

Case Study 4: Central Avenue

Concerted work on Central Avenue revitalization dates to the *Making Central Avenue Great* planning process which began in the mid-1990s and was memorialized in a plan document September 1997. In 1998, the Holland neighborhood contracted with University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute graduate student Katherine Geisen-Kisch to evaluate the relationship between the built environment and public safety along the avenue. Her [Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design \(CPTED\)](#) recommendations for improvements to the avenue, particularly to a number of parking lots which were run down and perceived as unsafe, were implemented through funding primarily from the [Metropolitan Council](#).

Principles of Commercial Corridor Revitalization:

In 1996, [LISC](#) partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to bring to urban areas the well-known National Trust's Main Streets commercial revitalization program, initiated by the Trust in the mid-1980s to reinvigorate the historic buildings of small town Main Streets throughout the nation. LISC brought their expertise in urban community development and economic development finance to the new partnership, and added public safety to the list of strategies for revitalization. The partnership with the National Trust has been dissolved, and LISC no longer uses the "Main Street" name (their program is now called Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program), but the strategies employed remain as follows:

- Organizing and mobilizing business owners and the surrounding community.
- Creating marketing and promotional activities that bring customers to businesses, expose new people to the corridor and neighborhood, and help to redefine the perception of the corridor.
- Rebuilding the physical environment and improving the local infrastructure to create a sense of safety for customers and an inviting, customer-friendly atmosphere. This includes mixed-use housing development, commercial space redevelopment and/or industrial development, in some cases.
- Assisting businesses to stabilize and expand, as well as bringing new businesses into the corridor.
- Reducing crime and enhancing public safety in order to build the local market for goods and services.

In 1999, the Minneapolis City Council entered into a six-year partnership with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), to utilize a LISC Main Street approach to revitalizing Central Avenue using these strategies. The Northeast Chamber of Commerce worked with LISC on developing the Central Avenue Mainstreet Program (CAMP), and in 2002, the [Northeast Community Development Corporation \(NECDC\)](#) was created to convene resident and business interests specifically along Central Avenue. A 2004 evaluation report of CAMP commissioned by LISC found that Central Avenue business owners believe that the CAMP program created a stronger connection among businesses and improved the safety and appearance of the neighborhood. As the ongoing support of the City and LISC has ended after six years, the CAMP program has ended. However, the program effectively developed the capacity of the NECDC to address revitalization on Central Avenue and provides a foundation for continued NECDC work with Central Avenue businesses and property owners.

Impact:

Between 1999 and 2005, **the EMV for the targeted section of Central Avenue rose from \$518,500 per acre to \$1.3 million, an increase of 151%** (Charts 1 and 2). The Northeast CDC has completed market studies and retail leakage phone surveys in the neighborhood, is engaged in a number of real estate development projects including an important site at Central and Lowry, has successfully lobbied for a Central Avenue Corridor Housing Initiative, currently in process, and supported community policing efforts of the Guardian Angels this summer in response to an increase in property crime.

Challenges:

Despite this good work by NECDC, the vacant square footage on Central Avenue has nearly doubled in the past six months, to approximately 20,000 square feet. NECDC was alert to this issue and requested assistance from the City and LISC to embark on a retail recruitment program. A contract of \$25,000, matched by LISC commercial corridor resources, was approved by the City Council on May 26, 2006, and NECDC director John Vaughn and a retail consultant are beginning to analyze which business types may succeed on the corridor and to work with property owners in recruiting these businesses.

The retail recruitment strategies will inform the real estate development activities of NECDC and will be incorporated into the Corridor Housing Initiative work, utilizing the CHI process as another opportunity for both public engagement around preferences for the avenue and education on the market realities for commercial development. Central Avenue, while it has experienced many successes, remains one of the City's four laggard corridors, measured by Estimated Market Value (Chart 1), and will likely continue to need some degree of support for NECDC corridor activities and redevelopment projects in the next few years. We have had preliminary conversations with LISC about a continued partnership on Central Avenue working with NECDC.