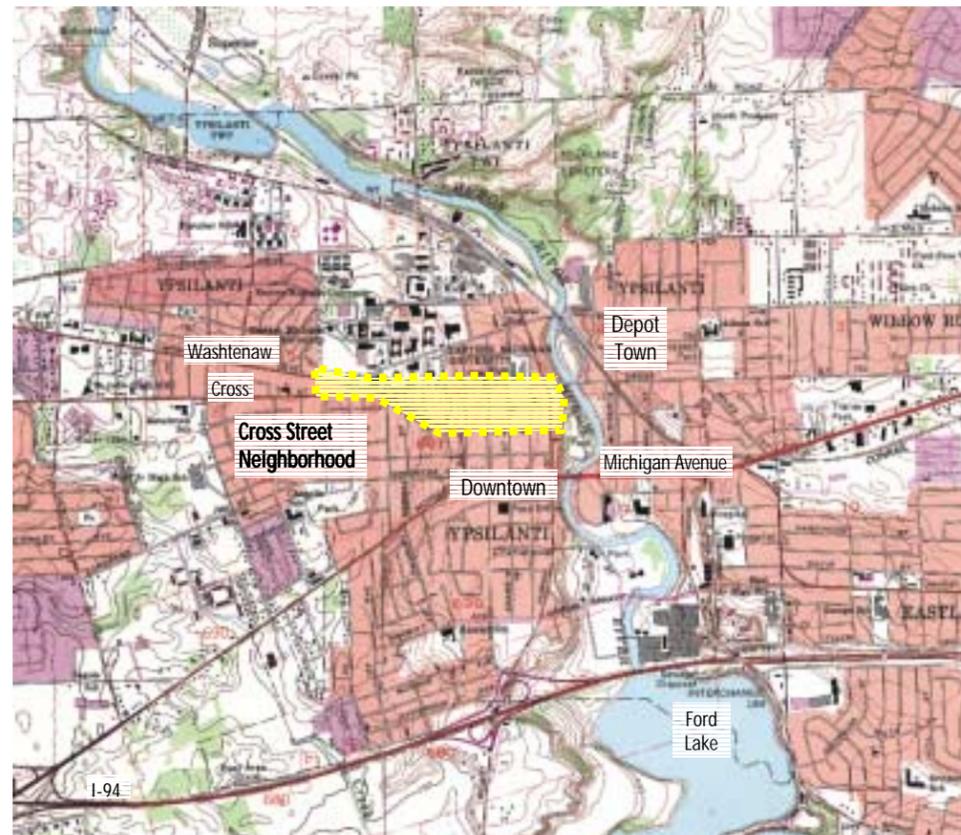


# Chapter 1: Overview

Cross Street and Washtenaw Avenue are busy one-way state-owned arterials in the center of Ypsilanti. They accommodate east-west connections through the city. The small, linear shaped neighborhood framed by these streets is referred to as the Cross Street Neighborhood. The City of Ypsilanti, Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) are working together to focus on developing strategies for improving these streets and the neighborhood. The Cross Street Neighborhood is bounded by EMU to the north, the Huron River and historic Depot Town on the east, downtown Ypsilanti to the south and stable residential neighborhoods both to the west and south. Cross Street and Washtenaw converge at Ypsilanti's historic Water Tower, a 120-foot high, circular landmark built of stone.

Map 1: Location of the Cross Street Neighborhood in Ypsilanti (map courtesy of USGS)



In the 1970's Cross and Washtenaw were modified by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to facilitate efficient and safe movement of traffic through the area. The modifications resulted in an oval shaped, multiple lane traffic loop that serves to quickly move traffic. Today, valuable on-street parking is stripped away and fast-moving cars tend to discourage pedestrians from using the area. The two traffic corridors cut off the small neighborhood trapped between them. Cross Street's once-thriving commercial district is in decline, and residential block areas behind it face challenges such as problematic landlords, crime and blight. Density, inappropriate land uses and code enforcement issues are underlying concerns requiring immediate attention to reverse decline. The one-way loop system is one of many contributing factors impeding improvement efforts.

There is growing realization that Cross and Washtenaw should act less as a throughway and more as calmer city streets. The character of the current streetscape environment is alien to the attractive, small-city qualities that make Ypsilanti unique. The community leadership has a strong desire to adjust past street improvement efforts and bring a sense of balance between moving cars efficiently and providing necessary amenities that support a vibrant urban neighborhood. Recognizing the potential of the Cross Street neighborhood, the City in conjunction with EMU and the Depot Town DDA have worked to expand the DDA district boundaries, providing additional financial tools for future improvements to the district. The Cross Street Neighborhood Improvement Plan represents a new era of cooperation between the City, EMU and the DDA to revitalize what was once a vibrant neighborhood in the center of Ypsilanti.

### Community Participation

An extensive public process was used as the primary resource in developing each phase of this report. Public outreach activities included a community work session, stakeholder data collection, multiple walking tours of the area, and open forums on concepts and recommendations. A Steering Committee, representing the study partners and other stakeholders, led the planning effort. The

### Goals of the Neighborhood Improvement Plan

Identify issues and areas for potential change within the neighborhood for the purpose of objectively assessing the design alternatives related to future transportation policies and land use.

Develop a land use plan and recommendations in meeting the needs of the community while providing for quality residential and business development in the future.

Establish transportation policies and recommendations that are supportive of land use policies and city-wide transportation goals.



Above: Neighborhood walk-through (May 2001)

committee members convened at critical stages in the process to provide feedback and direction for the study. Three public meetings, hosted by the City of Ypsilanti and Eastern Michigan University, were effective in engaging broad representation from the community by serving as forums for openly discussing issues and reviewing proposed concepts. This high level of public involvement in the planning process has increased awareness of the challenges facing the neighborhood while generating enthusiasm and support for implementing proposed improvements.

#### The Huron Whittaker Corridor Study

In 1999, the City of Ypsilanti studied the Huron-Whittaker Corridor. The purpose of the Huron-Whittaker Corridor Study was to develop an improvement plan that enhances the relationship between Huron and Whittaker Roads and the Ypsilanti area community, as well as the Huron River, the centerpiece of

Ypsilanti's natural system. The study examined the corridor in the context of a number of segments based on character and use.

The Cross Street Neighborhood falls within the Central Corridor Sub Area. Some of the goals and objectives that pertain to Cross Street include, (1) Improve upon the built environment in ways which will stimulate economic activity, (2) Upgrade wayfinding and visibility to the city's many landmarks, such as Depot Town and the Huron River Corridor park system and (3) Enhance the neighborhoods traversed by the corridor through adequate lighting, maintenance of public right of way and traffic calming measures.

Within the Central Corridor Sub Area, the Study analyzed two alternatives that would affect the Cross Street Neighborhood – Alternative 1 - Converting the Huron-Hamilton one-way pair into two two-way road systems and Alternative 2 - Maintaining the one-way pair but reducing it from three to two through lanes in each direction. The capacity analysis conducted to evaluate the alternative revealed that the conversion of the two two-way operations would cause the Level of Service to deteriorate to unacceptable levels, whereas, reducing Huron and Hamilton from three to two lanes would allow the Level of Service to remain at an acceptable level. Suggested uses for the third non-travel lane include bicycle lanes, parking lanes, curb lawn area/streetscaping and wider sidewalks.

#### The Planning Process

Background information collected from the City and stakeholders was catalogued, reviewed and documented as part of the database. Existing plans, past studies, site observations and aerial photos provided tools to illustrate neighborhood issues and relationships. This information helped the team understand how this neighborhood functions as part of the greater community. A half-day neighborhood walk was held early in the process with a group that included consulting team members with expertise in urban design, community planning and traffic engineering, members of the city's community development staff and Downtown Development Authorities, representatives of EMU's administration and physical plant, staff from WATS and the Ann Arbor Transit

#### The Seven-Step Planning Process

- Data gathering, including a block by block survey of conditions, market study and traffic analysis of the area
- Issues and opportunities visioning session with the public and stakeholders of the neighborhood
- Review and testing of the transportation circulation alternatives
- Issues and opportunities review with the steering committee
- Draft recommendations and preferred transportation alternative presentation to the steering committee, public and stakeholders in the neighborhood
- Steering committee review and comment
- Final report

Authority (AATA), the project contact for MDOT and a Washtenaw County Planning Department member. Site reconnaissance activities contributed to documenting issues and functional characteristics of the neighborhood; including efforts such as a visual assessment of building conditions, review of code violations, documenting parking patterns and gaining an understanding of traffic flow conditions during various times of the day.

The first community session, held in July 2001 with stakeholders in the neighborhood, explored overall issues and opportunities. Participants included local residents; Cross Street business owners; Depot Town business owners; representatives of EMU administrators, faculty and students, MDOT, Washtenaw County, UATS, AATA and city staff. Results of the session and survey responses are presented in Appendix B.

The second community session was held in September 2001 and focused on traffic and circulation. It had the highest level of participation of any session conducted during the study. Preliminary alternatives for addressing circulation issues were presented. Three options depicted variations on concepts that retained the one-way traffic flow system and five options depicted ways to convert the existing system to two-way traffic flow. Options were modeled using computer simulation, then discussed in an open, town meeting forum. Attendees were provided tab sheets during the session and asked to indicate their preferred one-way option and their preferred two-way option. Survey results are included in Appendix B.

The results of the preferred transportation options were combined with neighborhood design concepts that addressed concerns expressed in the first session. Four scenarios emerged that required more extensive study: two options depicting improved one-way traffic patterns and two design solutions illustrating two-way traffic patterns. Each concept portrays a neighborhood revitalization strategy using one of the circulation variables. They illustrate alternatives for street closures, on-street parking locations, off-street parking solutions, converting residential streets to two-way traffic, and commercial and residential

development in the neighborhood. The scenarios were presented to the Cross Street Steering Committee in November 2001.

The Steering Committee helped refine the concepts and blend them into one solution using a two-phased circulation approach. The committee felt a two-phase plan was needed to address potential cost constraints. This strategy would serve as the first step in the implementation program for the greater vision by addressing some of the more pressing needs with resources already available. It would convert the existing one-way pairs to two-way traffic, but allow for an interim solution of a modified one-way traffic system along Cross and Washtenaw. The modified one-way system is more sensitive to the needs of the community than the current system and can be implemented relatively quickly at a lower cost.

#### Overview of the Document

This Plan is a product of the on-going effort to achieve its strategic goals, documents the planning process and provides a vision for the future. The following chapters summarize the development strategy for the Cross Street Neighborhood, from improving crosswalks and developing properties, to programming retail market opportunities and improving on and off-street parking and traffic flow. The recommendations, once implemented, will achieve the City's vision statement and plan which detail the future of the Cross Street Neighborhood. An action plan outlines and prioritizes activities for sequencing the revitalization program. Design Guidelines provide a framework for the City to evaluate new development respecting compatibility and vision for the Cross Street Neighborhood.

The planning effort's intent is to lay the foundation encouraging a more favorable business environment, provide more pedestrian opportunities, and create an attractive, stable mixed-use district. The phased approach for implementing the Plan gives the City the ability to take immediate and aggressive short-term actions while preparing for more detailed planning and engineering necessary to pursue infrastructure changes that meet long-term expectations.



A Vision for the Cross Street Neighborhood

The vision for the future of the Cross Street Neighborhood is to successfully integrate the needs of the historic residential district, student housing district and commercial uses into a thriving, vibrant neighborhood.

The area where Summit, Cross and Washtenaw merge will be reorganized into a beautiful landscaped gateway that announces the Cross Street Neighborhood and Eastern Michigan University. The newly created Water Tower Park will celebrate the historic significance of the Water Tower, and provide the gracious setting it deserves.

Commercial activities will be condensed into a small mixed-use setting to enhance the synergy and viability of doing business in the district. Existing shops and restaurants that remain will be attractively renovated and new shops with residential apartments above will infill the gaps. A planned mixed-use development will anchor the district on the site of the current parking area on Cross Street opposite the Water Tower. This cluster of shops will complement the quality and character of larger commercial districts in Depot Town and downtown.

Past Ballard Street and moving toward Depot Town, the character of Cross Street changes from a commercial mixed-use setting to one with more of a residential mixed-use flavor. This active street will be highlighted with a mix of renovated buildings, historic structures and new town homes. The neighborhood's zoning accurately reflects these various land uses.

Both Cross and Washtenaw will have amenities that enhance the pedestrian environment. These include street trees, attractive bus shelters, consistent levels of street and pedestrian lighting, uniform business signs, and highly visible crosswalks. Traffic will flow in both directions on Cross and Washtenaw, helping to feed businesses in the district and those in adjacent areas such as Depot Town. On-street parking provides convenience for customers while buffering pedestrians from moving vehicles. Traffic is calmed to a steady and orderly flow along Cross Street, yet the street seems narrower and easy for people to cross. Patrons of Pease Auditorium will be tempted to drift over to a Cross Street café for coffee and dessert after a show. Shared parking strategies with EMU, neighborhood churches and property owners provide additional off-street parking for commercial patrons. Combined dumpster areas will service each block and will be maintained under mutual agreements and fees.

A strict code enforcement policy will be implemented and changes to the city's ordinances will be made to address blight in the neighborhood. All structures will be maintained and in compliance. The integrity of structures intended as single-family homes but converted to apartments will be supported by zoning that prohibits excessive density. Multiple family structures will be kept clean, and have adequate, consolidated off-street parking for residents behind the housing units. Lighting, landscaping and paving requirements for these parking areas will be dictated by a new ordinance. Front yards, porches, and landscaping requirements will be similar to those of single-family homes. The perception is that Emmet and other streets in the neighborhood are safe and people feel welcome. The appearance of the historic district will be strengthened, and a number of homes in the neighborhood are renovated and converted back to single-family use.

