

Chapter 7

Existing Land Use Patterns

Objective: “Feasibility Assessment of New Office, Commercial, and Residential Uses”

Introduction

This Chapter describes existing land use conditions in the study area, and serves to lay the foundation to imagine and define changes, where appropriate, of the land use pattern of the study area. The findings of the existing land use conditions, therefore, will be used as an aid to accomplish the third objective of the plan, which is to assess the feasibility for new office, commercial and residential land uses, specifically:

- prepare a comprehensive revitalization plan that promotes more efficient land uses immediately adjacent to the roadway;
- suggest appropriate sites for retail and professional centers; and
- define potential financing sources for eventual development of sites.

The land-use related objective of the plan, described above, is compromised by traffic congestion, parcel assembly, misalignment of local roads, among other characteristics of the study area. Conversely, the objective is supported by positive characteristics as well.


The Chapter begins by describing the different land use districts within the planning area, and then shifts gears to describe in detail its “assets,” “opportunities,” and “constraints,” using maps, photographs and text. The chapter concludes with a summary assessment of existing land use patterns within the study area.


Existing Land Use and Conditions

DISTRICTS OF THE PROJECT STUDY AREA



Project team members identified the existing land use composition of the study area by using the City’s Arc Map “assessor parcel data” as a base document, upon which field observations of the actual land uses were recorded. Five distinct districts emerged from the land use study, whose acreages are:


Merced County Fairground District	53-acres or 33% of study area
McNamara Residential District	47-acres or 29% of study area
Martin Luther King Jr. Way District	25-acres or 16% of study area
State Route 99 -West District	18-acres or 11% of study area
State Route 99 -East District	18-acres or 11% of study area

Diagram  depicts the boundary of the districts.

The Assessor Parcel Data includes numerous categories of land use types that actually exist on the land. State Route 99 Embankment was added to recognize the unique non-taxed land in the study area. Diagram  depicts the spatial distribution of these land use categories, which include the following:

- Government Land
- Minor Commercial
- Miscellaneous
- Religious
- Residential 1 DU
- Residential 2-4 DU
- Residential 5+
- Utility
- Vacant
- State Route 99 Embankment

For each of these land use categories, the amount of acreage and lots that occur within each land use District were gathered and are presented in Table  and Table  respectively.

Key Study Area “Land Use” Characteristics Not counting public roadways, the study area consists of 160 acres divided into 398 lots. With roadways, the total size of the study area is  acres. When looking just at the 160 acres of non-roadway lands, the highest percentage of land occurring in the study area is “Government Land,” at 42%. Sixty-seven (67) acres is designated “Government Land,” with fifty-three (53) acres allotted to the Merced County Fairgrounds. Hence, the government controls most of the land within the study area, primarily as roads and the fairgrounds. The second highest ranking land use of the non-roadway lands consists of twenty-nine (29) acres of “Residential 1 Dwelling Unit” in 168 lots, mostly occurring in the *McNamara Residential District*. Tied for third place, are twenty-two (22) acres of “Minor Commercial” in 34 lots, mostly located in the Martin Luther King Jr. Way District, and twenty-two (22) acres of “Residential 2-4 Dwelling Units” in 120 lots, also concentrated in the *McNamara Residential District*. Another nine (9) acres are occupied with “Residential 5+ Dwelling Units,” which brings the total acreage of residential land to sixty (60) or 37% of the non-roadway lands. Residential lots also account for a large portion of the lots in the study area, capturing 319 of the overall 398 lots, with just over half of the residential lots being occupied with single-family homes. The area has five (5) acres of vacant land spread across 22 lots, and three (3) acres of “Religious” land spread across eight (8) lots.

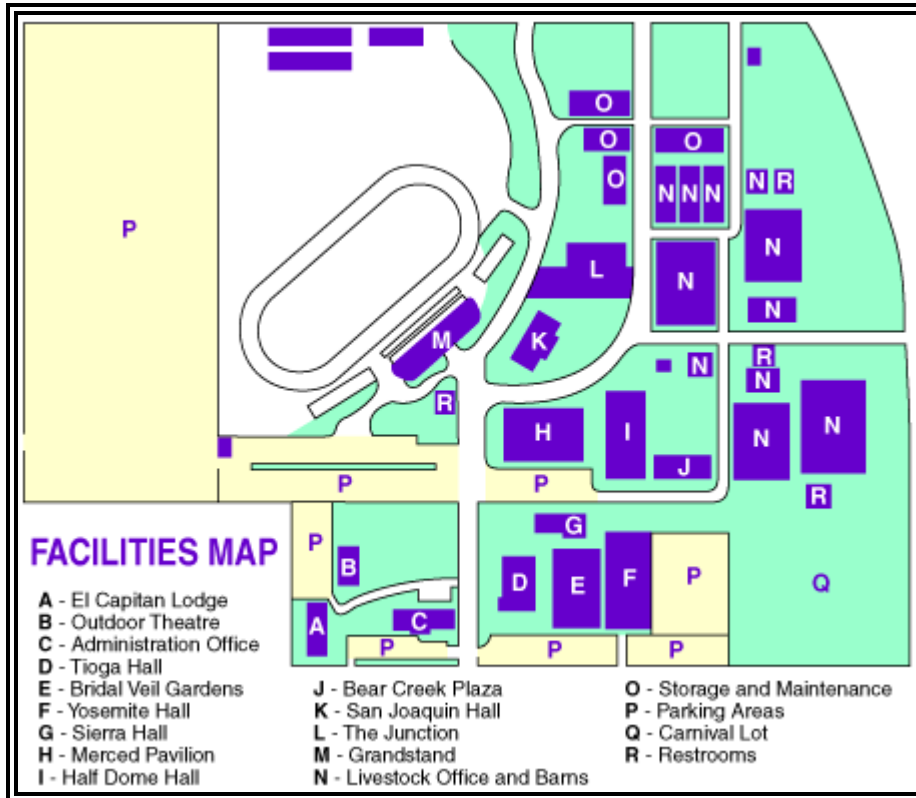
Martin Luther King Jr. Way District Although only consisting of 16% of the non-roadway land area in the study area, this district is the focus of the Revitalization Plan. The District is

comprised of the Martin Luther King Jr. Way corridor. The District contains a total of 25-acres of land, 20 of which are occupied with “Minor Commercial” land uses; 3-acres of Government Land; and 2-acres of vacant land. The corridor is dominated by heavy commercial uses, primarily automotive; commercial establishments include tire sales, auto repair and service, a few restaurants (mostly located within one strip development, as well as two small, independent Aquarius), a laundromat, a gun store, multiple liquor stores, County uses (Fire Department and Public Works Station), car rental, and other industrial uses, such as a small distribution site. This District has a high ratio of vacant lots, accounting for 40% of the total 5-acre total for the entire study area. The primary thoroughfare is Martin Luther King Jr. Way, which serves as both an automobile route and a route for trucking. The Martin Luther King Jr. Way corridor has no traffic signals or controlled crosswalks between 13th Street and Childs Avenue, the Northern and Southern project area boundaries.

State Route 99 Districts (East and West) This district is bounded on the north by State Route 99, on the south by Eleventh Street, on the eastern and western edges by the project area boundaries (“M” and “G” Streets), and is bisected into two parts by the Martin Luther King Jr. Way District. While both areas are generally similar, there are some differences. The west side includes a church and some government owned properties, whereas these are absent in the east. The east side contains 83-lots compared with 67-lots on the west side, with the difference mainly due to fourteen (14) more “Residential 1 Dwelling Units.” The east side also contains “Minor Commercial” land uses, where the west side does not. The east side also contains more vacant lots than does the west side. The street layout of both east and west sides is a traditional grid. Pedestrian activity and cycling appear to be high-frequency modes of transportation.

McNamara Residential District This district is bound on the north by Eleventh Street, on the east side by the Martin Luther King Jr. Way corridor, on the west side by “M” Street (project area boundary), and on the south by Childs Avenue (project area boundary). The District is 47-acres in size and comprises 29% of the study area acreage. It also includes the greatest variety of land uses. The dominant land uses in the neighborhood are residential, with single family homes occupying 20-acres on 116 lots. The second largest land use is “Residential 2-4 Dwelling Units,” occupying 12-acres on 65 lots. Unlike the State-Route 99 Districts, this District is served by a few small commercial establishments, which are located within the residential neighborhoods. These businesses tend to be liquor and convenience stores. This neighborhood benefits from the presence of McNamara Park, as well as the police station, which is located within the park. The street layout of District is a traditional grid with occasional termini.

Merced County Fairground District This district consists of the Merced County Fairgrounds, which is owned by the State of California, but lies within the project area. It contains the fairground facilities, as well as surrounding offices and other uses, primarily located along Martin Luther King Jr. Way. It should be noted that with the exception of the main entrance, this District is entirely fenced off from the rest of the project area.



"Acres" of Land by Land Use Type within Study Area Districts							
	MLK Jr. Way	Fairgrounds	McNamara	SR 99- West	SR 99- East	Total No. of Acres	% of Total Study Area
Government Land	3	53	9	2	0	67	42%
Minor Commercial	20	0	1	0	1	22	13%
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Religious	0	0	1	1	0	3	2%
Residential 1 DU	1	0	20	3	5	29	18%
Residential 2-4 DU	0	0	12	5	5	22	13%
Residential 5+	0	0	2	4	3	9	6%
Utility	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Vacant	2	0	2	0	1	5	3%
SR 99 Embankment	0	0	0	3	2	5	3%
Total Acres	25	53	47	18	17	160	100%
Percent of Total Study Area	16%	33%	29%	11%	11%	100%	

"Lots" of Land by Land Use Type within Study Area Districts							
	MLK Jr. Way	Fairgrounds	McNamara	SR 99- West	SR 99- East	Total No. of Lots	% of Total Study Area
Government Land	3	1	4	2	0	10	3%
Minor Commercial	28	0	3	0	3	34	9%
Misc	0	0	1	0	0	1	0%
Religious	0	0	4	4	0	8	2%
Residential 1 DU	2	0	116	18	32	168	41%
Residential 2-4 DU	0	0	65	28	27	120	30%
Residential 5+	0	0	8	11	12	31	8%
Utility	0	0	0	1	0	1	0%
Vacant	5	0	8	1	8	22	6%
SR 99 Embankment	0	0	0	2	1	3	1%
Total Number of Lots	38	1	209	67	83	398	100%
Percent of Total Study Area	10%	0%	52%	17%	21%	100%	

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATIONS

ZONING DISTRICTS

Non-Conforming Land Uses

The mapping and field exercise resulted in the identification of **four** non-conforming properties.

Nonconforming Use #1


This section of the report discusses the assets, opportunities and constraints that exist within each of the four areas of the corridor. Because there are some strengths and weaknesses that are relevant corridor-wide, the discussion first focuses on these before addressing each section of the corridor individually. This is followed by maps of each corridor area that graphically depict the locations of relevant assets, opportunities and constraints. The majority of the comments made during stakeholder interview sessions were concerns that the existing physical and economic conditions of the corridor are negatively impacting its capacity for redevelopment. Five weaknesses were repeatedly cited during interviews:

- Decreasing truck accessibility and poor traffic flow at key intersections;
- Aging industrial infrastructure;
- Negative perception created by crime, drug dealing, and prostitution along the corridor;
- Unattractive physical appearance overall; and
- With the exception of demand for industrial space, a generally weak real estate market.

Some interviewees noted that the corridor was in better physical condition than it has been in the past, particularly near the airport, but that improvements are mitigated by a general sense of disinvestment and stagnation, if not actual decline. Despite the challenges facing the corridor, some interviewees found that the existing conditions presented several strengths that could be leveraged for redevelopment and revitalization. Specific strengths include:

- A number of vacant or underutilized lots available for redevelopment.

Assets

This section of the report discusses the assets that exist within the study area. Because there are some assets that are relevant corridor-wide, the discussion first focuses on these before addressing site-specific assets. Diagram  depicts the spatial distribution of these assets.

Although the study area is gripped with disinvestment, it also contains a framework of positive features that if protected and enhanced, could help to form a foundation for revitalization. These area wide assets include the existence of parks and open space features and nearby schools; streets lined with mature trees and sidewalks that provide a pleasant walking environment; a public-street right-of-way network that allows for all forms of transportation; a large variety of land uses in which to live, play and work; and vibrant walkable neighborhoods where people are out-and-about their day's business. The study area has 'location-location-location' traits, located within walking distance of downtown, having direct access to State Route 99, and with parks, schools, and commercial and employment centers nearby.

JOB SITES

What the area lacks in major employers, it makes up in variety of employment opportunities. The small scale nature of businesses provides stability against large swings in availability of nearby jobs, and also provides for a variety of commercial services. The Martin Luther King Jr. Way District contains the largest grouping of businesses.

OPEN SPACES AND RECREATIONAL SITES

The following descriptions appear in the *2004 Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan*.

McNamara Park McNamara Park is a very heavily used park, and contains the largest City-owned swimming pool. Although this park is small, it serves the community park function. There is a fairly large children's play area with a sand surface, a play structure, and spring toys. A basketball court is located adjacent to the parking lot. There are also two lighted softball fields. The park was developed in a piecemeal fashion, and none of the architecture or materials are consistent. The youth drop-in center is a former fire station and could use significant renovations. The police station is new and fairly attractive, but was not designed to fit into an overall architectural program for the park.

11th and H Mini Park* This is one of the smaller (mini-park) sites (about 7,500 square feet) and does not appear to get much use.

Love Veasley Family Park* The park is the size of a single family home site (about 7,500 sq.ft.). The play structure is very small, and there are no other facilities or landscaping at the park. This site is within walking distance of Gilbert Macias Park, McNamara Park and Harriet Tubman Park, all of which have nicer and more interesting play equipment.

* Due to these parks' limited recreation value and overlapping service area, the *2004 Merced Park and Open Space Master Plan* recommended that the City should consider disposing of these sites. They are the size of residential lots, and are located among single family residences.

State Route 99 Frontage The embankment of State Route 99 forms the study area's northern boundary, and is characterized by a dense planting of mature trees located in a wide band of property set between 13th Street and the southern edge of an elevated freeway, giving the area a forested sloped appearance. These trees form a visual barrier to the elevated freeway, although noise can be obtrusive to occupants of properties on the south side of 13th Street.

OWNER OCCUPIED HOUSING

Of the 388 non-government owned lots, 102 are owner-occupied. The majority of these lots are single-family homes. Diagram [REDACTED] depicts the spatial distribution of owner-occupied lots. Although there are comparatively few of these lots, they are distributed fairly evenly throughout the study area.

VIBRANT USE AREAS

A variety of uses offer the surrounding community opportunities for social gatherings and cultural events. These include Club Mercedes, the Merced County Fairgrounds, parks and numerous churches. A local fire station and police substation also serve as important social anchors.

Opportunities

This section of the report discusses the opportunities that exist within the study area. Because there are some opportunities that are relevant corridor-wide, the discussion first focuses on these before addressing site-specific opportunities. Diagram [REDACTED] depicts their spatial distribution.

While opportunities for new development, reinvestment of existing structures and improved living conditions for many existing and future residents, there are an equal amount of constraints (see discussion in next section). Based on the study area's location and structural nature of the neighborhood, opportunities for redevelopment of residential and commercial lots exist throughout the area in the form of vacant and underutilized lots. But the largest opportunities lay in upgrades and reinvestment of existing structures by private owners. Strategic public investments, assistance programs and improvements could spur private interest to create a renaissance in the area.

VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED LAND ASSESSMENT

State Route 99 Frontage The embankment of State Route 99 forms the study area's northern boundary, and is characterized by a dense planting of mature trees located in a wide band of property set between 13th Street and the southern edge of an elevated freeway, giving the area a forested sloped appearance. The area along 13th Street, closest to SR 99, is occupied with an unattractive chain-link fence and some asphalt placed next to the curb that is used by pedestrians. Development of an attractive pedestrian walkway, or other open space enhancement, would capitalize on this opportunity to improve the neighborhood.

Vacant Lots. [redacted] percent of the lots within the study area are vacant. This amounts to [redacted] percent of the acreage in the study area. The size and location of these lots are such that opportunities for change through development of individual lots will be localized.

Site	Address	Owner Type	Acres	Use Ideas
1				
2				Transitional Housing Center
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PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY

Martin Luther King Junior Way The last major improvement that defined this road was in [redacted] when it was widened to four lanes and engineered primarily for vehicles. Now, more than [redacted] years later, and essentially used in the same manner, there is tremendous opportunity to integrate all forms of mobility and to soften the harsh concrete river of cars with islands and banks of landscaping.

Alleys Alleys are an essential component of a traditional grid road design, and are experiencing a renewal in urban designs as an efficient way to provide access to smaller homes placed on small lots. There are [redacted] alley segments in the study area, some of which connect with Martin Luther King Junior Way. New planning concepts exist that can provide an aesthetic and safe realm in what are now dirty and avoided public spaces.

HAZARD REMEDIATION SITES

There are five properties within the project area that have experienced contamination issues, according to the data maintained by the County of Merced and the State of California. A description of each of these sites follows along with a brief history, current status, and timelines for clearance as appropriate.

Former World Oil #53 This site is located at 1244 Martin Luther King Jr. Way. Merced County is the lead agency regarding the remediation of the site. The site is currently vacant with remediation infrastructure on-site within a fenced compound.

The case began in 1996 when gasoline released from former underground storage tanks was discovered. The groundwater generally flows toward City Well Site #3C (1000 feet west of the site), but no contamination has been found in the well. The gasoline tanks were removed in 1999. The site was originally cleaned up with over excavation of impacted soils. Since 1999, soil vapor extraction and air/oxygen injection to the groundwater has been used. The site's groundwater wells are monitored on a semi-annual basis. The site is currently under consideration for closure as "low risk" pending the soil vapor investigation.

U-Haul This site is located at 1247 Martin Luther King Jr. Way. Merced County is the lead agency regarding the remediation of the site. U-Haul continues to operate on-site. The case was opened in 1990 and the case was closed in 1999. Issues were waste oil, hydraulic oil, and lube oil releases. No information is available on the clean-up, but generally in these situations (minor oil spills), soil disposal is used.

Leonard Truck Repair / also known as Merced Truck & Trailer This site is located at 625 Martin Luther King Jr. Way. Merced County was the lead agency, but the site contamination "co-mingled" with the adjacent Merced County Public Works Corporation Yard's groundwater contamination, so the State Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) is now the lead agency for the "co-mingled" groundwater contamination.

The case started in 1991 with gas and diesel fuel releases from former underground storage tanks and fueling systems. Site clean-up began in 2007. Since May 2010, a soil vapor extraction treatment system has been in operation and the system is in the process of being augmented with air injection below the water table. According to [REDACTED], these systems should be sufficient to stop the plume from further migration. The site's groundwater wells are monitored on a semi-annual basis. According to the Regional Water Quality Control Board's August 2, 2010, status letter, site clean-up for both sites is expected to take 4 to 7 years.

Merced County Public Works Corporation Yard This site is located at 715 Martin Luther King Jr. Way (see previous paragraph).

Former Condor Freight Lines This site is located at 841 Martin Luther King Jr. Way. Merced County was the lead agency regarding the remediation of the site. The site is currently vacant or used for _____. This site was impacted by vehicle fuel releases from underground storage tanks. The site was investigated, clean-up actions were initiated, and ultimately the site received “regulatory closure” on August 18, 2009.

PLANNED LAND USE IMPROVEMENTS

There are a number of planned improvements to infrastructure in the Study Area.

McNamara Park Planned improvements include three new soccer/football fields; public art, an open-air performing area; renovated playground area; new landscaped boulevard; and new security cameras.

Sidewalks and Handicapped Ramps The City has a multi-year project, utilizing federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, to replace sidewalks and handicapped ramps in the Study Area. These include four ramps on the north side of Childs Avenue, two on M Street, and two on 5th Street. The recently completed traffic signal project at Childs and G Street also installed handicap ramps at all four corners.

Childs Avenue Pedestrian Crossing on Highway 59 Another City project, which went out to bid in June 2010, would install a Childs Avenue pedestrian crossing on Highway 59 to complete the recently completed Childs/Highway 59 traffic signal project. Sidewalk will be installed on the east side of the Highway to connect to the existing stub on Childs Avenue and the existing end of the sidewalk at the County Fairground’s main entrance.

Capital Improvement Plan Projects On an annual basis as part of the City’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process, the City determines priorities for replacing/upgrading sewer mains, water mains, street and alley resurfacing, and other related projects. However, funding is usually only available for a limited number of sites each year. One example of a water main which should receive some attention is the main in the 11th/12th Street alley from G to I Streets, which generates a lot of calls for repair.

Constraints

This section of the report discusses the constraints that exist within the study area. Because there are some constraints that are relevant corridor-wide, the discussion first focuses on these before addressing site-specific constraints. Diagram _____ depicts their spatial distribution.

Public perception of the corridor is that of a heavy commercial zone dominated by an ugly road. Equally damaging has been the widespread decay of City infrastructure and private properties. These trends need to be reversed in order to successfully revitalize the corridor and study area.

MISSING INFRASTRUCTURE

Streetlights

Street Trees

Bike Facilities

Transit Stops

DETERIORATING ALLEYS

AGING HOUSING STOCK

MISSING OR UNDERPERFORMING UTILITIES

Wastewater System As a result, the one major sewer improvement needed within the Study Area is already in place and is designed to meet the needs of the land use designations within the City's General Plan at full build-out.

The area is completely served by public sewer; no properties are on private septic systems.

The majority of properties are served by 6", 8", 10" and 12" lines located in alleys and streets. There is a 16" sewer line in 11th Street. In 1982, the Canal Street Relief Sewer, a 24-inch sewer-trunk line, was installed in Canal Street from 11th Street to Gerard Avenue, as a project from a citywide sewer facilities study.

Although most sewer lines are located within public road rights-of-way, there is a 12" line of approximately 0.5 mile in length between 11th Street and Childs Avenue (1/2 block west of Martin Luther King Jr. Way) that runs through private properties and alongside and under buildings. Due to the risk of leaks and associated sink-hole formation, lines should be placed away from building sites. Though rare, there is also a risk of methane gas explosions. The presence of this line therefore is a constraint to development in this part of the project area.

There are two sewer lines that need to be replaced, these being (1) the line in the alley on the east side of Martin Luther King Jr. Way, between 12th and 13th; and (2) the line in the alley between Martin Luther King Jr. Way and K Street, between 11th and 12th Streets.

Any major change in land use designation would need a review to verify that sewer flows would be adequate from the Canal Street sewer trunk or larger lines would need to be installed by the proposed development.

Water System The water system within the Study Area is centered around three backbone streets (Childs Avenue, Canal, and G Street), City Well Site #3C at [REDACTED], and one elevated tank at [REDACTED]. There is a 16-inch and a 10-inch water main in Canal Street, a 12-inch main in Childs Avenue, and parallel water mains (an 8-inch and a 10-inch) in G Street. Most water mains throughout the area are 6-inch lines with some 8-inch lines. The smaller mains are mostly in the alleys with large portions of local streets having no water mains. State

Highway 59 has two 6-inch water mains, one on each side of the roadway. These mains are, on average, over 80 years old.

In other parts of the City, 6-inch lines are being replaced by 8-inch lines to comply with current City standards. This should also be the case when any 6-inch mains are replaced in the Study Area. It is recommended that a localized water study occur in the Study Area to examine existing fire flow capabilities, measured against various development scenarios that may require increased fire flow. In addition, the possible need for additional redundancy in the water system should also be analyzed. Those parcels that have water mains on the opposite side of Highway 59 from their parcel may experience significant costs to provide necessary water to their parcels upon development or redevelopment.

Storm Drain System The area is primarily served by 12" and 18" pipes at street intersections, except that the McNamara Neighborhood District does not include such improvements. Additionally, 24" storm-drain lines exist along 13th Street and on the east side of Martin Luther King Jr. Way/Highway 59 between 6th Street and Childs Avenue. A 48" storm-drain trunk line exists in G Street.

The 2002 *City of Merced Storm Drain Master Plan*, not officially adopted but used by City staff for guidance, shows three storm drain upgrades and one new storm drain needed in the study area. The three upgrades are: (1) G Street from Childs to 13th Street; (2) Childs Avenue near M Street; and (3) 13th Street from Highway 59 to M Street. Each proposed storm drain is larger than the current lines in place. The proposed new storm drain is in Highway 59 from 11th Street to Childs Avenue, where no storm drain currently exists.

On the east side of Highway 59 from 13th Street to Childs Avenue, storm flows in the gutter vary from 4 feet wide at 11th Street to up to 12 to 16 feet just north of Childs. This all flows east to a State-owned storm drain pump on Childs Avenue. The pump station needs to be upgraded for increased reliability. It often clogs with silt, which causes significant ponding in Childs Avenue, up to a couple of feet deep.

All other streets in the Study Area have surface flow of storm water. Many of these local streets and alleys are too flat to drain properly. Ponding at street corners is common and gutter flows of up to 3 feet wide occur on some streets every year.

UNSIGHTLY PROPERTY

While bright spots exist, primarily in the residential districts, the area as a whole, particularly Martin Luther King Junior Way, is unattractive. Listed below are areas of the study area that are particularly impacted:

- *Building Facades;*
- *Alleys;*
- *Fencing (Commercial and Residential);*
- *State Route 99 Frontage with 13th Street;*

- *Intersection of 13th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way;*
- *Intersection of 12th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way;*
- *Intersection of 11th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way;*
- *Intersection of 8th Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Way; and*
- *Park strips*

TRUCK TRAFFIC

Maps:

Private Land Use Map
Public Land Use Map
Owner-Occupied Homes
Asset Map
Opportunity Map
Constraint Map
Composite Map

Progression of Planning / Foundational Elements

Include a progression chart of the area to put MLK Plan in context.