

## CHAPTER 4: Analysis of Issues

This chapter provides an analysis of the issues that were revealed through the planning process. Some of these issues were identified through an analysis of existing conditions. Others were identified through the work of a real estate market consultant, Joe Urban Inc., and an urban design firm, Bonestroo Inc., both of which were hired to help with the planning process [see the Appendix A for the full market study].

### DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

The Lyn-Lake area draws upon its unique character to attract a wide variety of residents, businesses, and visitors. While a large percentage of those residents are from a young demographic, urban living is becoming an attractive option for many older people as well. National trends indicate an increase in childless households, including singles, couples, roommates and adult family members living together. Thus, it is likely that Lyn-Lake will continue to be a place that attracts smaller households.

These trends indicate a shift away from large families living in urban homes, with the exception being families that have recently immigrated to the United States. With a prominence of smaller household size, there will continue to be a demand for more dwelling units. This has the potential to create a shift in which some renters choose to live in larger multi-unit buildings instead of in older, formerly single family homes.

### REAL ESTATE TRENDS

While current market conditions may slow development, Lyn-Lake and the greater Uptown area will remain an attractive location for residential and commercial development because of its proximity to downtown, the lakes, the Midtown Greenway, and a variety of businesses.



*A variety of housing types exist in the area*

### Commercial

One issue facing area businesses are increasing lease rates. Rent rates are indicative of an increased attractiveness of an area, but they can make it difficult for “mom and pop” stores to remain in the area. Lyn-Lake will be directly impacted by changes in Uptown and any potential future development at Nicollet Avenue and West Lake Street. Generally speaking, property values and lease rates are the highest in Uptown and then decrease incrementally to the east along West Lake Street. Any future development at the Kmart site on West Lake Street could alter that.

Lyn-Lake will have to continue to strive to retain its unique character and “brand” as changes occur up and down West Lake Street. With the exception of the cluster of restaurants near the Lyndale/Lake intersection, the retail market lacks synergy, due to the wide variety of destinations and spacing between them. This is an issue that can be addressed through strategic marketing of certain properties and good planning of commercial space.

## **Residential**

As discussed previously, the demographic trends will likely result in the continued demand for high density housing. Much of that may be rental, but for sale housing may also increase from its current share of 20% of existing households.

Availability of affordable housing will continue to be an issue. Land value is likely to remain high and the cost of new housing units will reflect the high land values. In addition, if transit service is added to the Midtown Greenway, there will be an additional increase in demand and cost of new housing.

## **LAND USE AND BUILT FORM**

Land uses in the study area are changing quickly. Several former industrial parcels along the Midtown Greenway have been redeveloped into high density housing and several small to medium sized commercial developments are proposed along Lyndale Avenue South.

The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan, which was adopted by the City Council in early 2007, calls for high density housing along many sections of the Midtown Greenway and policies in the Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth call for a mix of uses along Commercial Corridors such as West Lake Street and Lyndale Avenue South (north of West 31<sup>st</sup> Street). These recommendations are based on real estate trends and historic land uses along major streets in Minneapolis.

The primary land use and built form issue facing Lyn-Lake is determining how land uses will change. While transition to higher density residential development is called for in much of the surrounding area, some industrial uses and single family homes near the greenway will likely remain for some time. This plan aims to guide phased infill development in a way that will ensure continued economic viability, enhance neighborhood livability, and minimize the negative impacts that are sometimes associated with change.

In order to explore issues related to land use and built form the design firm of Bonestroo Inc., was contracted to complete an analysis of existing and allowable building height and do three development case studies. The analysis of existing building height is presented below. It shows that some taller buildings (five to six stories) are found near the intersection of West Lake Street and Lyndale Avenue South, two to four story buildings are scattered along Lyndale Avenue South and portions of West Lake Street, and several lower scale buildings exist in the study area. Particularly, along West Lake Street, east of Lyndale Avenue South are many sites with large surface parking lots which result in a less comfortable pedestrian environment.



Existing building shape and height

### The Activity Center

The built form around the intersection of West Lake Street and Lyndale Avenue South creates a quality environment with an almost solid series of attractive facades and new, wide sidewalks and street furnishings. Maintaining and enhancing the “street wall,” a continuous series of building facades, will be important. Gaps in a street wall can cause a less desirable pedestrian experience.

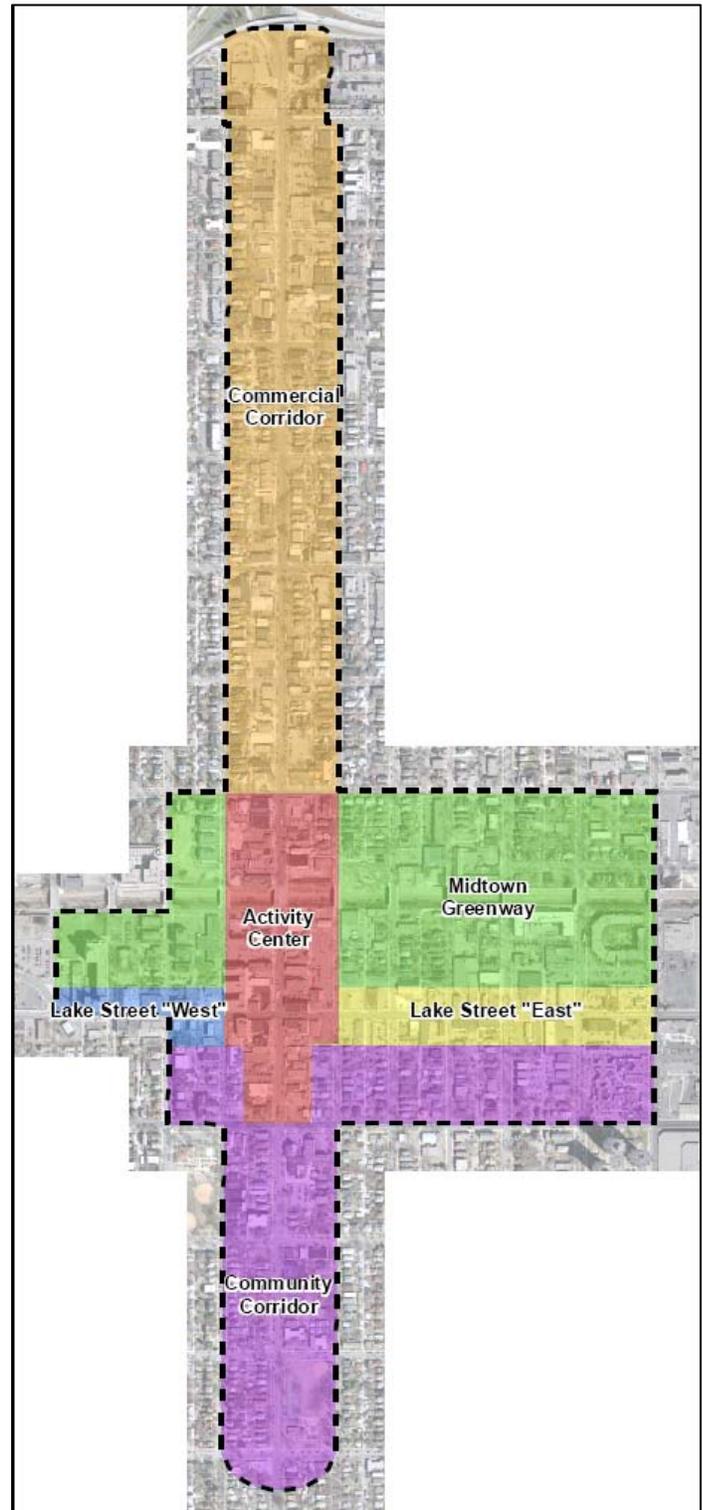
This intersection is the heart of the area. The current mix of restaurants and theaters creates a destination. In order for Lyn-Lake to remain vital and continue to be a destination, this business mix must be supported and potentially expanded. A specific challenge facing the area is maintaining the appropriate amount of parking for entertainment uses while maintaining a walkable environment.

### Lake Street “West”

This area is particularly important because it links two strong, but distinct activity centers. The recent streetscape improvements and infill development has enhanced this section of Lake Street, but additional opportunities exist. Promoting land uses that enhance the street should be a priority.

### Lake Street “East”

West Lake Street east of Lyndale Avenue South has a more fragmented urban form. Many auto oriented uses are located along West Lake Street between Lyndale and Blaisdell Avenues; this section is less desirable than areas to the west because of the lack of pedestrian oriented destinations. However, the existing businesses do provide valuable goods and services.



Character Areas

Traffic near the intersection of Pillsbury Avenue South and West Lake Street was raised as a concern during a community meeting held to get input for this plan. Commercial destinations along the Midtown Greenway have created traffic congestion on side streets. Traffic impacts should be given special attention when evaluating the merit of future development in this area.

### **The Midtown Greenway**

As mentioned, land uses along the Midtown Greenway are slowly transitioning away from industrial uses and single family homes. New commercial uses have been developed along major roadways that cross the Midtown Greenway like Lyndale Avenue South, and higher density residential development has occurred on side streets near the Midtown Greenway. Adopted City policy in the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan and the Industrial Land Use and Employment Policy Plan, support the active transition away from industrial use in some areas of the city and the concentration of industrial uses in other areas of the city.

With the change in land use has come a change in built form. The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan and the Uptown Small Area Plan both suggest building designs that limit shadowing of the Midtown Greenway. In addition, the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan suggests creation of a promenade along the top of the greenway trench as part of new development.

### **The Commercial Corridor**

Land uses along Lyndale Avenue South north of West Lake Street are an eclectic mix, as is the built form. There are small shops, restaurants, small apartment buildings, and single family homes. The eclectic mix is something that is valued by many residents and visitors, but there will likely be infill development. Maintaining the existing character while allowing for new development that is appropriate along a major commercial corridor will be a challenge.

### **The Community Corridor**

Uses along Lyndale Avenue South, south of West Lake Street currently transition well from a dense, heavily commercial area to a more typical neighborhood scale. Maintaining this transition and keeping strong pedestrian connections between the residential areas to the south and the Lyn-Lake intersection should be a priority, particularly since Painter Park and the neighborhood commercial node at West 36<sup>th</sup> Street and Lyndale Avenue South are destinations a few blocks to the south of the Lyn-Lake intersection.

## **PARKS AND OPEN SPACE**

There are parks in each of the neighborhoods surrounding the Lyn-Lake area. However, other than the Midtown Greenway and the Soo Line Community Garden, there is little open space in the core of the study area. As development is proposed opportunities for the inclusion of small green spaces can be encouraged to create a more interesting and comfortable streetscape. In addition, opportunities may exist to enhance spaces within the Midtown Greenway, particularly with the addition of potential future transit stations.

## **TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**

Land use and transportation are directly linked. As land uses change in the Lyn-Lake area, specific steps must be taken to ensure that traffic and parking are well managed. At the same time, scenarios calling for major improvements in transit service, whether with buses or some form of rail transit in the Midtown Greenway, should be considered. Such transit service improvements would have a strong impact on the area's development potential, transit patterns, and parking demand.

### **Automobile**

Part of the Lyn-Lake area's strength is that it is located at the intersection of two major roadways that traverse the city from north to south and east to west, making the area very accessible. West Lake Street has recently been reconstructed between Dupont Avenue South and Blaisdell Avenue, along with Lyndale Avenue South from West 29<sup>th</sup> Street to West 31<sup>st</sup> Street. The section of Lyndale Avenue South from West 31<sup>st</sup> Street to Minnehaha Parkway is scheduled for reconstruction through 2009. Lyndale Avenue South, north of West Lake Street will also be reconstructed sometime in the future, but Hennepin County has not targeted a timeline for that work.

West 26<sup>th</sup> Street and West 28<sup>th</sup> Street are a major one-way pair that cross part of the study area. These streets add to the accessibility of the area, but also create some challenging intersections from a pedestrian and bicycle perspective.

Many of the roadways in the study area carry a large number of cars, but the network functions generally well. Regular traffic management will continue to be an issue, but overall the roadway network is not a primary issue. However, any opportunity to restore the street grid should be taken as outlined in existing City policy. There is the potential to regain sections of West 29<sup>th</sup> Street that have been given up by the City in the past. An opportunity to reconnect Nicollet Avenue may exist in the future and this would also have a positive impact on the Lyn-Lake area.

### **Parking**

Parking is a major issue for the Lyn-Lake area. Ideally more and more people would walk, bike, or take transit to the area, but many people still drive, particularly to evening entertainment venues. The Garfield parking lot serves the necessary function of accommodating auto users that visit Lyn-Lake and is considered a great asset to the area.

Other public parking exists in the Uptown City Apartments and in the development Blue. However, these lots are less visible and some people are hesitant to use the parking without a full understanding of the ticketing system.

The Garfield parking lot is frequently full in the evening, but has spaces available during the day. Businesses in the Lyn-Lake area can buy “parking credits” in the Garfield parking lot, and businesses frequently take this option rather than supplying their own parking on site. This is beneficial because it cuts down on the number of surface parking lots; however there is the potential for the Garfield parking lot to reach capacity.

When the Garfield parking lot reaches capacity a decision will need to be made regarding how parking needs will be accommodated in the long term. Building a ramp would likely involve additional bonding, which would be paid off through assessments. The potential exists for a developer to build a ramp as part of a larger development project, but this would involve the City selling the Garfield property which still carries bond debt and has dedicated parking credits that would need to be honored.

An additional issue related to the Garfield parking lot is the impact of a potential transit line in the Midtown Greenway. If the Midtown Greenway is chosen as the route for the Southwest Transit Corridor or a streetcar, commuters could choose to use the Garfield parking lot as a park and ride lot (this is more likely if there is light rail connecting to downtown than if there is a street car connecting the Southwest Transitway to the Hiawatha LRT line). This has the potential to either help or hurt local businesses. On one hand it could bring people to the area and on the other hand it could create congestion and a higher demand for parking. The potential scenario of the Garfield parking lot serving as an informal park and ride lot could also have implications for other station areas.

### **Transit**

The Lyn-Lake area is currently well served by bus transit. As mentioned, there is the potential for light rail or streetcar to be developed in the Midtown Greenway. Either option could make Lyn-Lake an even more desirable place for entertainment and urban living. It could also create more demand for development and increase property costs.

If the Midtown Greenway is chosen as a transit route and a station is located at Lyndale Avenue South, an additional level of planning involving detailed design work related to pedestrian connections and public space will be needed.

### **Bicycle**

In recent years bicycle use of the Midtown Greenway has increased dramatically. Making destinations bicycle friendly along the Greenway is more important than ever. The zoning ordinance was recently amended to require that bicycle parking be incorporated into most developments, and a bicycle master plan process is currently underway that will outline policies for future bicycle infrastructure investments.

**Pedestrian**

The Lyn-Lake area is generally pedestrian friendly, but there are areas that need improvement. The pedestrian environment along West Lake Street has been recently improved, as has Lyndale Avenue South from West 29<sup>th</sup> Street to West 31<sup>st</sup> Street. However, north of West 29<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalks vary in quality and design, and some land uses are more inviting to walk by than others. Hennepin County has not identified a target year for the reconstruction of Lyndale Avenue South from West 29<sup>th</sup> Street to Franklin Avenue, but the construction of a quality pedestrian environment should be a priority when that project is undertaken. In the meantime, as new development is proposed, special design attention should be given to the streetscape design and the provision of pedestrian amenities.