

# Chapter 1: Introduction

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The Penn Avenue Community Works Corridor Vision and Implementation Framework presents an integrated community-based vision and a coordinated, long-term implementation framework for the Penn Avenue corridor. The **Penn Avenue corridor** is shown in Figure 1.1. The outcomes of this community development planning and design effort will guide future inter-agency initiatives and investments in multimodal transportation, land use, economic development, housing, and placemaking as part of Penn Avenue Community Works (PACW).

## Key Terminology:

**Penn Avenue Corridor:** For the purposes of this report, this term is used to refer to the area roughly two blocks on either side of Penn Avenue and Osseo Road from Interstate 394 to 49th Avenue.

A comprehensive inventory and analysis of existing conditions was conducted in an earlier phase of this planning process, addressing topics such as existing plans and policies, demographics, transportation, property conditions, housing, economic development, corridor character, and public utilities. For more details see the full “Penn Avenue Vision and Implementation Framework – Inventory and Analysis” document.

The recommendations and strategies outlined in this document are intended to address some of the key issues and opportunities identified in the earlier inventory and analysis phase, including the following:

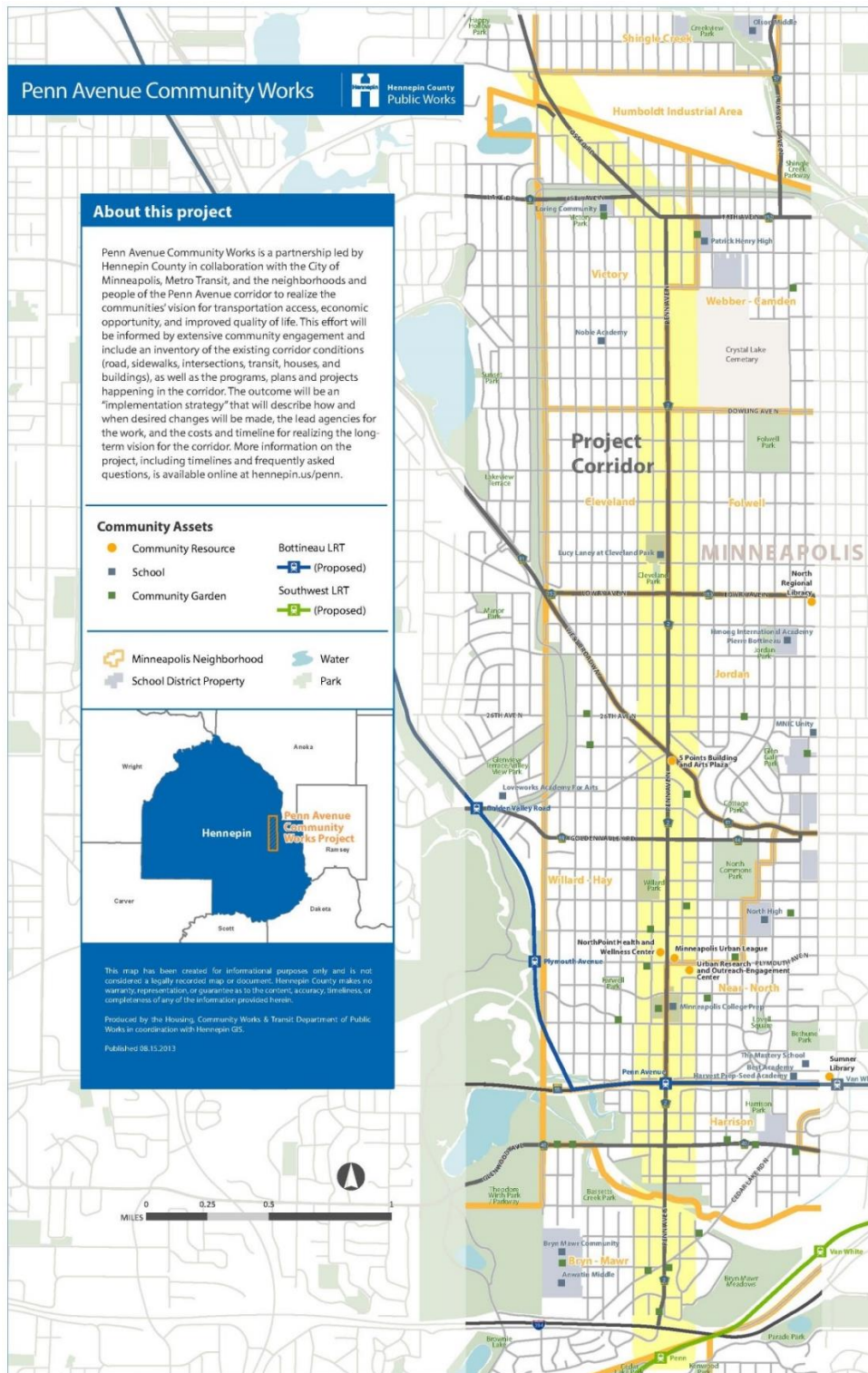
- » **Existing Plans and Programs:** Several plans and programs, particularly the *West Broadway Alive* and *Lowry Avenue Strategic Plan*, have helped shape recent development in the corridor. These plans address a range of issues including land use and development, transportation, public realm, and community development. In response to the significant structural damage caused along Penn Avenue by the May 22, 2011 tornado, the City of Minneapolis initiated the Penn Avenue North Redevelopment Project in 2012 as part of its strategy for addressing tornado damage, blight, and other concerns in the community.
- » **Income:** Median household incomes are mixed along the Penn Avenue corridor with the highest incomes generally at the north and south ends of the corridor. The diversity of household incomes along the corridor indicates that strategies for redevelopment will need to carefully consider the types of development that will most benefit existing and future households. And, as is the case for communities with lower median incomes, one must not rely solely on traditional sources of market data as it's been shown to have significant limitations (e.g., does not capture the cash economy).
- » **Employment:** Community members noted the need for additional employment opportunities in the corridor, access to living wage jobs, support for small business development, and connections to professional training and job skill development programs.
- » **Future Transit Improvements:** The planned C Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) will provide improved transit access, connecting residents to downtown Minneapolis and to other existing and proposed transit options, including the proposed Blue Line (Bottineau) Light Rail Transit (LRT) at Highway 55 (also known as Olson Memorial Highway). These improvements stand to benefit corridor residents by increasing access to jobs and downtown Minneapolis and reducing automobile dependence. Community members expressed concerns about the safety, aesthetics,

and function of future transit stations and related improvements, emphasizing the need for transit improvements to benefit the corridor as a whole, its residents and businesses.

- » **Safety:** Resident concerns regarding personal safety were documented through community surveys and interviews. Perceptions of personal security and safety act as barriers to transit and public space use and may also impact redevelopment potential in the area.
- » **Property Conditions:** Many residents expressed concerns about vacant and poorly maintained properties in the corridor. An inventory of vacant properties showed that, although the property condition rating for most properties along the corridor ranges from Average Plus to Average, there are areas where poor residential and commercial building conditions are more concentrated. These sites provide near- and long-term opportunities for increased housing density, mixed-use, employment, and placemaking.
- » **Development Opportunities:** There are several current and planned development projects in the corridor, some currently under construction and others still in the planning and/or approval process. Many of these projects are located around key intersections along Penn Avenue. The project team supplemented some of these existing initiatives and development projects by identifying additional redevelopment opportunity sites at key intersections along the corridor, particularly where vacant and/or underutilized properties exist.
- » **Housing:** Several community members cited a need for affordable housing options, noting that home costs and rents in the corridor are too high or higher than in surrounding areas. Others expressed concerns about the availability of larger homes, more options to meet diverse housing preferences, and the quality and maintenance of existing homes. With high rates of poverty occurring in the central neighborhoods of the North Side, low rates of housing vacancy, and increasing costs for new construction, supporting new market rate housing in these neighborhoods is challenging.
- » **Economic Development:** Many residents expressed a desire for more and a wider variety of retail, services, and activities along the corridor (for example, grocery stores, clothing stores, dine-in restaurants, retail, and services geared toward diverse populations and ethnic groups). While opportunities exist to capitalize on future transit improvements, develop living wage jobs, and increase support for local and small businesses, significant challenges to economic development persist. Challenges include overcoming real and perceived investment risk in the corridor and North Minneapolis as a whole; low commercial and residential rents; need for appropriate and effective public financing tools to encourage and support development in the corridor; and concerns over potential gentrification and displacement of residents.
- » **Corridor Character/Public Realm:** With minimal sidewalk space, several sidewalk obstructions, limited lighting and pedestrian amenities (seating, trash receptacles, etc.), gaps in tree canopy, limited bicycle facilities, vacant and underutilized properties, and a lack of active street frontages in some areas, the current conditions in the corridor are generally not conducive to biking and walking. While some areas have introduced wayfinding and placemaking elements (banners, signage, seating, bike parking, and public art), application along the corridor as a whole is inconsistent. Residents cited a desire for more formal and informal gathering places for young people and adults (community centers, movie theater, arts performances, clubs, music venues, patios, parks), cleaner commercial areas with more attractive landscaping, and more programming for youth and families.

» **Greening the Corridor:** The restoration of street trees and overall “greening” of the corridor is a priority for many residents, particularly in light of damage and tree loss resulting from the 2011 tornado. Residents also cited a need for safer parks and recreational facilities, programs for youth, adults, and seniors, and more playgrounds and year-round recreational opportunities.

**Figure 1.1: Corridor Map**



## Principles, Objectives, and Purpose

In 2012, Hennepin County designated Penn Avenue as a Community Works project. The Hennepin Community Works program is based upon the premise that carefully designed and integrated public works projects sustain and enhance the long-term tax base and viability of neighborhoods and businesses while enhancing the quality of life. Hennepin Community Works projects are guided by the following **principles**:

- » Stimulate economic development
- » Promote effective planning and implementation
- » Maintain and improve natural systems
- » Strengthen community connections
- » Enhance the tax base

The specific **objectives** of the Penn Avenue Community Works project were refined through extensive community engagement. Objectives are to:

- » Re-envision Penn Avenue as a complete street with enhanced transit service, pedestrian amenities, bicycle connections, and environmentally sustainable streetscaping
- » Stimulate private investment and promote economic opportunity in the corridor by improving public infrastructure and through targeted housing, redevelopment and economic development strategies
- » Enhance livability in the corridor by improving public spaces, connections to key destinations, and through other placemaking strategies.

Through the Penn Avenue Community Works project, the County, City, and Metropolitan Council have undertaken a coordinated effort to plan for future private and public investments needed for the Penn Avenue corridor in North Minneapolis. The resulting document establishes a comprehensive vision and supporting strategies for the corridor that recognize the complex relationship between a multi-modal transportation network, the built environment, economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, and quality of life. The **purpose** of the Penn Avenue Community Works Corridor Vision and Implementation Framework is to:

- » Establish and pursue a shared vision for the corridor that reflects the diverse voices along the corridor and recognizes the different characteristics of Penn Avenue neighborhoods, each of which contributes to the corridor's identity
- » Create a strategic framework for public investments that not only leverages private investment, but delivers community and economic benefits
- » Align jurisdictional authorities, policies, and technical and financial resources to maximize benefits
- » Garner broad-based community input, collaborate with corridor communities, and build a coalition of support to collectively advocate for corridor-wide funding needs
- » Work in tandem with Metro Transit during BRT project development to ensure that the community-based corridor vision becomes the basis for future transit investments in the project

area through early community input, coordination with project decision points, timely infrastructure investments, and the full benefits associated with the transitway

## Document Organization

The Penn Avenue Community Works Corridor Vision and Implementation Framework addresses the Penn Avenue corridor at two scales: corridor-wide recommendations and intersection-specific recommendations. The following chapters discuss these recommendations in greater detail:

- » **Chapter 2: Corridor-Wide Land Use and Development** includes land use and development strategies and recommendations that apply to the Penn Avenue corridor as a whole
- » **Chapter 3: Commercial and Housing Development** includes strategies and recommendations related to commercial and housing development and job creation and access that apply to the Penn Avenue corridor as a whole
- » **Chapter 4: Corridor-Wide Roadway Improvements** includes plans, strategies, and recommendations related to roadway improvements, streetscape, placemaking and wayfinding, and bike connections that apply to the Penn Avenue corridor as a whole.
- » **Chapter 5: Intersection-Specific Strategies and Recommendations** includes strategies and recommendations that apply to key intersections along the corridor. This chapter address issues specific to a given area/intersection and may include recommendations pertaining to redevelopment and land use, commercial and housing development, job creation and access, roadway improvements, streetscape, placemaking and wayfinding, and bike connections.
- » **Chapter 6: Implementation** includes the highest priority strategies that will be implemented through public private partnerships, starting in 2016.

## Community Engagement

More information on the community engagement strategies, methods, and results for this project can be found in the appendices.

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