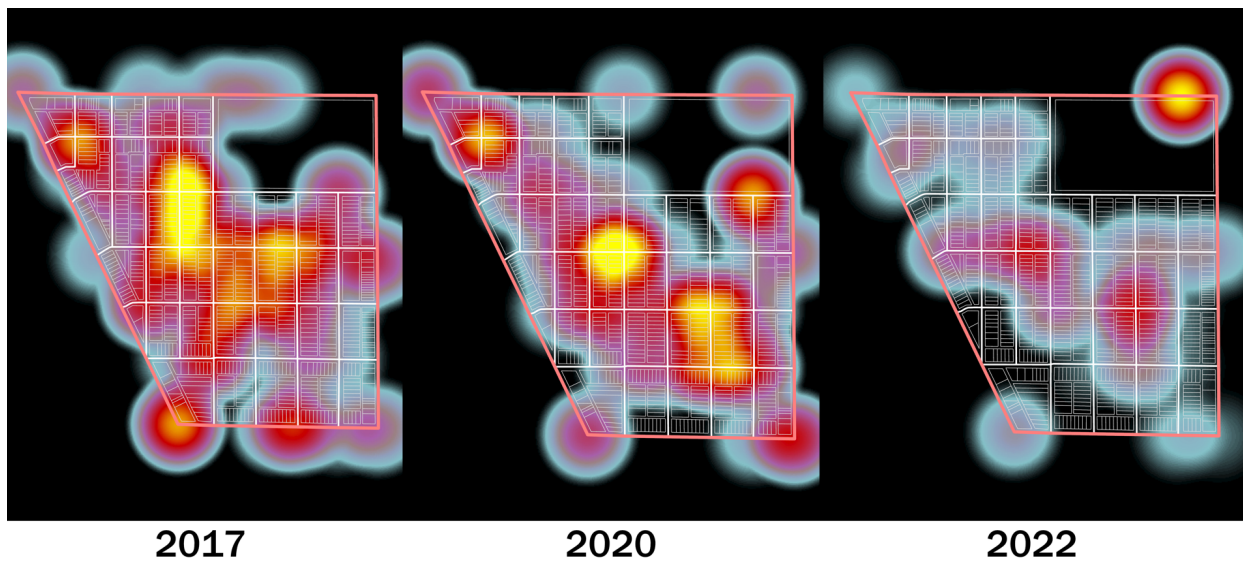


Figure 5 Spatial heatmap of crime offenses in 2017, 2020 and 2021



Mobility Analysis

Vehicular

Cars are the most beneficial mode of transportation in the neighborhood. One-way streets were implemented within the Conant Gardens neighborhood at the end of the 20th century, with the goal of better snow removal and street maintenance. However, over the years, it has led to confusion with residents and visitors travelling streets in the wrong direction. The one-way lanes lack clear markings which makes wayfinding more difficult within the community.

Speedhumps were recently implemented in the neighborhood to enhance area safety and introduce a strategy for calming down traffic flow.

Pedestrian and Public Transportation

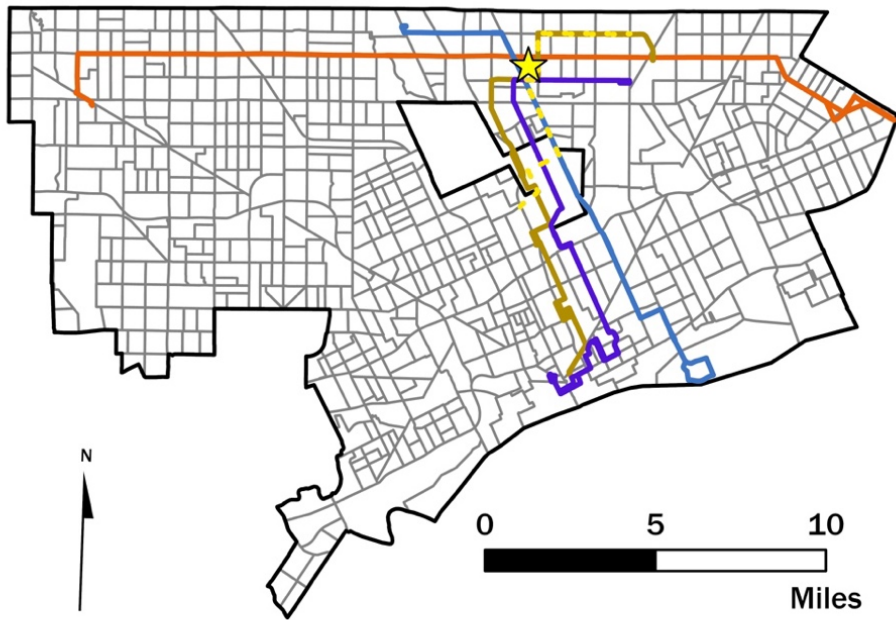
Conant Gardens sidewalks are in poor condition and affect pedestrian mobility. Some sidewalks end abruptly, are uneven, suffer from overgrown weeds and pool water during rain storms. The sidewalks also serve as a cover for the Detroit Edison (DTE) underground service infrastructure. In early 2022 DTE initiated a plan to replace natural gas lines which has resulted in sidewalk improvements in areas where gas lines were replaced. This work will continue during 2023. Even with the DTE improvements, the area could benefit from new walking paths and signage to improve neighborhood wayfinding.

Bus routes serving Conant Gardens are all on the neighborhood's boundaries, with residents living on or near the Conant Gardens perimeter having more access to bus service. Bus stops belong to the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) and have routes to all of Conant Gardens. Map 4 identifies lines accessible to Conant Gardens. The bus routes that intersect with the neighborhood are 95, 10, 45 and 12. These routes make travel south very easy, and travelers can reach downtown Detroit without changing to other buses. Traveling in other directions is more

complex, especially to the city's east and west, requiring at least one bus transfer. These bus routes also do not extend past the city's border, making visiting other communities outside of Detroit difficult.

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Map 4 Conant Gardens Connectivity. Public Bus Routes and Stops.



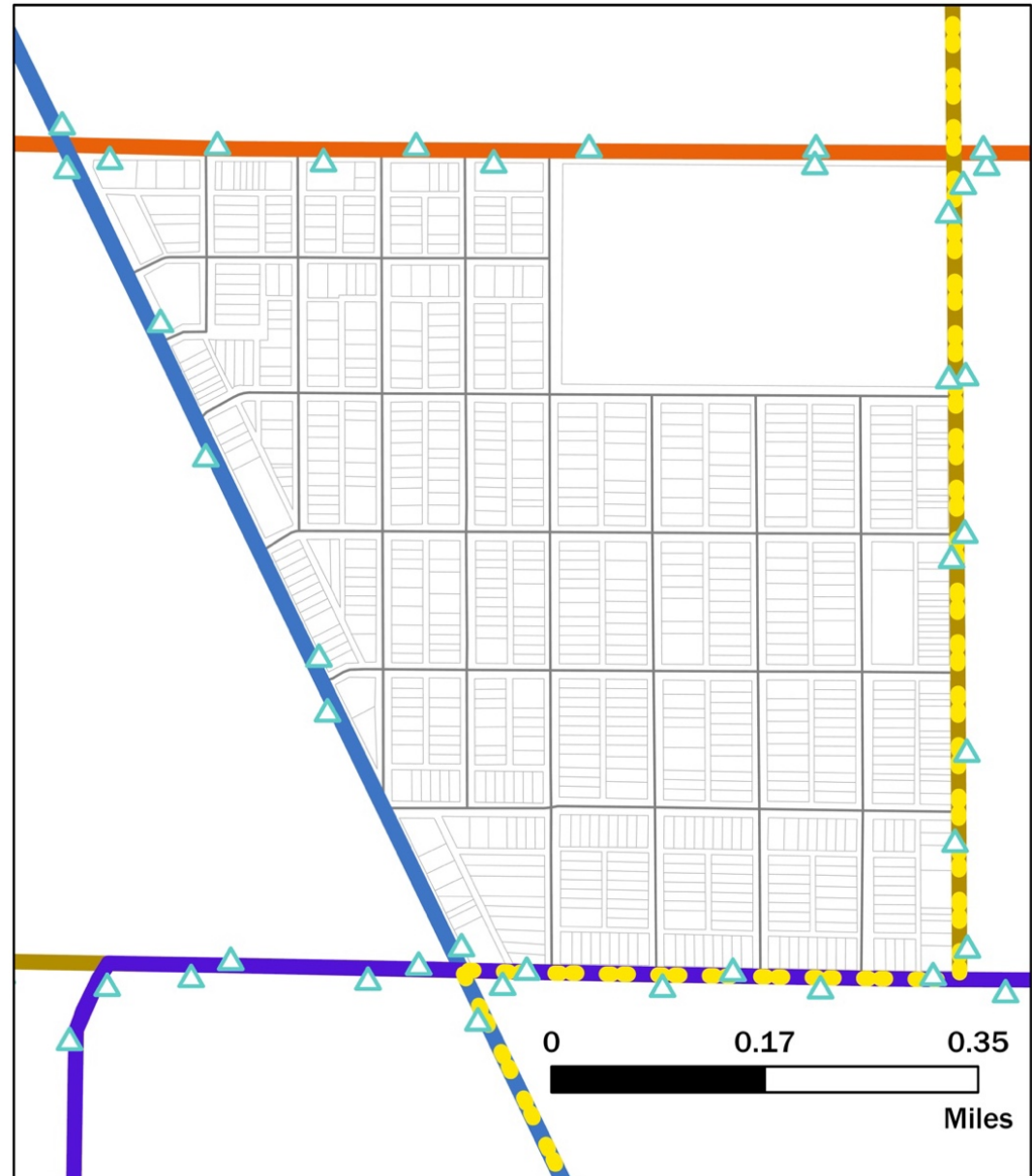
 Conant Gardens

 Bus Stop

Available Bus Route

-  7
-  12
-  40
-  52
-  95

ANALYSIS



Public gathering spaces

Conant Gardens suffers from a lack of public meeting places. The neighborhood has no parks, libraries, or any other type of meeting space open to the public. Only access to the Pershing High School outer grounds is available for public use. Churches may provide meeting spaces for the larger community. However, larger gatherings might be more beneficial outdoors after the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

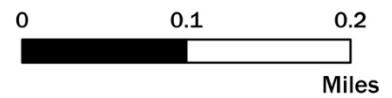
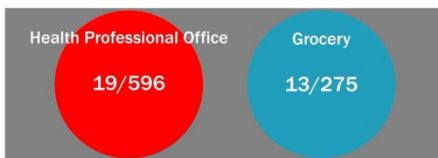
Access to services and amenities

Within the neighborhood boundaries there are commercial structures (see Map 5), including service and repair shops, garages and car washes. There are only two health-professional offices and no grocery stores, which makes the community and its members dependent on services located elsewhere (these can be seen in Map 6, for other services, see Apendices, Map 11).

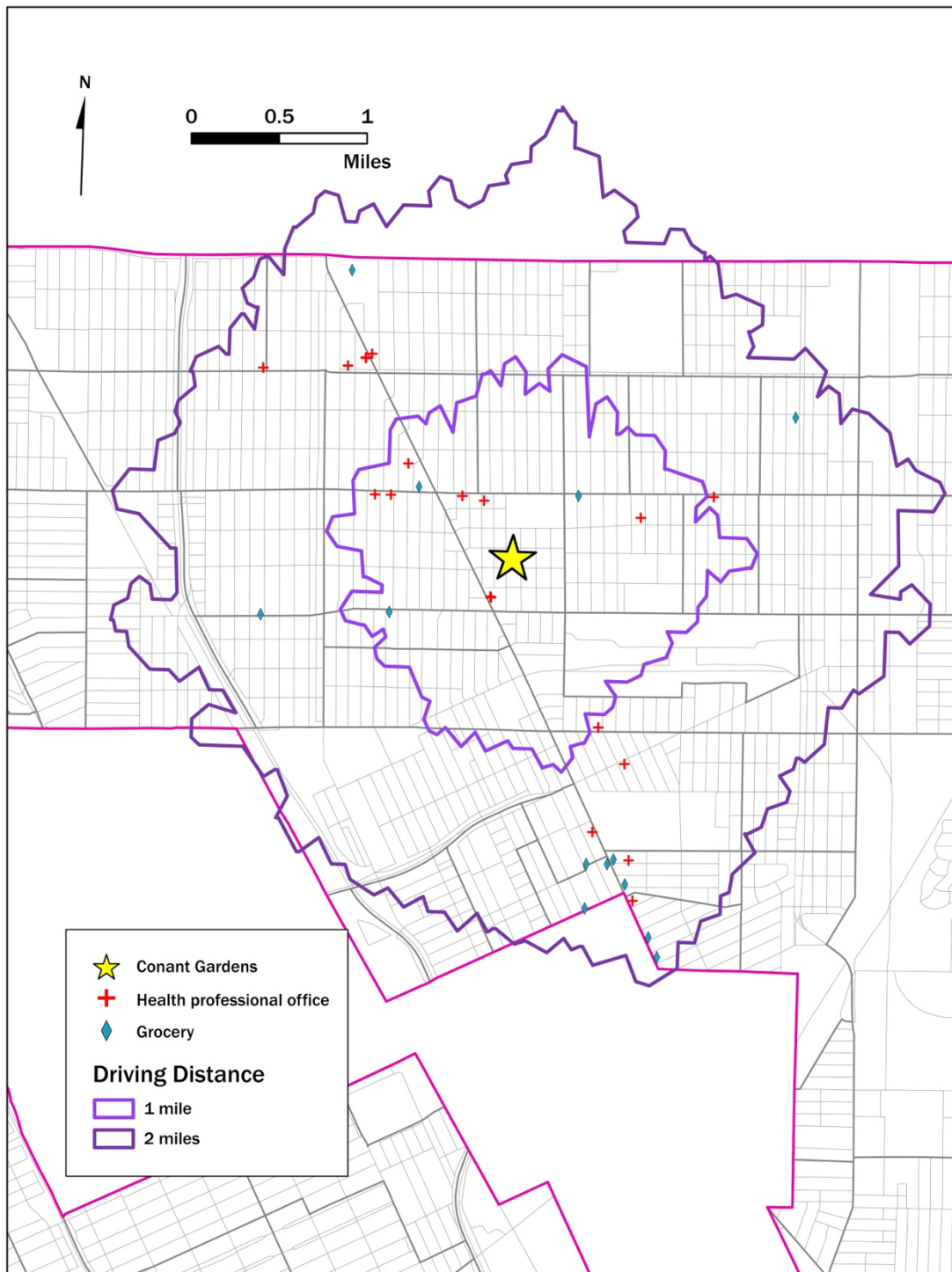
Map 5 Conant Gardens Connectivity: Access to Amenities and Services



Accessible Assets within 2 Miles Driving Distance



Map 6 Conant Gardens Connectivity: Access to Amenities and Services within a 2 mile driving distance



4. Housing Profile



The majority of Conant Gardens homes were built during the years between the 1930's and 1950's. A variety of architectural styles is apparent including the popular Tudor-Craftsmen design, which has become an important historical landmark for the community.

Housing Supply

Types

Conant Gardens has been a **single-family home neighborhood**, and the predominance of this housing type continues on through a period of 10 years, from 2010 to 2020 (see Table 4). The historic neighborhood shows minimal construction of homes later than 1959. Those built by 1939 or earlier account for 36.7% of the homes in the neighborhood. These homes are **detached structures**.

Table 4 Housing Units in Structure. Source: ESRI BAO Data with ACS 5-year estimates

Housing Units in Structure	2010	2020
Total Housing Units	376	338
1 Unit		
1, Detached	354	321
1, Attached	78	0
2 units	8	0
3 or 4	0	0
5 to 9	15	15
10 to 49	0	0
50 or More	0	0

The parcel-level data available through *Regrid.com* confirms the single-family home structures as still predominant. Other options – such as house-scale buildings with multiple units – are not viewed as a housing choice within this community.

The prevalence of single-family detached homes in the housing stock relates to the predominance of standard Euclidean zoning in the area and its tendency to exclude uses and restrain density of development which in turn increases housing costs and ultimately excludes vulnerable population groups (Danielson, 1976).

Tenure and Vacancy

As described above, there is a slight decline in the absolute number of total housing units. However, while the data projected for 2027 shows no change in the number of housing units, it indicates a declining trend for occupied units – both by owners and renters – and therefore an **increase in vacant homes (see Table 5)**. Regrid parcel-level data shows that today 196 out of 717 parcels were listed as vacant, of which 85% are residential, 14% are commercial, and 1% are industrial.

Table 5 Housing Units by Occupancy Status and Tenure in the years 2010, 2022 and projected to 2027. Source: Data from Social Explorer based on ACS Data

Housing Units by Occupancy Status and Tenure	Census 2010		2022		2027	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Housing Units	513	100.0%	439	100.0%	439	100.0%
Occupied	404	78.8%	356	81.1%	348	79.3%
Owner	261	50.9%	252	57.4%	251	57.2%
Renter	143	27.9%	104	23.7%	97	22.1%
Vacant	109	21.2%	83	18.9%	91	20.7%

For housing vacancies, ACS data reveals a significant increase in the number of vacant housing units between 2010-2021, from 42 to 150, implying an increase of 258% (see Table 6). A significant number of these vacancies are neither for sale or rent homes, which implies a pervasive vacancy status for these units (see Table 6).

Table 6 Occupancy Status of Housing Units and Vacancy Status by Type of Vacancy. Source: Social Explorer, based on ACS Data

Occupancy Status				
	2010	2015	2021	Change (2010-2021)
Housing Units:	376	541	366	-2.7%
Occupied	334	471	216	-35.3%
Vacant	42	70	150	257.1%
Vacancy Status by Type of Vacancy				
Vacant Housing Units:	42	70	150	257.1%
For Rent	21	0	16	-23.8%
For Sale Only	0	0	57	
Other Vacant	21	70	77	266.7%

Several sources, including Data Driven Detroit and the city’s open data website Data Detroit, also highlight the **increase in vacancy cases**. According to The Eviction Machine web portal, since January 2019, the neighborhood has seen 79 eviction cases and an additional 13 orders of eviction, pointing to an explanation for the increasing vacancy in the neighborhood.

Map 7 Conant Gardens Vacant Plots by Use and Tenure



The systemic impacts of redlining, described earlier, are among the factors influencing blight and severe vacancy affecting the cycle of disinvestment. The

Michigan League for Public Policy estimates that “for every 10 percentage-point increase in a neighborhood’s historical redlined area, there were seven more foreclosures per 100 owner-occupied units from 2009 to 2011”.

In 2022, the formerly redlined area of the neighborhood contains most of the newly vacant parcels, likely responding to aging properties and lack of maintenance from owners. According to Regrid data, within this area, the mean values of homes and vacant parcels are significantly lower than other vacant parcels elsewhere. An average sale price of \$18,000 lower than the mean price value in an area that was not redlined, demonstrates the overall sale price differential. Of all vacant parcels, 31 are categorized as “good” or “fair” for their conditions with regular maintenance. While 4 out of the 31 are located outside the formerly redlined area, a total of 27 parcels are within the area.

These conditions can become an opportunity for the community for vacant parcel repurposing. The properties in the area can provide the community with lots at a lower cost that could be converted into community recreation facilities, or other uses.

Housing costs and affordability

In the neighborhood, owner-occupied housing units without a mortgage represent 85% of the total 147 owner-occupied units. The remaining 15% of households with a mortgage show a high of 9% of homes with multiple mortgages (see Table 7). This high rate of homes without a mortgage could be driven by the age of the typical homeowner and mean that home mortgages have been paid off. Although not having a mortgage means a lower housing cost, at the neighborhood level, it might indicate other economic vulnerability.

Table 7 Owner-Occupied Housing Units by Mortgage Status. Source: ESRI BAO Data

Owner-Occupied Housing Units by Mortgage Status	
Total	173
Housing units with a mortgage/contract to purchase/similar debt	26
No Second Mortgage and No Home Equity Loan	10
Multiple Mortgages	16
Second mortgage and Home Equity Loan	0
Only Home Equity Loan	7
Only Second Mortgage	9
Home Equity Loan without Primary Mortgage	0
Housing units without a mortgage	147

Table 8 Housing Units by Age of Householder. Source: ESRI BAO Data

Housing Units by Age of Householder			
	2010	2021	Change % from 2010 -2021
Occupied Housing Units:	334	216	-35.3%
Householder 15 to 24 Years	5	0	-100.0%
Householder 25 to 34 Years	90	33	-63.3%
Householder 35 to 44 Years	31	23	-25.8%
Householder 45 to 54 Years	76	53	-30.3%
Householder 55 to 59 Years	36	0	-100.0%
Householder 60 to 64 Years	14	35	150.0%
Householder 65 to 74 Years	21	42	100.0%
Householder 75 to 84 Years	53	11	-79.2%
Householder 85 Years and Over	8	19	137.5%

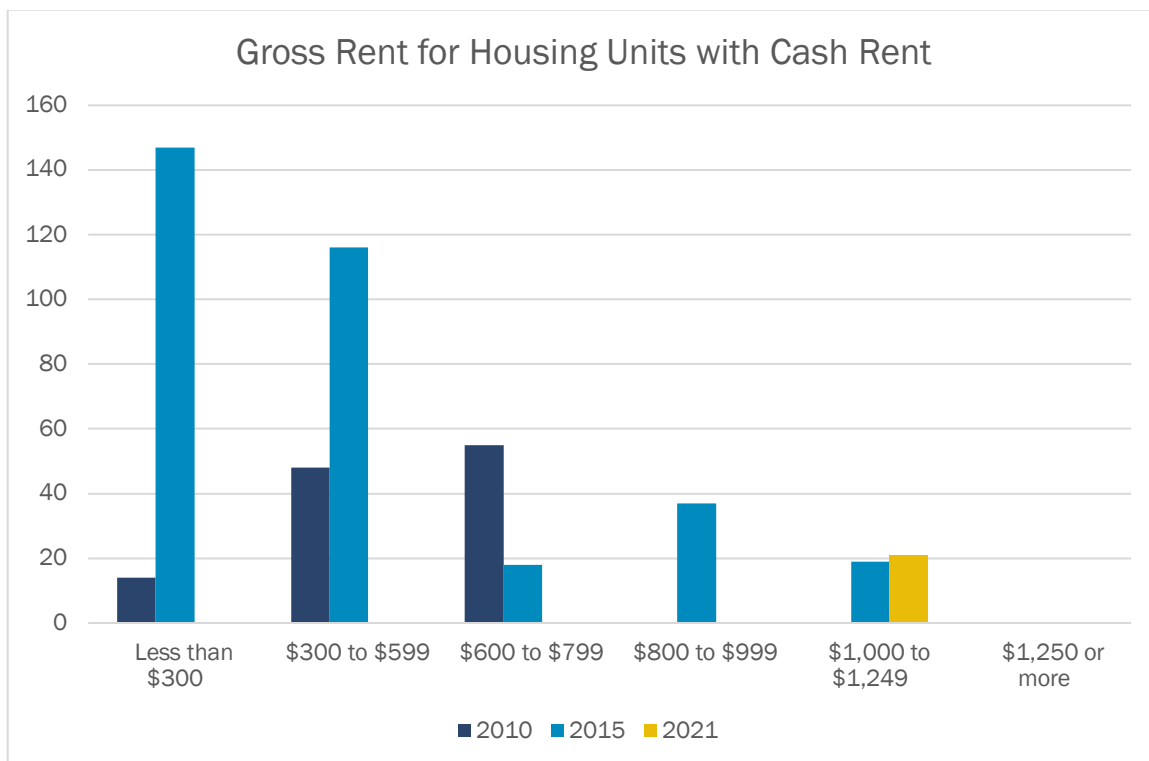
When looking into monthly costs for owner-occupied housing units by mortgage status, we see that for homes without a mortgage, housing costs represent less than 30% of household income. In other words, these homes are not cost-burdened. However, three of the homes with a mortgage experience housing costs as much as 50% or more of their household income (see Figure 9), and they are severely cost-burdened (see Figure 17). This tendency of severely cost-burdened renters follows the same pattern city wide (MLPP) Rent costs in the community have been rising and

the options of more accessible rent costs are disappearing (see Table 9 and Figure 7).

Table 9 Gross Rent of Housing Units with Cash Rent. Source: ESRI BAO Data

Gross Rent (Housing Units with Cash Rent)		
	2010	2021
Renter-Occupied Housing Units with Cash Rent:	117	21
Less than \$300	14	0
\$300 to \$599	48	0
\$600 to \$799	55	0
\$800 to \$999	0	0
\$1,000 to \$1,249	0	21
\$1,250 or more	0	0

Figure 6 Gross Rent for Housing Units with Cash Rent. Source: ESRI BAO Data

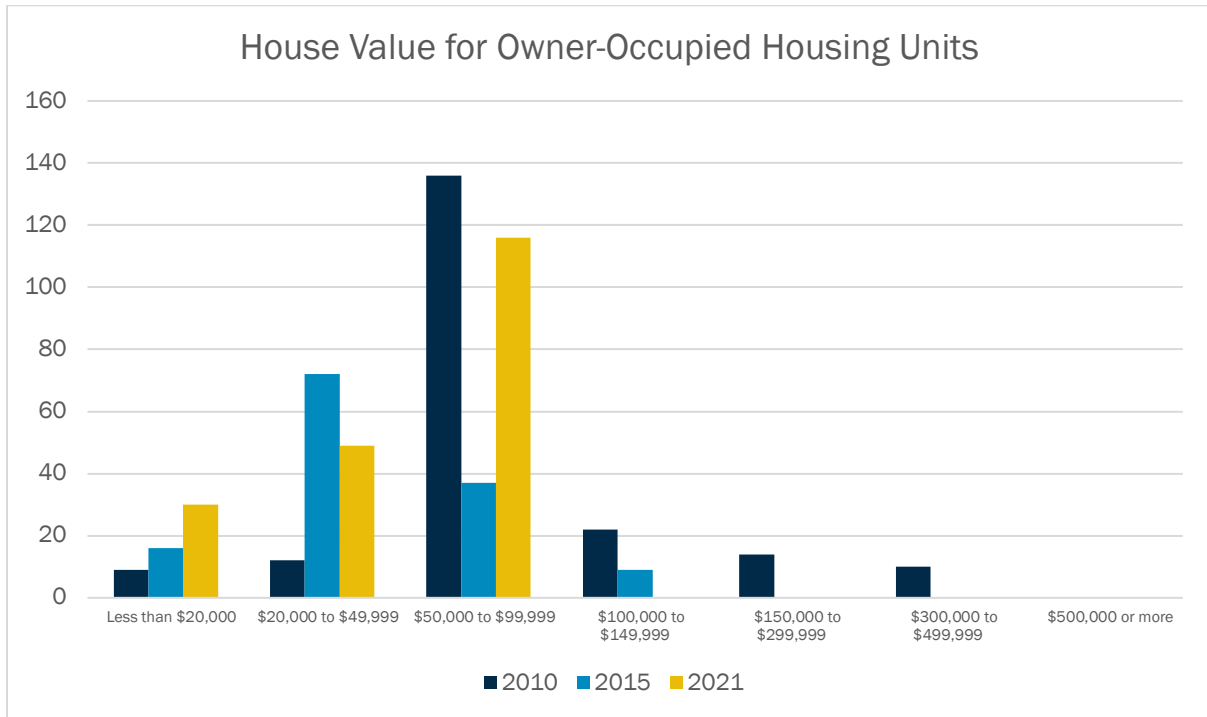


According to ACS estimates, Conant Garden's owner-occupied units show a consistent value of \$50,000 to \$99,999 for all three period estimates (2010, 2015, 2021). However, home values appear to be in decline, with homes of \$100,000 or more accounting for 46 units in 2010, but for none since 2015 (see Table 10 and figure 8).

Table 10 House Value for all Owner-Occupied Housing Units. Source: ESRI BAO Data

House Value for All Owner-Occupied Housing Units		
	2010	2021
Owner-Occupied Housing Units:	203	195
Less than \$20,000	9	30
\$20,000 to \$49,999	12	49
\$50,000 to \$99,999	136	116
\$100,000 to \$149,999	22	0
\$150,000 to \$299,999	14	0
\$300,000 to \$499,999	10	0
\$500,000 or more	0	0

Figure 7 House Value for Owner-Occupied Housing Units. Source: ESRI BAO Data



5. Community Engagement



The Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation requested the project include community engagement as a core component of its development. Community engagement was sought out to incorporate the community's input into the report and subsequent plan.

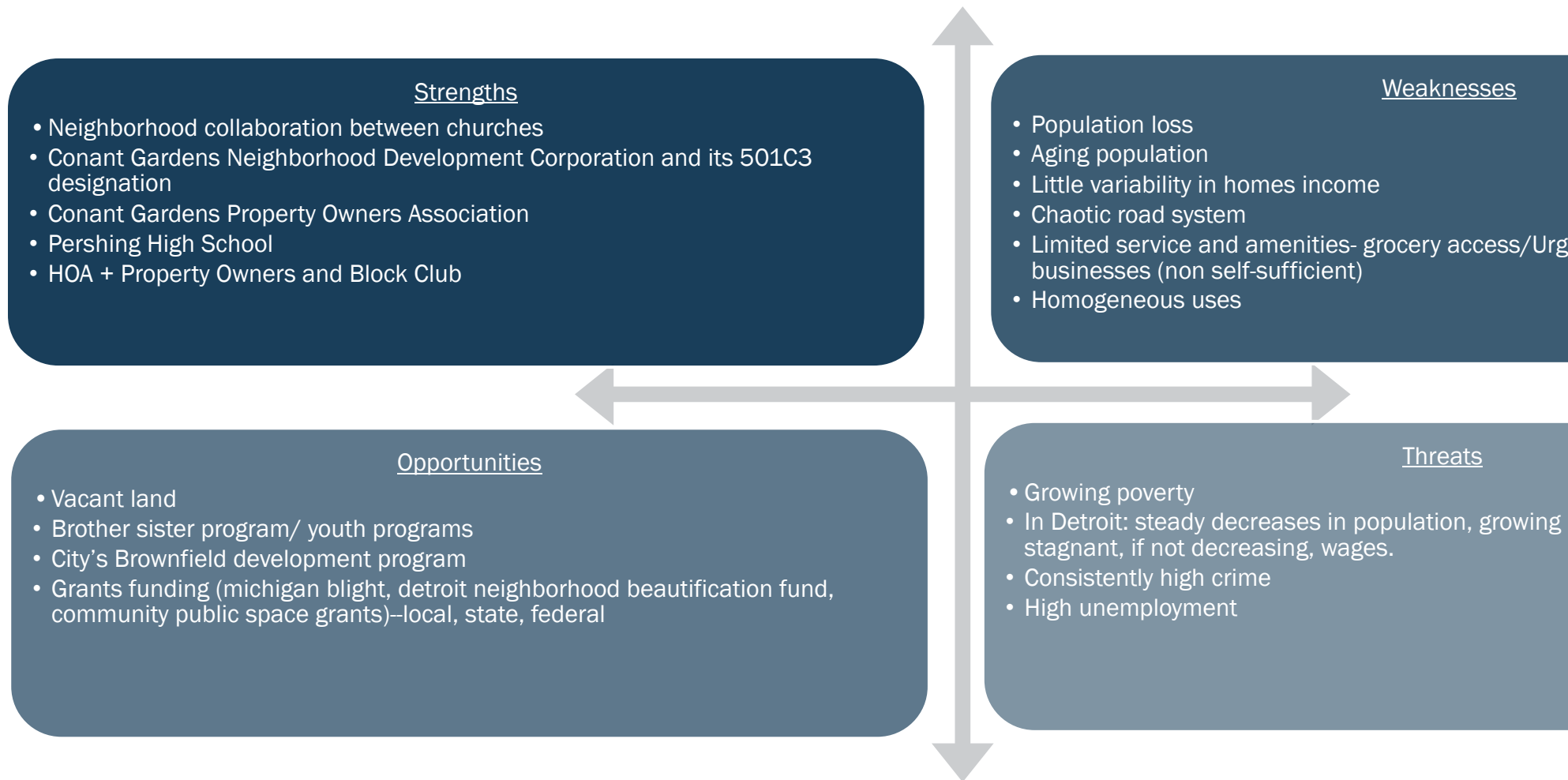
The activities were designed following an asset-based framework. This framework considers how the framing of a situation influences the language used to describe it, how it's thought about, and the ideas brought forward as possible "solutions". An asset-based approach is strength driven, opportunity and internally focused, and allows the community to take inventory of its assets and strengths.

The in-person workshop grouped participants by interests, i.e., homeowners, church members or officials, renters, youth, etc. The activity was divided into three parts. The first starts the conversation within the community by prompting three main questions:

1. What is already going on in Conant Gardens?
2. What do we wish we had more of?
3. What can we build upon?

The second part of the activity ranks the wishes community members have for the neighborhood through a vote, that prioritizes three wishes. The final moment asks the community members to identify assets that could be built upon to implement each wish. The input gained from the community engagement helps inform the following section, especially on the community's strengths, and opportunities.

6. Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)



Strengths

Many of the strengths for the neighborhood and the client are intangible assets and revolve around the collaboration ties already established. These include:

- Neighborhood pride
- Neighborhood collaboration between churches and organization capacity at large
- Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation and its 501C3 designation
- Conant Gardens Property/Homeowners Association HOA and Block Club
- Pershing High School

Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation designation as a charitable organization (501C3 status) makes them eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions. The corporation can then harness the social capital the neighborhood holds through its different groups and lead the efforts of revitalization by engaging with external actors and obtaining city-level funding.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses identified can be classified as either social or spatial. The first group includes social and sociodemographic characteristics or processes, such as population loss, aging population and the little variability in household incomes. On the other hand, spatial weaknesses in the neighborhood include a chaotic road system, limited services and amenities, such as access to fresh groceries, urgent or primary healthcare and other businesses, which in turn makes the neighborhood non-self-sufficient. Furthermore, the homogeneity in uses implies the neighborhood has little diversity both in terms of uses and population. This could be a contributing factor for population loss of younger persons who seek a variety of amenities.

- Population loss

- Aging population
- Little variability in household income
- Chaotic road system
- Limited services and amenities- grocery access/Urgent healthcare/other businesses (non-self-sufficient)
- Homogeneous uses

While the social weaknesses cannot be addressed directly, a revitalization proposal that not only sees them as a goal but acts upon addressing the spatial weaknesses could offer the solutions to both. Revitalizing spaces, making changes in use and adding amenity value would give the neighborhood the capacity to retain its population and attract new residents, owners or renters.

Opportunities

Despite the issues brought upon by the foreclosure crisis, the neighborhood can now turn its vacant plots into open spaces that tie the community together. It's historical architecture and landmark homes are an important feature of the neighborhood's character and provide an opportunity to showcase the neighborhood's historical character and its prominence in Detroit City history.

The existence and possible amplification of youth programs, like the Brother-Sister program, is an opportunity that can tie with the efforts of open space revitalization and would allow the groups to grow and strengthen while anchoring in community spaces, enhancing neighborhood appropriation and security.

- Historical architecture
- Vacant Land
- Brother-Sister or other youth programs

- City's Funding Opportunities: Brownfield development program, Michigan blight, Detroit neighborhood Beautification Fund, Community Public Space Grants)

Other opportunities are external and tied to CGNDC's 501C3 status. The possibility of accessing city funding through initiatives such as the Brownfield Development Program, would allow CGNDC and the community to finance projects and strengthen their relationship with the city.

Threats

The threats identified are of the broader context in which Conant Gardens finds itself. The problems experienced by Detroit echo in communities throughout the city and cannot be addressed at a smaller scale. However, remaining mindful of these difficult processes and external threats allows the community to take action within their boundaries to stop or reduce the incidence of these.

- Growing poverty
- In Detroit there is a steady decrease in population, growing unemployment rates and stagnant, if not decreasing, wages.
- Consistently High Crime
- High Unemployment

Closing remarks on SWOT

The threats to neighborhood revitalization and development are important and should not be dismissed because they can't be addressed directly. Conant Gardens, and the client, find within their boundary a series of strengths and opportunities that can connect with external efforts for neighborhood development.

7. Summary

Conant Gardens is a rich-history neighborhood. The changes it has seen in the last two decades are symptomatic of the larger-scale difficulties the city of Detroit has experienced. At a neighborhood level, some of the conditions are specific to Conant Gardens. However, lack of support and Detroit City processes have diminished the ability to maintain a vibrant, safe, and economically thriving community.

Conant Gardens core problem is population loss. The loss of population is a significant challenge to the community given that population loss is the first step in a cycle of disinvestment. With fewer residents – homeowners or renters – the number of abandoned houses grows, homes are subject to foreclosure and disinvestment, which creates a safety liability, or become infrastructure that gets demolished, furthering the notion of disinvestment and abandonment in the neighborhood, which does not foster investment, development and population retention. The neighborhood’s zoning designation, as almost exclusively low-density residential, could be a deterrent to investment. Pursuing higher density proposals should be evaluated further for land use regulations that might allow for enacting change.

The neighborhood’s need for better pedestrian sidewalks and new and vibrant community gathering spaces are only sustainable if anchored in a housing strategy to retain the current population and attract new residents. As identified in the SWOT analysis, the neighborhood has a number of strengths and opportunities that can connect with external efforts for neighborhood development. Focusing on physical aspects of shared community open spaces could have a positive impact on social processes and could provide the community with solid grounds for long-term sustained revitalization around retaining its population and attracting new residents.

8. Recommendations

The proposal for Conant Gardens is based on the analysis presented. The secondary data in the socioeconomic and housing profile inform this proposal throughout all the goals established and set the primary objective of addressing the issues experienced by the neighborhood, like population loss. Furthermore, the proposal draws on the community engagement results and the CGNDC Mission and Vision statements, and the overall goal of restoring and promoting safe quality of life through affordable housing and a beautiful, self-sustained neighborhood.

The recommendations are presented in an order that reflects a possible timeline, with the most attainable (short-term and low-funding) goals first. The order of presentation reflects a strategic prioritization for action. **The overall focus is to ensure strategic connections, partnerships, and community involvement for CGNDC.**

1. Build strategic partnerships that allow Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation to prepare for project management
2. Identify opportunities to generate affordable housing while preserving and enhancing the neighborhood's historic architecture
3. Provide Conant Gardens with the resources for implementing green-space network that improves access to healthy foods, gardens, and neighborhood safety

Recommendation One

Build strategic partnerships that allow Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation to prepare for project management

Action Items

R1 → Action 1

Short Term: Partner with neighborhood groups and stakeholders to coordinate community engagements and educational study groups on relevant issues

- 1.1. Identify, establish and consolidate relationships with other neighborhood initiatives and associations that would assist in strategic community wide implementation for future developments.
- 1.2. Initiate talks with the four other churches within the neighborhood
- 1.3. Get residents involved and connect with other block clubs and neighborhood organizations such as Conant Gardens Property Owners Association and KrainzWoods Neighborhood Organization.
- 1.4. Create an agenda for meetings that can apply the “asset-based community engagement” format introduced by the Practicum team with new contacts to:
 - 1.4.1. Consolidate the working relationship with the new partners
 - 1.4.2. Raise awareness of the shared resources the partners have, their Evaluate action capacity and shared community opportunities available.

- 1.5. Incorporate an interest-based education agenda to the “Conant Gardens Rising” that provides participants a comprehensive skilled approach to home ownership and financial management.

Workshops on residential alternatives such as multi-family housing as a neighborhood asset. Workshops to facilitate planning for community gardens that includes interested parties.

Partner with Michigan State University’s Extension Program, that would provide housing affordability workshops for residents.

Bi-monthly workshops to keep the conversations going and allow for other interested neighbors or partnerships to join efforts to beautify Conant Gardens.

Case Study:

To be able to get word to residents Chicago developed community **newsletters on various social media/portal/app platforms with resources and opportunities**. This enabled residents obtain direct knowledge of their neighborhood revitalization. Using COVID-19 Relief funding has helped tremendously in the ability to connect residents together.

R1→ Action 2

Short-term: Partner with District 3 Community Planners, City Staff and the City of Detroit Planning Commissioners

- 1.6. Establish a working relationship with community or city planners of the city of Detroit which will aid in identifying city-level programs or projects in which the neighborhood can be included. These will allow CGNDC to advocate for neighborhood interests and eligible funding.

The MSU Practicum Team recommends creating a working relationship with the City of Detroit Planner, Allen Penniman. Allen's planning expertise is specialized in Eastern Detroit. Allen has also expressed interest in the revitalization of Conant Gardens. He can be reached at Pennimana@detroitmi.gov or (313) 242-1332

Funding

Recommendation 1 is a low-funding and mainly short-term actionable goal. Its success will ensure the basis for the accomplishment of the next goals.

Case Study:

NorthWest Goldberg has been able to also form relations with those around it and the city itself. Its neighborhood website, North West Goldberg Cares, has information on similar initiatives and projects that CGNDC are interested in bringing to Conant Gardens. Through these initiatives and programming they have brought in the essence of community for residents again. **Breaking Bread**, a program of NW Goldberg Cares that brings an opportunity for neighbors to break bread, share space and enjoy healthy and delicious food, is the perfect example of how new programming and initiatives will bring the community back together for both the individual and all of Detroit.

Figure 8 'Breaking Bread' dinner put on by the neighborhood and partners, Lake Trust & Kellogg Foundation, once a month during the summer.



Recommendation Two

Identify opportunities to generate affordable housing while preserving and enhancing the neighborhood's historic architecture

Action Items

R2→Action 1

Short Term: Become an active Community Partner in the Detroit Housing Commission or meetings thereof

- 1.1. Develop relations with the Detroit Housing Commission (DHC) to offer its unique strengths to the community.
- 1.2. Coordinate with DHC to develop, or hire an independent contractor to create affordable housing opportunities by contacting RSDRSVP@dhcmi.org to request a DHC Community and Social Services application.

R2→Action 2

Mid-Term: Apply for the Blight Elimination Program set up by Labor and Economic Opportunity Department

- 1.3. In 2022, Governor Gretchen Whitmer allocated 21.55 million dollars to a blight elimination program headed by the State Land Bank Authority. The goal of this program and the grant it provides is to revitalize communities. Cities, Counties, Villages, or Townships can apply for this grant. Since Conant Gardens Neighborhood Development Corporation is not a government entity, to apply, the corporation must work with official planning agencies like the City of Detroit Planners. When working with the local government, Conant Gardens is eligible for up to 200,000 dollars. While the 2023 candidates have all been awarded, Conant Gardens must make the next cycle of grant funding. The cycle will renew and be refunded in 2026. It is recommended that Conant Gardens and the official planning body contact the State Land Bank Authority in 2024. They can be reached at landbank@michigan.gov or (517)335-8212.

R2→Action 3

Long-term: Apply to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Section 202 program for rehabilitation of buildings with the goal of providing housing for very low-income senior residents

- 1.4. Apply to senior housing programs. CGNDC as a non-profit organization can submit a response to the Notice of Available Funds posted on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). Section 202 of HUD is referred to as the **Supportive Housing for The Elderly Program**. This program helps to provide affordable housing and social services for the 65+. The Housing and Development Department will use already standing blighted buildings in Conant Gardens to rehabilitate into multifamily senior housing. The eligible participants are private non-profit organizations, (an organization with an article of incorporation that is not controlled by a public body and receives no funds from that public body). The timeline

to achieve this recommendation is 5 years or more. See Map 9 for suggested locations.

Recommendation Three

Provide Conant Gardens with the resources for implementing green-space network that improves access to healthy foods, gardens, and neighborhood safety

Action Items

R3→ Action 1

Short Term: Implement an alleyway cleanup with assistantship from community volunteers and governmental institutions and renovations through walkway murals and art paintings

- 1.1. Harness newly formed partnerships with Pershing High School and other associates within the community to create an outreach call for volunteers within and around the neighborhood for alleyway cleanup and mural painting in addition to grant applications.
- 1.2. Get involved with the Alley Clean-Up program from the Department of Neighborhoods in the City of Detroit which can provide external assistance for Conant Gardens. An application is required to request clean-up service for each alley.

Case Studies:

One program in Dallas, Texas takes COVID-19 relief money for the “**Dallas alley clean-up and trail conversion program**” that will offer paved pathways

through unimproved alleys. This program also gives good alternatives for disapproved trails or in our case green way networks as well; “ Should trail projects not be approved by two-thirds of residents, funding will be transferred to the alley maintenance programs.”

Figure 9 Cochran Heights neighborhoods alley sidewalk project photo by Dallas Morning News



R3→ Action 2

Mid Term: Create a community garden interest group that organizes efforts and rallies for external resources outside of our recommendations to create a rough site plan draft for the garden

- 1.3. Create a community garden neighborhood interest group by channeling the community engagement detailed in Recommendation 1, Action 1, which identifies the community members interested in participating in this effort along with outreach for lessons and knowledge of horticulture gardening.

- 1.4. Purchase parcels based on recommended timeline and grant references; an interest group would create an entity to take the lead in the planning process of placement for the garden itself and planting plots and maintenance thereof.
- 1.5. Create a community interest group that will provide monthly scheduled meetings, for garden plot planning decisions and gardening times for citizens to socialize and connect.
- 1.6. Engage with a grant writer for greater success of grant and project approval.
- 1.7. Connect with architects and engineers for long term site plans and to move through the city planning process. Local firms such as Christian Hurtienne Architects, Hobbs + Black Associates, Inc, or GAV & Associates are all black owned or related entities that would assist in enhancement and preservation for the historic parts of the community as well as incorporating new modern builds .
- 1.8. Establish a Community Garden Interest Group that would coordinate with MSU-Detroit Partnership for Food, Learning, and Innovation to organize agriculture and planting courses such as indoor planting, beekeeping, and other horticulture skills. This will prepare residents after the community clean-up process and subsequent garden placement. MSU DP FLI can be reached through <https://www.canr.msu.edu/detroitpartnership/>

Case Study:

Edible Flint is a good example of a community led initiative around a community horticulture project. The project provides kits, workshops and meetings around the topic of healthy food access and community vitality. While these resources are given to individual residents the

initiative can easily be translated into a community garden managed by the interest group.

Figure 10 Shows the information on Garden Kits provided by Edible Flint's webpage



More information available at

<https://www.edibleflint.org/22workshops.html>

R3 → **Action 3**

Long Term: Create a public park and outdoor recreational infrastructure such as a basketball court and bike trail connection the city program

- 1.9. Enhance community by addition of outdoor recreational space.
- 1.10. Engage with Westside Play to enable youth activities through a playground as well as a basketball court, field hockey, or lacrosse field or what is best suited for the community.

- 1.11. With appropriate implementation an accessory pavilion for a family and friends gathering space for the Music in the Park program provided by the Detroit Parks and Recreation Department many parks.
- 1.12. Coordinate with the director of Greenway Alleys Project to incorporate green walkable infrastructure for pedestrians of all ages
- 1.13. Bike proposals, see Map 8 and Map 9 for the schematics of the proposal and its connection to existing and developing Detroit City Projects, such as the Joe Louis' Pathways:
 - 1.13.1. Off of Nevada Street
 - 1.13.2. Off of Ryan Road

Case Study:

The City of Chicago depicts successful green alleys in their **Green Alley Handbook** which provides information for CGDC community engagements and board meetings, including lessons learned. Some lessons that can be implemented in Conant Gardens include stormwater management, as depicted in Figure 11.

This resource can also inform the alleyway cleanup described in R3-Action 1. The green alleyway examples in the handbook show alleys turned into spaces that promote social interaction, as well as providing safe paths for pedestrians of all ages.

Chicago's Green Alley Handbook can be accessed through:

https://www.chicago.gov/dam/city/depts/cdot/Green_Alley_Handbook_2010.pdf

Figure 11 Alley Infiltration Using Permeable Surfaces and Other Storm Management Techniques

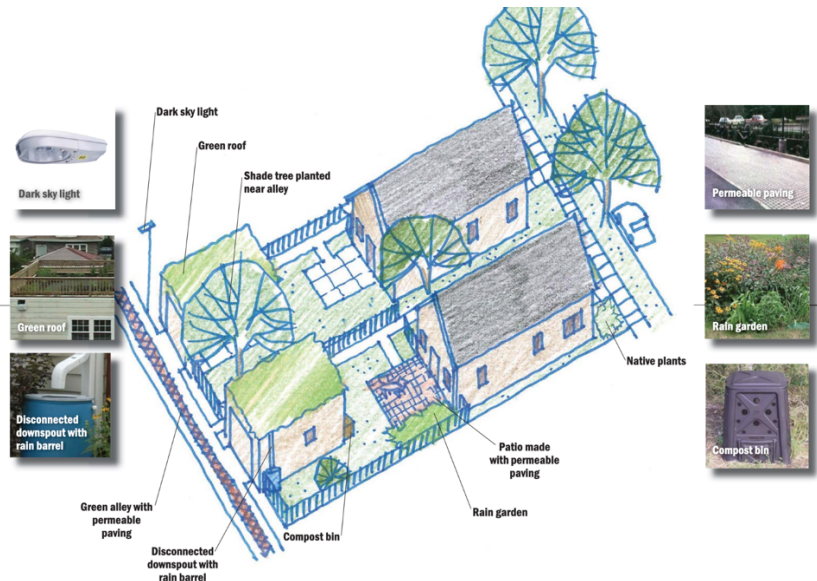


Figure 12 Finished Green Alleyway example from the Chicago Green Alley Handbook

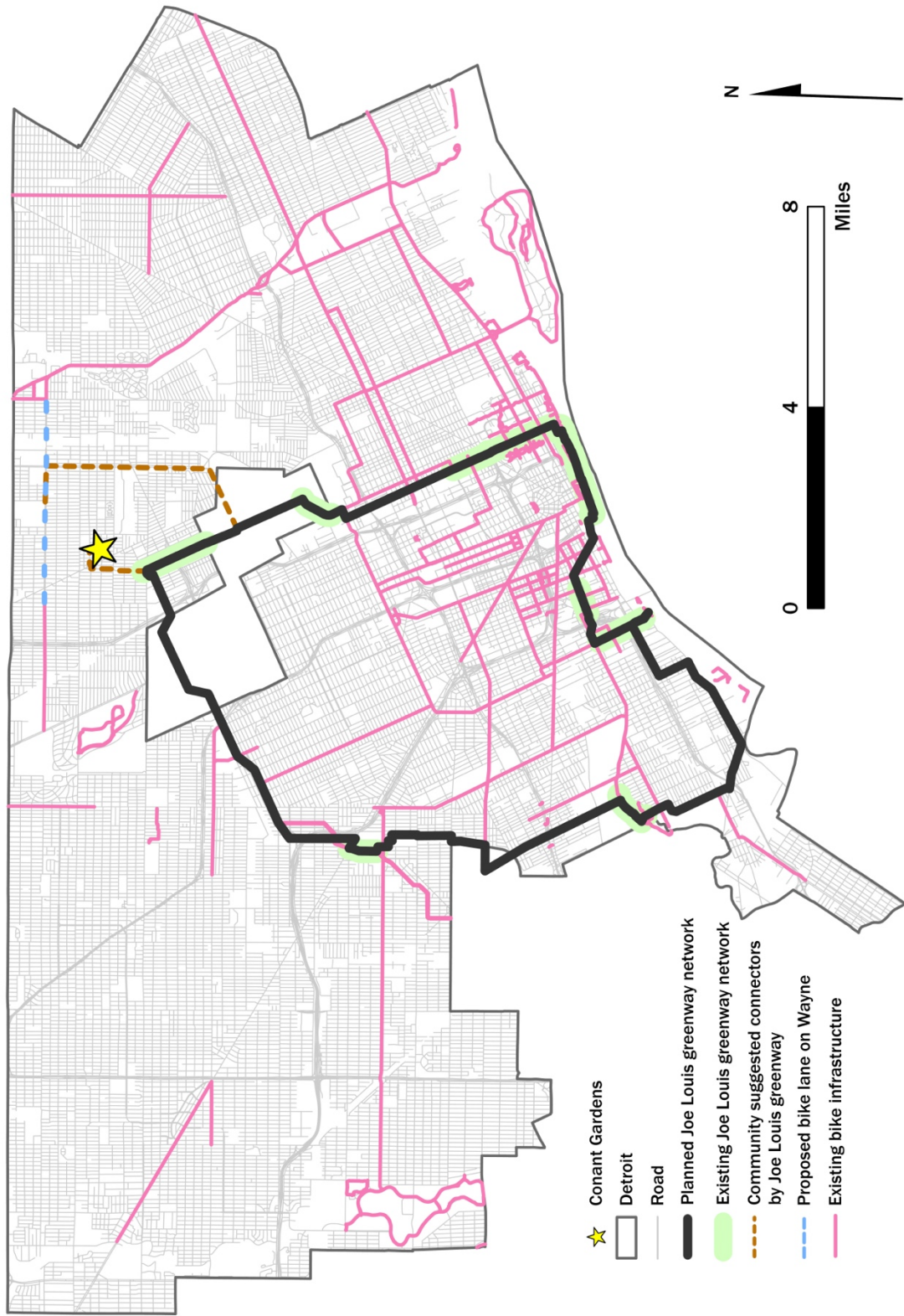


Proposal Location

Map 8 Land Proposal for recommendations



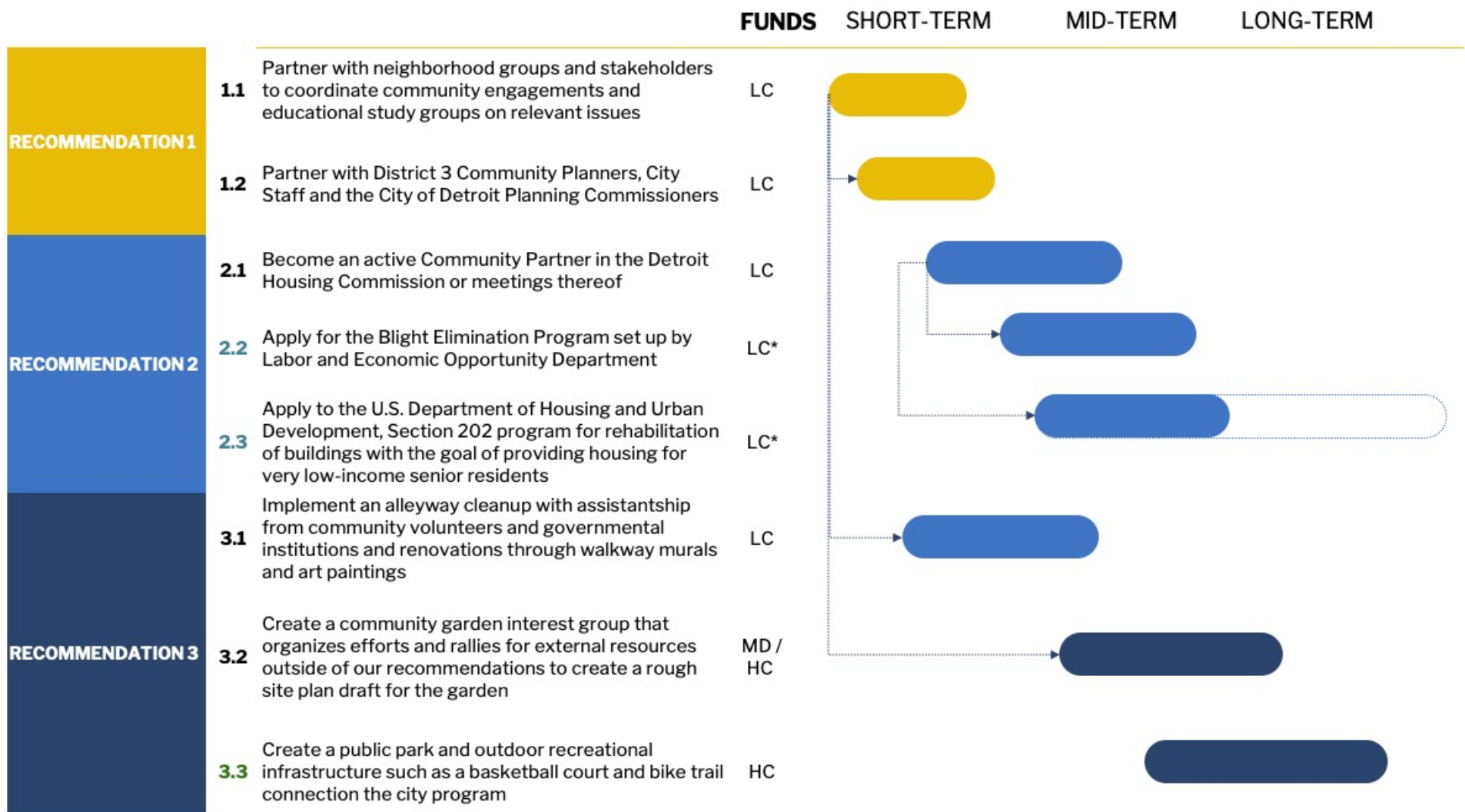
Map 9 Suggested future bike lane connections to the existing and planned city infrastructure



Timeline

The recommendations made are presented in Figure 12 as a timeline chart, to visually represent their proposed time frame. The column labeled *funds* represents the estimated costs of all actions specified. In the case of Actions 2.2 and 2.3 from Recommendation 2 these are low cost actions to implement, but can result in high value projects, such as blight removal and housing renovations. The dotted arrows represent base actions, such that Recommendation 1, Action 1.1. is necessary for the proper development of actions 1.2, and 3.1 and 3.2. Finally, Recommendation 2, Action 2.3 is marked with an extended polygon to show that application for development grant is a mid-term action, but its resulting effects will continue throughout as other recommendations take place.

Figure 13 Recommendations Timeline



9. Appendices

Asset-Based Community Engagement

Welcome:

1. Opening Remarks
2. What are we doing here today?

The team would like to spark a conversation on the community's assets. It will inform our work, but more than that, it will hopefully be a first step of actions well beyond the practicum project. We want to know what the community is proud of? What is unique?

3. How are we going about it?

A different kind of focus group. We will walk – literally – through a structured series of group-based dialogues.

PART 1 (35 minutes):

In the small groups within your tables, answer the questions that are in the sheets you see in front of you. Here is an example. And yes! You can repeat answers.

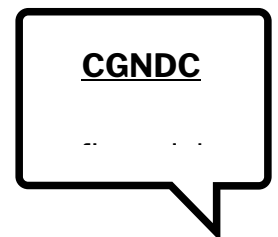
Q1: What is already going on in Conant Gardens? (1 paper sheet)

Q2: What do we wish we had more of? (1 paper sheet)

Q3: What can we build upon? (1 paper sheet)

We can build upon:

People's skills/ knowledge; gifts/talents, and abilities of people



Social: groups and organizations that already exist and are making things happen, or are engaging with different groups in the community

Political: groups or individuals that can make influence or lobby for future changes

Financial: groups or individuals that can access resources that can be turned brought into the community

Refreshment/Stretch Break (15/20 minute break)

During the break, we ask participants to vote on the wishes.

Of our wishes, what are the most important ones to you (pick 3)?

PART 2 (part 20/30): Each group has a copy

From part 1, we now have our 3 most important wishes for CG. And we know what we already have. In this next part, we will take our sticky-notes with our assets and place them on what wish they can help make possible.

From our pool of assets – those things we can build upon – we imagine how to take action towards achieving those ideals/wishes

The results are read to the participants.

Closing remarks. Thank you.

Conant Gardens Revitalization Project

Map 10 Vacancies by type and zoning within the Conant Gardens Neighborhood



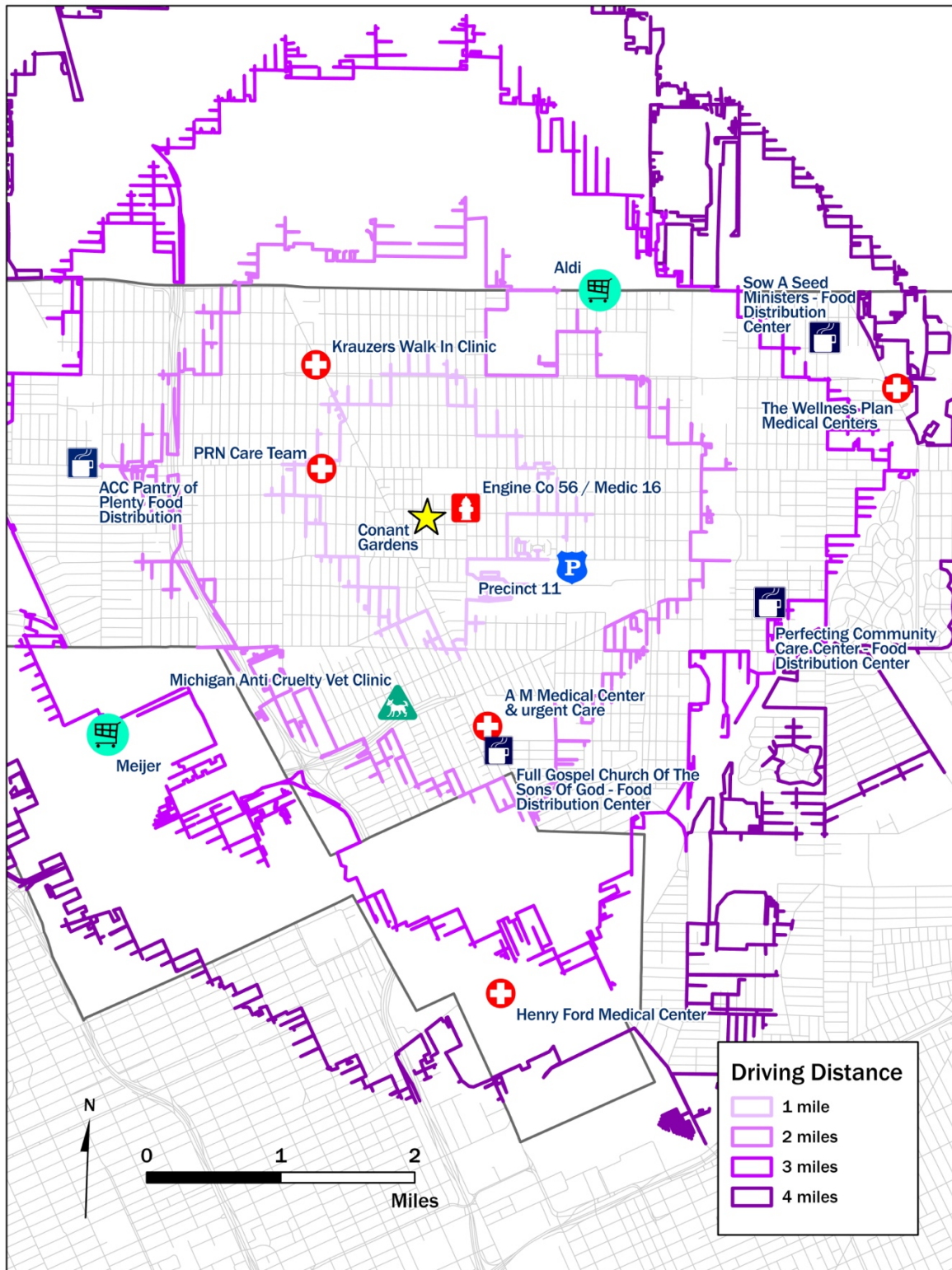
Conant Gardens Revitalization Project

Map 11 Publicly Owned Vacant Parcels within Conant Gardens Neighborhood



Conant Gardens Revitalization Project

Map 12 Emergency services access within 1, 2, 3 and 4 miles driving distance



Conant Gardens Revitalization Project

Map 13 Cycling infrastructure in the City of Detroit.

