Eastfield Partnership: Bridging Corporate Vision & Community Needs

Institute for Public Policy
and Social Research
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Eastfield Partnership:
Bridging Corporate Vision & Community Needs

Michigan Applied Public Policy Research Brief

Principal investigators:

Fatemeh Saeidi-Rizi, PhD.
Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture Program
School of Planning, Design & Construction
Michigan State University

Deyanira Nevarez Martinez, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Urban & Regional Planning Program
School of Planning, Design & Construction
Michigan State University

Student Assistants:

Musab Wedyan
Graduate Assistant, School of Planning, Design & Construction
Michigan State University

Lizbeth Munoz-Mejia, Fiona Roth, Sarah Arnold
Undergraduate Assistants, School of Planning, Design & Construction
Michigan State University

Cover image by Nick King,
originally published in the Lansing State Journal on April 22, 2024.

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary

This report presents an integrated assessment and design strategy for the revitalization of the Eastfield Neighborhood in Lansing, Michigan. Supported by survey data, correlation analysis, stakeholder interviews, focus group interviews and spatial analysis, the project aims to develop a community-informed vision that strengthens neighborhood stability, addresses persistent challenges related to vacancy and disinvestment, and expands opportunities for equitable redevelopment. Through the combined expertise of urban planning, landscape architecture, and community engagement, the research identifies key social, environmental, and structural factors shaping Eastfield's current conditions and translates these findings into actionable design solutions grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of residents.

The project's objectives were threefold: (1) to document resident perceptions of neighborhood needs through quantitative and qualitative methods, (2) to identify the structural and institutional dynamics influencing redevelopment outcomes, and (3) to develop design interventions that respond directly to community concerns while advancing long-term sustainability and resilience. Survey analysis revealed that neighborhood satisfaction is strongly associated with social cohesion, access to green spaces, and perceptions of safety and aesthetics. Respondents expressed strong preferences for small-scale, community-oriented amenities—such as cafés, grocery stores, and fitness centers—that function as "third places" supporting everyday social interaction. Green spaces, urban gardens, farmers markets, and walking/biking paths emerged as the highest redevelopment priorities, underscoring the importance of high-quality public spaces for improving neighborhood well-being.

Interviews with city officials, institutional partners, and local leaders revealed five cross-cutting themes essential for understanding Eastfield's redevelopment context: (1) the importance of preserving residential stability while focusing new growth along the Michigan Avenue corridor; (2) the significant influence of institutional landholdings, particularly those of University of Michigan Health-Sparrow Hospital (Sparrow Hospital); (3) the strong but underutilized community identity; (4) structural and financial barriers that impede reinvestment; and (5) opportunities for incremental, partnership-driven improvements. These findings highlight both the neighborhood's assets, including strong social networks and strategic location, and its persistent structural challenges, such as vacancy, maintenance deficits, limited community influence over development decisions, and constrained municipal regulatory authority.

Drawing on these insights, the report proposes a set of design solutions that include enhanced green infrastructure, activation of vacant parcels through temporary and long-term uses, improved non-motorized mobility systems, and the creation of human-scale commercial nodes that support local economic activity and social cohesion. These interventions aim to strengthen the neighborhood's physical character while addressing resident-identified needs related to safety, social interaction, environmental quality, and equitable access to amenities. The proposed solutions emphasize incremental change, stewardship-based management, and collaboration with institutions such as Michigan State University, the Ingham County Land Bank, and local nonprofit organizations.

2. Introduction

2.1 Neighborhood Economic and Household Profile

Eastfield is a smaller neighborhood inside Lansing's Census Tract 65, roughly corresponding to Census Blocks 1002, 1003, 1010, 3001, 4001, and 4003, and thus its statistical portrait is based on tract-level data that best approximates conditions for this area. Census 2020 data show the neighborhood area is primarily residential with the majority of housing units occupied and a high share of renter-occupied units relative to owner-occupied units, and households include a mix of family and non-family types (DECENNIALDHC2020.H3, H5, H10, H12, P16, P21). American Community Survey (ACS) data for the tract reveal relatively low household incomes, with many households concentrated in lower income brackets and median household income well below broader regional benchmarks (ACSST5Y2023.S1901, S1903). Housing cost characteristics indicate that many residents, especially renters, spend a large share of their income on housing, with a substantial share classified as cost-burdened (paying more than 30 % of income on housing) and a notable portion severely cost-burdened (more than 50 % of income on housing) (ACSST5Y2023.S2503). By contrast, the City of Lansing overall has a higher median household income, about $52,170 in 2023, but still faces affordability challenges, with nearly one in five residents living in poverty (Lansing QuickFacts; 18.0 % poverty rate) and typical incomes that remain modest relative to regional and state benchmarks ($52,170 median income for Lansing vs. roughly $69,000 for Michigan overall) (Census.gov).

2.2 Background of the issue and current policies

The issue of blight in neighborhoods, often exacerbated by the presence of vacant lots, typically occurs due to a combination of economic decline, population loss, and policy failures, all of which negatively impact the surrounding community (Carpenter, Mitchell, & Price, 2015; Herbert, 2018; Tisher, 2013). Studies highlight that blight also has significant social and environmental consequences, affecting the quality of life for residents and leading to increased crime and health issues (De Leon & Schilling, 2017; Mireku, Abubakari, & Martinez, 2021; Pinto, Ferreira, Spahr, Sunderman, & Pereira, 2023). Furthermore, inadequate urban planning, poor enforcement of building codes, and lack of infrastructure investment contribute to the problem of vacant lots. In Michigan, Detroit is one of the most well-known examples of city decline, showcasing the severe consequences of unmanaged vacant properties (Xie, Gong, Lan, & Zeng, 2018). Based on this, addressing vacant lots through effective policies and redevelopment initiatives is crucial for reversing urban decay and fostering vibrant, healthy communities.

In addition to the previous, in the last decade there have been land use changes that have shaped the makeup of Eastfield neighborhood. With the presence of Sparrow Hospital, now U of M-Health Sparrow, the built condition of the neighborhood and as a result the economic and social context in the community have been affected. Within the Eastfield neighborhood boundary, 89% of the parcels are residential, 5% are state-owned, and 6% are commercial. Comparing these percentages to the amount of land coverage by zoning, the numbers are significantly different with residentials parcels making up 51% of all land coverage, 26% owned by the state, and 23% dedicated to commercial properties. Of that 23% dedicated to commercial properties, 19% of that land is owned by U of M Health-Sparrow with a recent increase in this number since the purchase of Old Eastern High School by U of M Health-Sparrow in 2016. Of the state-owned land, much of it consists of athletic fields dedicated primarily to Eastern High School and Lansing Catholic High School. In fact, about one third of the total land area of Eastfield neighborhood is exclusive to these academic institutions (LansingGovernmentWebsite, 2025). Within the decade, the neighborhood has dealt with the presence of vacant or underused lots including roughly 10 residential lots but most spatially significantly being the commercially-owned parcels between Ferguson St. and North Holmes St. that was occupied most recently by Goodyear. The building became vacant and demolition took place shortly after. Currently the parcels hold a temporary parking lot as of August 2024. Other significant land use changes came with the property purchases by U of M Health-Sparrow of numerous residential lots within the neighborhood being made in 2016 and since (LansingGovernmentWebsite, 2025).

2.3 Summary of Michigan's existing policies and strategies

Michigan addresses vacant lots through a statewide network of land banks and nuisance abatement programs. Established under the Land Bank Fast Track Act of 2003, land banks are public entities focused on acquiring, managing, and repurposing vacant and blighted properties. These land banks, such as the State Land Bank Authority, the Detroit Land Bank Authority, and the Ingham County Land Bank, play a crucial role in transforming vacant lots into productive use, often through rehabilitation, demolition, and resale to responsible owners. Nuisance abatement programs, like the one in Detroit, take legal action against owners of blighted properties, compelling them to maintain or redevelop their properties.

Regarding the acquisition of properties by large corporations, such as hospitals or companies like General Motors, there are currently no specific policies that prevent these entities from purchasing houses within neighborhoods and leaving them vacant. However, there are expectations and sometimes pressures from local governments and communities for these corporations to develop the purchased lands or at least maintain them to prevent blight. The lack of regulations means that large entities can hold onto vacant properties without immediate development plans, leading to prolonged periods of blight and underutilization.

Problems of blight and divestment in Lansing led Mayor Andy Schor (Mayor of Lansing since 2018) to form the Michigan Ave. Corridor Improvement Authority, a group of business owners aiming to revitalize this iconic road linking Michigan State University and Michigan's capitol building. Despite this intervention, overall blight (as measured by unoccupied buildings on Michigan Ave) has only increased. Urgency for a shared vision has increased because Sparrow Hospital, which is on Michigan Avenue, has initiated work on an $800 million development plan. The CEO of Sparrow publicly called for green space to be included (LansingStateJournal, 2021), but no written plan exists, and only a parking lot is currently under construction. Furthermore, controversy erupted when Sparrow demolished a historic building that it aquired from the Lansing School District eventhought the school district had sold itwith the caveat that its historic character be preserved.

2.4 Positioning Eastfield Neighborhood as a case study to address these gaps.

While Detroit's population has increased recently, many cities in Michigan remain at risk of blight including Lansing. In urban areas like Lansing, the proliferation of vacant properties contribute to declining property values, increased crime rates, and diminished neighborhood vitality (Schneider, 2023). Effective redevelopment of these lots can revitalize neighborhoods, stimulate local economies, improve public safety, and provide much-needed housing (Branas et al., 2018; Kim, Newman, & Jiang, 2020; Stewart et al., 2019).

In February of 2024, we received an email from a Lansing resident seeking assistance with redesigning their neighborhood. The resident lives in the Eastfield Neighborhood, adjacent to Sparrow Hospital. Since 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Sparrow Hospital has been purchasing numerous houses around its campus due to falling interest rates. Unfortunately, these properties remain vacant, with no development plans in place. This situation has led to increased blight and a decline in neighborhood vitality. In addition, the blight in the Eastfield neighborhood not only is impacting the residents of the neighborhood, it also has impacts on the 6,000 people who work at the Sparrow hospital in Lansing. The situation in the Eastfield Neighborhood highlights the need for more stringent policies or incentives to ensure that purchased properties are developed in a timely manner.

2.5 Neighborhood Challenges

The neighborhood currently faces a significant imbalance between parking supply and active transportation infrastructure. Parking availability and usage patterns remain poorly understood, as systematic data on occupancy and peak demand are lacking. Without such information, parking management decisions risk being reactive rather than evidence-based. At the same time, biking infrastructure is critically underdeveloped, with only one bike rack and three parked bicycles observed in contrast to approximately 600 cars on the west side. This disparity highlights a missed opportunity to encourage alternative modes of transportation. The lack of secure bike facilities, sheltered racks, and designated routes creates barriers for potential cyclists, limiting progress toward sustainable and equitable mobility.

"Figure 1, Top Floor Parking Ramp.

Figure 2, Surface Parking Lot.

Figure 3, Eastfield Neighborhood Challenges.

The neighborhood is facing several interconnected challenges that require attention as shown in the figure: (1) a lack of green spaces, public seating, and cleanliness, which limits recreational opportunities and reduces the area's livability; (2) a disconnected community, as residents have limited access to gathering spaces that promote interaction and identity; (3) safety concerns, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, stemming from inadequate infrastructure and oversight; (4) a lack of traffic control, which increases risks and reduces efficiency for both vehicles and non-motorized users; and (5) limited connectivity, which hinders access to businesses, services, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Eastfield neighborhood has **minimal multi-use parks** in the immediate vicinity to allow for walkability. With plentiful open space there is potential for redevelopment into a **revitalized** environment for **community gathering**.

Figure 4, Lack of Green Spaces
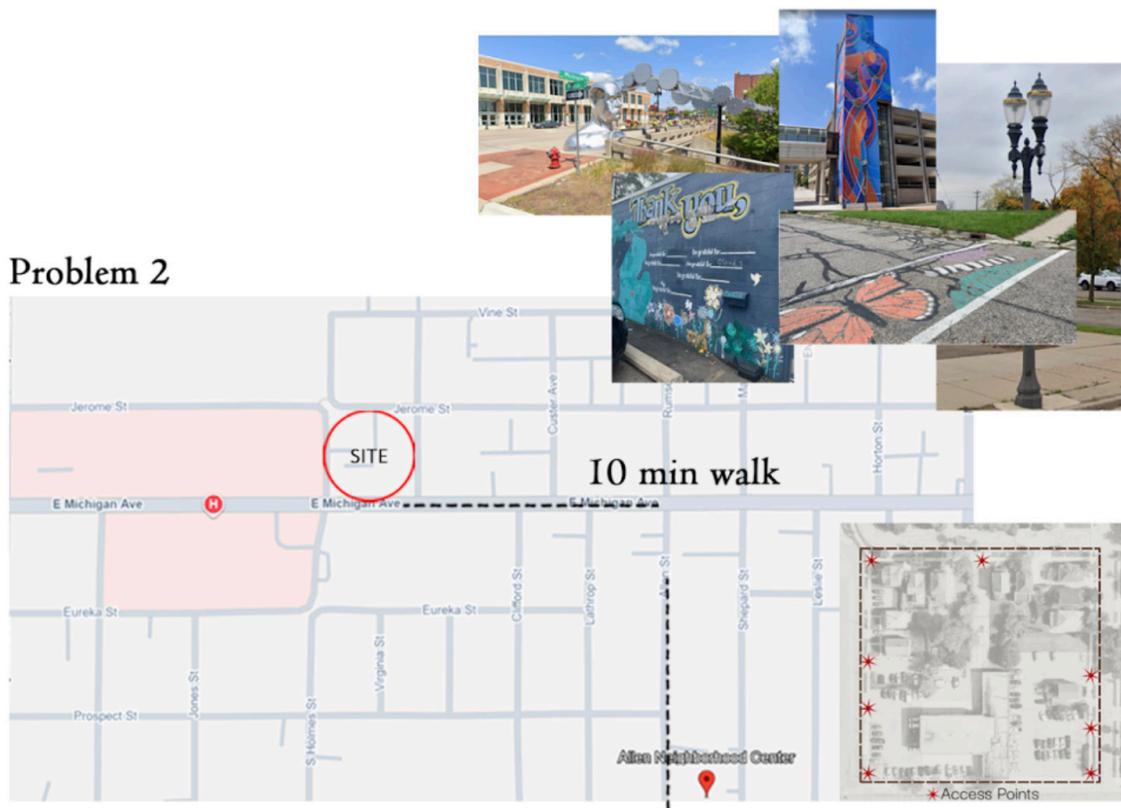

Problem 2

10 min walk

Figure 5, Walkability Issues.

As shown in Figure 5, the closest neighborhood center is in Allen neighborhood which is a 10 minute walk from the neighborhood. The absence of a dedicated, local gathering space within Eastfield significantly undermines opportunities for connection, collaboration, and community-building. This lack of accessible communal space contributes to a weakened sense of identity. Lansing is a vibrant city and having a space closer to the residents would foster an engaged community. The site has possible access points directly within the neighborhood.

Figure 6, Safety Concerns.

As shown in Figure 6, Jerome street is about 27 ft wide making it the widest street in the neighborhood. Residents want to ensure safety throughout the neighborhood and the main focuses to foster that would rely on lighting, sidewalks, and the main street. Examples would be having light cover more surface area, maintenance on sidewalks/making them wider, and adding bike lanes and/or speed bumps to encourage slow traffic and a multi-modal environment by creating a designated space for cyclists.
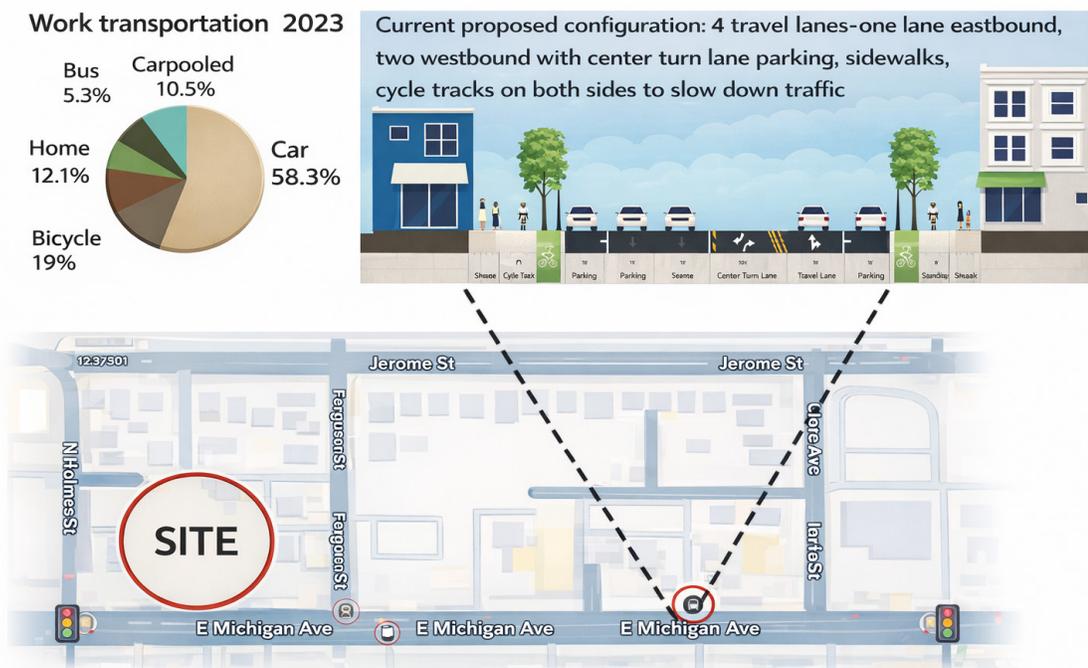

Figure 7, Lack of Traffic Control.

From the first traffic light on the left to the second on the right there is a distance of 345 meters, 1,133 ft, and 0.215 miles. With various businesses and bus stops in between, traffic control would ensure pedestrian safety, multimodal use, and shorten the access time to businesses and bus stops for those in the neighborhood.
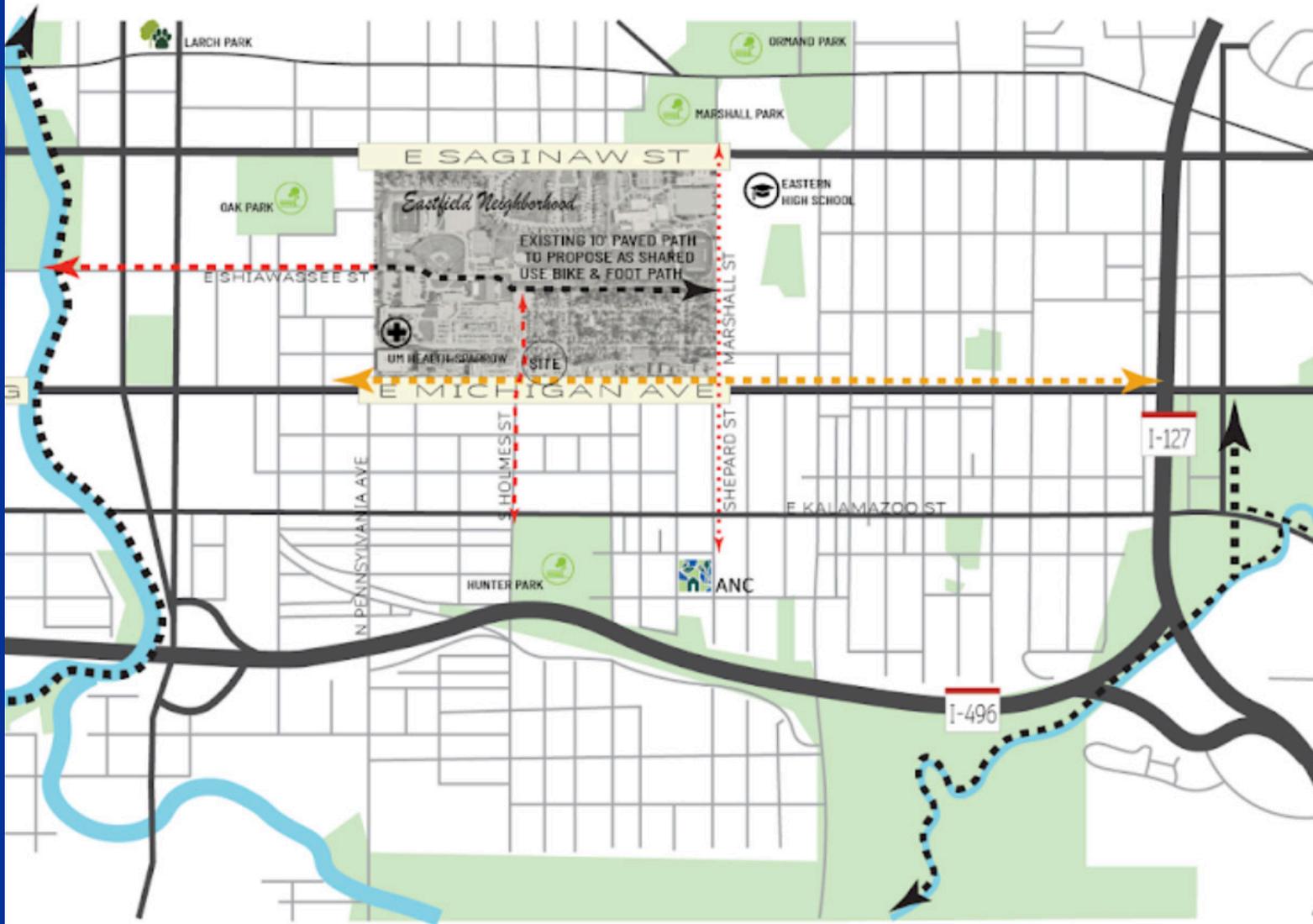

Figure 8, Limited Connectivity.

Jerome Street, approximately 27 feet wide, is the widest street in the neighborhood and serves as a central corridor where residents emphasize the need for safety and accessibility improvements. Priorities include better lighting coverage, sidewalk maintenance and widening, the addition of bike lanes, and the installation of speed bumps to slow traffic and create a multi-modal environment that designates safe space for cyclists. At the same time, the absence of a dedicated, local gathering space within Eastfield undermines opportunities for connection, collaboration, and community-building, forcing residents to rely heavily on the Allen neighborhood center, a ten-minute walk away. Establishing a closer communal hub would foster identity and engagement within Eastfield. Complementing this, the proposal to ex-

pand bike lanes throughout the neighborhood and connect them with Lansing's existing system, including links to parks and East Michigan Avenue, would strengthen connectivity and support local businesses. Residents also expressed a need for a dedicated dog park, as the nearest option, Lanph Park, is only an open field located at a considerable distance. Creating a nearby dog park alongside expanded bike lanes would enhance community interaction, safety, and public health. To guide these improvements, a Symbol Key is used to indicate infrastructure status: Proposed Bike Lane (red dashed line), Under Construction (orange dashed line), and Existing Bike Lane (black dashed line).

3. Project Objectives & Research Questions

The core objective of this project is to advance a community-led vision for neighborhood revitalization, supported by the professional expertise of urban planners and landscape architects. Our goal is to cultivate a shared, cohesive framework among city officials, Sparrow Hospital, local businesses, and Eastfield residents that can guide the redevelopment of vacant and underutilized parcels in a manner that strengthens neighborhood stability and long-term vitality. With seed funding from Michigan State University, we initiated this effort through a local case study focused on designing an intervention that intentionally challenges and reshapes the narratives contributing to urban decline at a time when the city is actively working against these narratives within downtown and other key areas of the city. This project leverages MSU's interdisciplinary strengths in Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture to co-produce a comprehensive community vision plan—one that reflects local priorities, supports equitable redevelopment, and provides a roadmap for future investment and decision-making. To achieve these objectives, the project is guided by the following research questions, which translate the broader goals into specific lines of inquiry:

1. How do Michigan's existing policies influence the management and redevelopment of vacant lots within urban neighborhoods, and what are the barriers to preventing blight?
2. How have vacant lots and blight in Eastfield Neighborhood impacted the safety, quality of life, and experiences of residents and Sparrow Hospital employees?

3. What are effective strategies, including community-led initiatives and urban planning expertise, for engaging stakeholders in the sustainable redevelopment of vacant lots in Eastfield Neighborhood?

4. Methodology

This project employed a mixed-method, community-centered research design that integrates quantitative analysis, qualitative insights, and participatory design processes. Given the Eastfield Neighborhood's complex context—marked by long-term residential instability, demographic shifts, vacant properties, and the expanding institutional footprint of Sparrow Hospital—the methodology was intentionally structured to capture both lived experiences and spatial conditions. The approach combined demographic data analysis, resident and employee interviews, community surveys, and a student-led design charrette, ultimately informing a phased redevelopment framework aligned with neighborhood priorities.

The first phase consisted of gathering contextual data to establish a comprehensive baseline of neighborhood conditions. Demographic and socioeconomic indicators were compiled from publicly available datasets and local records to identify trends in population change, household structure, property ownership, housing age, racial composition, income, and employment patterns. In addition to that, land use and property records—including residential, commercial, and state-owned parcels—were examined to trace changes associated with Sparrow Hospital's acquisitions since 2016, the demolition of former industrial parcels, and the emergence of temporary parking lots on commercially owned land. These spatial changes directly informed our understanding of the neighborhood's increasing vacancy and resulting blight, as well as gaps in green space, connectivity, and active transportation infrastructure.

In the second phase, a neighborhood-wide survey was deployed to capture residents' perceptions of safety, satisfaction, green space availability, mobility infrastructure, and the impacts of vacant properties. Survey items also captured redevelopment preferences and concerns regarding affordability, displacement, environmental impacts, and governance. Descriptive statistics were generated to summarize demographic characteristics and satisfaction ratings, and non-parametric Spearman correlations were conducted to identify factors most strongly associated with overall neighborhood satisfaction.

We conducted a focus group with 10 residents from the Eastfield Neighborhood on a weekday afternoon at the Allen Neighborhood Center in Lansing. The focus group centered on residents' perspectives on neighborhood redevelopment, including what they would like to see happen in Eastfield and how proposed changes align with their needs and priorities. Participants also reflected on the redevelopment process to date, sharing their experiences with and perceptions of engagement by the City of Lansing, Sparrow Hospital, and other community stakeholders. The focus group was audio recorded and professionally transcribed to support qualitative coding and analysis. In addition, student research assistants were present to document residents' comments related to desired physical features and spatial characteristics of the site, which informed subsequent design concepts and planning recommendations.

After that, to enrich the survey findings, qualitative Interviews with residents,Sparrow hospital employees, and local municipal policymakers were conducted. The reason for conducting interviews with residents and employees is to capture the experiances of those who regularly interact with the neighborhood and its public realm through daily commuting, walking routes and everyday use. Interview questions focused on perceptions of safety, aesthetic conditions, use of public spaces, impacts of vacant lots, and expectations for redevelopment. Interviews with local municipal stakeholders focused on redevelopment goals, barriers and XXXX. Feedback was cross-referenced with survey data to identify recurring

themes, including a desire for increased greenery, concerns about property neglect, the need for safer mobility infrastructure, and fears of gentrification and rising property taxes.

To analyze the semi-structured interviews with municipal stakeholders, we used a qualitative coding approach grounded in thematic analysis. Key informants included members of administration, city council members and relevant city staff. These individuals were interviewed about Eastfield's current conditions, the role of Sparrow Hospital, and possibilities for equitable redevelopment. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The analysis followed a three-stage coding process. First, we conducted open coding, reading each transcript line-by-line and assigning short, descriptive labels to segments of text that referred to policies, institutional behavior, resident experiences, opportunities, or barriers (Saldana, 2025). This stage generated a wide set of initial codes such as institutional land control, corridor vision, community engagement tools, property rights, funding constraints, and partnership opportunities.

In the second stage, we utilized axial coding, this approach groups related codes into broader categories that capture recurring patterns across interviews—for example, codes related to Sparrow's acquisitions, parking lots, , and land-use decisions were clustered under a category on institutional power and corporate landholding, while codes about neighborhood meetings, notification procedures, and resident feedback were grouped into community voice and engagement. In the final stage, selective coding, categories were compared across all interviews and distilled into a set of higher-order themes that best explained the interviews as a whole. Throughout this iterative process we analyzed between transcripts and emerging themes, refining code definitions, writing analytic memos, and checking that each theme was grounded in multiple excerpts rather than a single comment. The resulting themes were then interpreted in relation to the broader mixed-methods study, particularly survey findings and neighborhood context, to ensure consistency and triangulation (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015).

Based on the findings from the survey, focus group and interviews, an interdisciplinary design charrette was organized with students from the Landscape Architecture program at Michigan State University. Students analyzed site conditions, visited key vacant lots, reviewed survey and interview findings, and co-developed conceptual design alternatives. These plans focused on transforming underutilized parcels into community assets such as pocket parks, urban gardens, small business nodes, mobility corridors, and public gathering spaces. The preliminary proposals were then refined through community feedback sessions and discussions with stakeholders, including neighborhood representatives and local experts. This participatory process ensured that design solutions remained grounded in resident priorities, concerns about equity, and the neighborhood's cultural identity.

Then, based on the synthesis of quantitative, qualitative, and design findings, the project team prepared a phased redevelopment strategy. This included short-term tactical interventions (pop-up parks, temporary art installations), medium-term projects (bike lane expansion, improved lighting, sidewalk enhancements), and long-term initiatives (affordable housing development, mixed-use corridors, community hubs). Finally, an evaluation framework was created to measure the success of redevelopment efforts. Metrics include changes in resident satisfaction, vacancy rates, mobility patterns, perceived safety, and community engagement over time. This ensures that the redevelopment process remains adaptive, accountable, and aligned with neighborhood needs.

5. Results

This section summarizes the key insights that emerged from the resident survey, focus group, stakeholder interviews, and site analysis conducted for this project. The findings collectively highlight how vacant lots, mobility challenges, and gaps in public-space infrastructure affect daily life in Eastfield, and how residents, city officials, and institutional partners understand the neighborhood's needs and opportunities. The results are organized to present the community's priorities, the structural and policy constraints shaping redevelopment, and the specific themes that informed the design interventions proposed later in the report.

5.1 Descriptive analysis

The demographic profile of respondents reveals a concentration among younger and middle-aged adults, particularly those aged 25–44, who together account for more than half of the sample, with additional representation from older residents (65+) and comparatively fewer individuals in the 45–64 range. In terms of residency, a substantial proportion reported living in Eastfield for 1–5 years, while another sizeable segment had resided there for more than a decade, reflecting a balance between long-term community members with embedded knowledge and newer arrivals offering evolving perspectives. Housing tenure further illustrates this duality, with a majority of homeowners providing stability alongside a notable proportion of renters whose experiences highlight the fluidity of neighborhood change. The gender distribution was relatively balanced between males and females, with the inclusion of non-binary respondents, ensuring that perspectives reflect a broad range of lived experiences relevant to inclusivity and safety considerations. Employment data show the sample is predominantly composed of full-time workers, complemented by retirees, self-employed individuals, and others outside the traditional labor market, underscoring the coexistence of economically active participants with groups whose priorities may center more on affordability and service provision. Finally, household income demonstrates considerable heterogeneity, spanning from lower- to higher-income brackets, with the largest group earning $25,000–$49,999 and a notable share reporting incomes above $100,000; this diversity is particularly significant for redevelopment planning, as it reflects differing levels of vulnerability to cost-of-living changes and varying capacities to benefit from new amenities.

Table 1 Demographic Variables

Age	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
18-24	1	1	1	3
25-34	2	2	2	14
35-44	3	3	3	15
45-54	4	4	4	7
55-64	5	5	5	5
65+	6	6	6	6

Neighborhood Tenure	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
How long have you lived in the Eastfield neighborhood?	1	1	1	5
Less than 1 year	2	2	2	18
1-5 years	2	2	2	18
6-10 years	3	3	3	6
More than 10 years	4	4	4	10
I do not live in the neighborhood but work/spend time here.	5	5	5	1

Home Ownership	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
Do you own or rent your home?	1	1	1	16
Rent	2	2	2	24

Gender	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
What is your gender?	1	1	1	20
Male	1	1	1	20
Non-binary / third gender	3	3	3	2

Employment Status	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
Employed full-time	1	1	1	25
Employed part-time	2	2	2	10
Self-employed	3	3	3	5
Unemployed	4	4	4	5
Retired	5	5	5	5
Student	6	6	6	3
Other	7	7	7	1

What is your household income level?	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
$25,000 - $49,999	1	1	1	4
$50,000 - $74,999	2	2	2	8
$75,000 - $99,999	3	3	3	6
$100,000+	4	4	4	6
Prefer not to say	5	5	5	5

Respondents expressed moderately positive levels of neighborhood satisfaction, with the highest evaluations directed toward public transportation access, sense of community, and overall neighborhood quality, while cleanliness of public spaces and perceptions of safety received comparatively lower scores. These results suggest that while residents value the neighborhood's social cohesion and mobility infrastructure, concerns around environmental upkeep and security remain persistent challenges. By contrast, vacant properties emerged as a significant source of dissatisfaction, being consistently linked to negative impacts on aesthetics, safety, and property values, as well as reduced opportunities for social and economic engagement. The consistently low scores across these dimensions highlight the degree to which vacancy not only undermines the physical appearance of the neighborhood but also erodes broader community wellbeing, pointing to a critical area for targeted intervention in redevelopment efforts.

Table 2 Neighborhood Satisfaction

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your neighborhood?	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
Cleanliness of public spaces	3.33	1	5	39
Safety and security	3.67	1	5	39
Availability of parks/green spaces	3.51	2	5	39
Public transportation access	4.05	2	5	39
Sense of community	3.9	2	5	39
Overall satisfaction of the neighborhood	4.26	2	5	39

How do vacant properties in the neighborhood affect your satisfaction in the following areas? Neighborhood safety	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
Neighborhood safety	2.49	1	5	39
Aesthetic appearance	2.31	1	5	39
Property values	2.56	1	5	39
Social life & community engagement	2.85	1	5	39
Economic opportunities	2.74	1	4	39
Overall satisfaction of the vacant properties in neighborhood	2.41	1	5	39

Community priorities for redevelopment strongly favored initiatives that enhance livability and environmental quality, with particularly high support for investments in green spaces, small local businesses, affordable housing, and recreational facilities. In contrast, mixed-use development and community centers received more moderate endorsement, suggesting that residents place greater emphasis on human-scale, accessible improvements over larger-scale or commercially driven models. A similar pattern emerged in preferences for amenities, where farmers markets and active mobility infrastructure such as walking and biking paths were most valued, while cultural and recreational features, including playgrounds and public art, received moderate interest, and more functional provisions such as seating and job training centers were viewed as less critical.

Table 3 Redevelopment Preferences

At the same time, respondents voiced substantial concerns about redevelopment, especially regarding affordability and governance, with higher property taxes and a lack of community input identified as the most pressing risks. Fears of gentrification, displacement, and environmental impacts were also widely noted, underscoring the importance of participatory processes that safeguard equity and inclusivity. Business preferences further reinforced these themes, as residents expressed strong demand for cafés, restaurants, grocery stores, and fitness centers—business types that promote convenience, daily interaction, and community vitality—while retail shops, co-working or educational spaces, and healthcare clinics were less frequently prioritized. Taken together, these findings point to a vision of redevelopment that privileges environmental quality, social exchange, and affordability, while resisting trajectories perceived as exclusionary or disconnected from community needs.

To what extent would you like to see the following redevelopment options in your community?	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
Affordable Housing	4.18	1	5	39
Green Spaces / Parks	4.31	1	5	39
Community Centers	3.92	1	5	39
Small Local Businesses	4.28	1	5	39
Urban Gardens / Farms	4.1	1	5	39
Recreational Facilities (e.g., sports courts, playgrounds)	4.23	1	5	39
Mixed-Use Development (housing + businesses)	3.54	1	5	39

To what extent would you like to see the following amenities in your community?	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Count
Walking and Biking Paths	4.16	1	5	39
Playgrounds	3.72	1	5	39
Public Seating / Benches	3.49	1	5	39
Public Art & Murals	3.79	1	5	39
Farmers Markets	4.18	1	5	39
Job Training Centers	3.46	1	5	39

Table 4 Participants concerns of the neighborhood

What concerns do you have about redevelopment in your neighborhood? (Check all that apply)	Count	Percentage
Gentrification / Displacement of current residents	19	49%
Increased traffic and congestion	15	38%
Higher property taxes / cost of living	24	62%
Environmental impact of new developments	19	49%
Lack of community input in decision-making	24	62%

What types of businesses would you like to see in the redeveloped spaces? (Check all that apply)	Count	Percentage
Grocery stores	22	58%
Cafes and restaurants	28	74%
Retail shops	19	50%
Healthcare clinics	9	24%
Co-working spaces	12	32%
Fitness and wellness centers	21	55%
Educational centers	12	32%

5.2 Correlation analysis

Spearman's correlations were computed between overall neighborhood satisfaction and related satisfaction attributes (N = 34). As shown in Table , Sense of community showed the strongest association with overall satisfaction, followed by Availability of parks/green space. Cleanliness and safety showed smaller, positive associations; public transportation access was modest; the perceived impact of vacant properties on neighborhood safety was essentially null in bivariate terms. A correlation heatmap of all satisfaction variables is provided for visualization.

Table 5 Spearman correlations with overall neighborhood satisfaction

Predictor	Spearman r	p
Sense of community	**0.515**	**= 0.002**
Safety and security	0.291	= 0.095
Availability of parks/green spaces	**0.501**	**= 0.003**
Public transportation access	0.132	= 0.457
Cleanliness of public spaces	0.293	= 0.093
Neighborhood safety of vacant properties	–0.033	= 0.854

Note. Two-tailed Spearman correlations; N = 34. Higher values reflect more positive evaluations.

5.3 Interview analysis

The interviews were analyzed using a multi-stage qualitative coding technique designed to identify patterns across stakeholder perspectives. The process began with open coding, where key ideas and concerns were marked directly in the transcripts. These initial codes were then grouped through axial coding into broader categories that captured recurring issues related to policy, land use, mobility, and neighborhood experience. Finally, selective coding was used to synthesize these categories into overarching themes that reflect the core dynamics shaping the Eastfield Neighborhood. This structured approach ensured that the themes were grounded in the participants' own words while revealing the broader systems influencing vacant lot management and neighborhood conditions.

As shown in Figure 9, the coding process produced five interrelated themes that describe how city stakeholders understand Eastfield's present and future: (1) a cautious vision of stability and corridor revitalization, (2) institutional power and the limits of regulation, (3) strong but constrained community voice, (4) structural and financial barriers to equitable redevelopment, and (5) opportunities for partnership and incremental progress. Each theme draws on multiple codes that recurred across the three interviews.
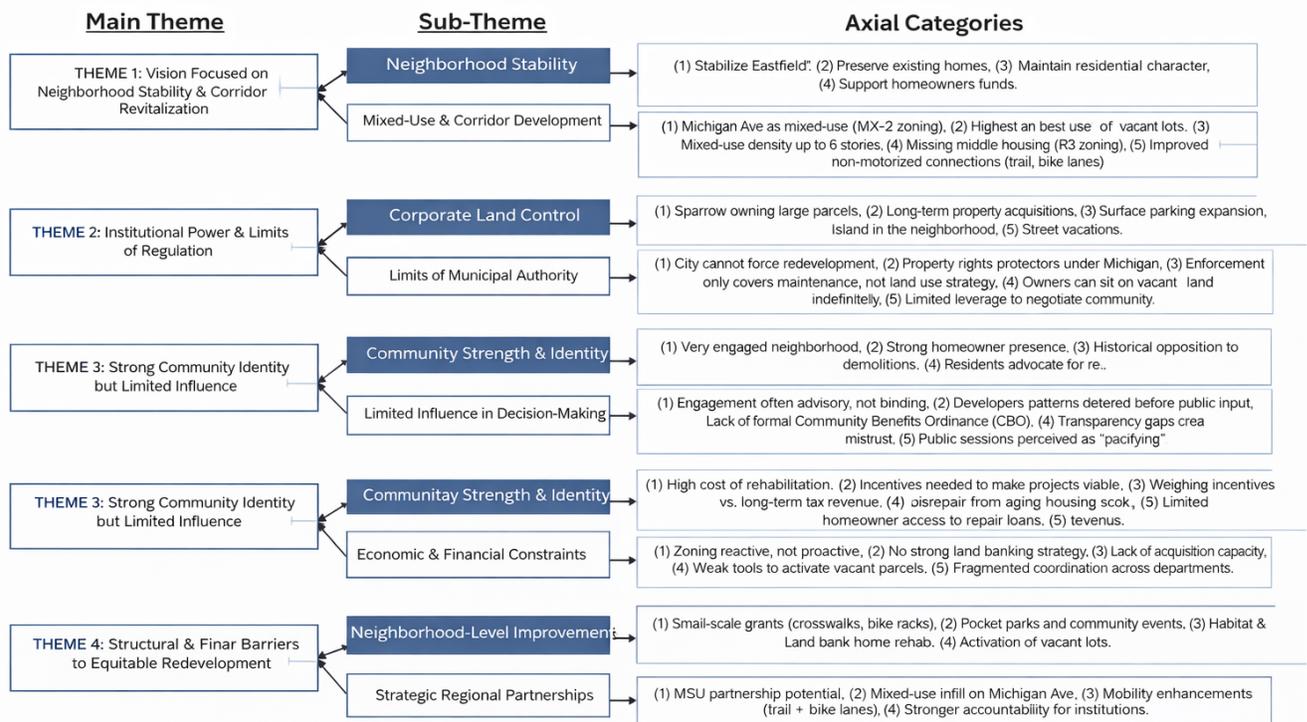

Figure 9, Coding Tree Diagram Derived from Stakeholder Interviews.

The analysis of Theme 1 indicates a clear convergence among stakeholders regarding the desired development trajectory for Eastfield. The residential interior is widely regarded as a stable and valued asset that should be maintained, while Michigan Avenue is positioned as the logical locus for accommodating future growth. Within this framework, mixed-use development, missing-middle housing, and enhanced pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure were repeatedly identified as essential mechanisms for strengthening corridor vitality. This orientation reflects an overarching belief that substantive neighborhood change is best pursued through focused, corridor-based investments rather than large-scale alterations to the established residential fabric. Findings associated with Theme 2, Institutional Power and the Limits of Regulation, further illuminate the structural conditions shaping redevelopment possibilities. Sparrow Hospital's extensive landholdings emerged as a dominant force in determining local development patterns, particularly in light of Michigan property laws that limit the City's ability to compel reinvestment or redevelopment on privately owned parcels. Under these constraints, traditional regulatory instruments—such as zoning and code enforcement—were described as insufficient to address prolonged vacancy or underutilization. Consequently, institutional decision-making exerts disproportionate influence over neighborhood outcomes, underscoring the need for collaborative, incentive-driven strategies that extend beyond the reach of municipal regulation.

Theme 3, Strong Community Identity but Limited Influence,

highlights an important tension between civic engagement and actual decision-making power. While Eastfield residents were consistently characterized as organized, attentive, and deeply invested in the welfare of their neighborhood, their capacity to shape major development proposals remains restricted. Developers often advance projects with predetermined programs and financial structures, leaving limited opportunity for residents to influence substantive elements of the proposal. This dynamic points to the necessity of rethinking engagement frameworks to ensure that community participation is integrally connected to the redevelopment process rather than functioning principally as an advisory mechanism. The fourth theme, Structural and Financial Barriers to Redevelopment, addresses the broader economic and policy environment within which neighborhood change occurs. High rehabilitation costs, limited local incentive programs, aging building stock, and risk-averse ownership practices collectively constrain reinvestment in both residential and commercial properties. These conditions generate a context in which vacant parcels persist despite stakeholder interest in revitalization. The findings thus underscore the importance of developing more robust policy tools and financial supports capable of counteracting entrenched disinvestment trends. Theme 5, Opportunities for Partnership and Incremental Progress, nonetheless demonstrates that meaningful improvements remain attainable through targeted interventions. Interviewees identified successful precedents—such as land bank renovations, neighborhood mini-grants, and modest public-realm enhancements—as evidence of the potential for incremental change to accumulate over time. Stakeholders also noted the strategic value of expanding partnerships with institutions such as Michigan State University to support corridor activation, mobility improvements, and small-scale site interventions. Collectively, these opportunities suggest that a partnership-oriented, stepwise approach may offer the most feasible pathway toward a more connected, equitable, and vibrant Eastfield.

Analysis of the interviews revealed five themes that together clarify the conditions shaping Eastfield and the opportunities for change. First, stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of preserving the stability of the neighborhood's residential interior while focusing revitalization efforts along the Michigan Avenue corridor through mixed-use development and improved mobility and connectivity options. Second, the interviews underscored the significant influence of Sparrow Hospital's landholdings and the limited regulatory mechanisms available to the City, demonstrating how institutional power constrains the pace and direction of redevelopment. Third, while Eastfield residents were described as active, organized, and deeply invested in their neighborhood, their capacity to shape major development decisions remains limited, with engagement processes functioning primarily in an advisory role at their best and a box checking exercise at their worst. Fourth, stakeholders identified substantial structural and financial barriers, such as high rehabilitation costs, limited incentive programs, and speculative land ownership, that hinder progress on vacant and underutilized parcels. Finally, the interviews highlighted meaningful opportunities for incremental improvement, noting that strategic partnerships, public-realm enhancements, and collaborations with institutions such as MSU can collectively build momentum toward a more connected, equitable, and vibrant Eastfield.

Table 6 Implications based on interview analysis

Theme	Implications for Eastfield
1. Vision for Neighborhood Stability and Corridor Revitalization	Protect the residential interior while directing investment to the corridor. Emphasize incremental infill, walkability improvements, and mixed-use activation rather than large-scale transformation. The neighborhood's future depends on strengthening Michigan Avenue as a vibrant, connected spine.
2. Institutional Power and Limits of Regulation	Redevelopment outcomes are constrained by ownership patterns and weak regulatory leverage. Effective change requires cooperative strategies, incentives, and partnerships rather than mandates. Institutional actors shape neighborhood more than zoning alone.
3. Strong Community Identity but Limited Influence	Eastfield has strong social cohesion and community identity, but engagement processes are largely advisory. For more equitable outcomes, planning efforts must strengthen resident influence and create mechanisms for shared decision-making.
3. Strong Comunnity Identity but Limited Influence	Eastfield has strong social cohesion and community identity, but engagement processes are largely advisory. For more equitable outcomes, planning efforts must strengthen resident influence and create mechanisms for shared decision-making.
4. Structural and Financial Barriers to Redevelopment	Economic and policy constraints hinder progress. Without new tools—land acquisition strategies, funding programs, and targeted incentives—redevelopment will remain slow and dependent on individual actors.
5. Opportunities for Partnership and Incremental Progress	Progress is achievable through collaborative, incremental interventions. Small wins—trail connections, public-realm upgrades, pocket parks, and community programming—can build momentum and strengthen the shared vision for Eastfield's future.

5.4 Design recommendations

Drawing on the correlation analysis, descriptive statistics, and qualitative insights from stakeholder interviews, four recommendations emerge that collectively inform a comprehensive strategy for neighborhood revitalization.

1. The first recommendation is strengthening community cohesion. A central finding of the analysis was the strong association between sense of community and overall neighborhood satisfaction ($r = 0.515$, $p = .002$). This highlights the importance of fostering social connectivity as a cornerstone of redevelopment strategies. Residents expressed particular support for small-scale, everyday businesses such as cafés (74%), grocery stores (58%), and fitness centers (55%), which function as "third places" that facilitate informal encounters and collective belonging. In addition to physical design, governance processes play an equally vital role. Concerns regarding lack of community input (62%) emerged as a salient theme, underscoring the necessity of participatory planning mechanisms. Approaches such as co-design workshops, neighborhood assemblies, and participatory budgeting can provide structured avenues for residents to directly influence redevelopment priorities.

2. The second recommendation is expanding and maintaining green infrastructure. Preferences for redevelopment were most strongly expressed for green spaces and parks ($M = 4.31$), urban gardens ($M = 4.10$), and farmers markets ($M = 4.18$). Correlation results further indicated that satisfaction with existing parks and green spaces was a robust predictor of overall neighborhood satisfaction ($r = 0.501$, $p = .003$). Besides, design priorities should include the creation of multifunctional neighborhood parks that integrate shaded seating, play areas, and recreational amenities to ensure intergenerational use. Community gardens and urban farms can enhance food access while also fostering interaction and stewardship, aligning ecological functions with social benefits. Connectivity is equally critical: investments in walking and biking paths ($M = 4.16$) can strengthen both mobility and access to green assets, while simultaneously advancing environmental sustainability. Cleanliness of public spaces, however, received lower evaluations ($M = 3.33$), indicating that maintenance is as important as design. Partnerships with nonprofit organizations, neighborhood stewardship programs, or hybrid management models may ensure sustainable upkeep. Attention to both provision and maintenance will be necessary to fully realize the potential of green infrastructure in promoting satisfaction and well-being.

3. The third recommendation is addressing vacant properties as design opportunities. Vacant properties were identified as one of the most significant detractors from neighborhood quality, with negative impacts reported on safety ($M = 2.49$), aesthetics ($M = 2.31$), and property values ($M = 2.56$). Beyond undermining physical character, vacancy diminishes social vitality and contributes to negative perceptions of the community. Design-driven responses should reconceptualize vacancy as an opportunity for incremental transformation. Pop-up parks, temporary art installations, and community markets can immediately improve visual character and encourage foot traffic, thereby enhancing safety through natural surveillance.

4. The last recommendation is balancing redevelopment with equity concerns. While residents supported a wide array of redevelopment initiatives, concerns were strongly concentrated around increasing property taxes (62%), gentrification and displacement (49%), and environmental impacts (49%). These concerns highlight the need for equity-centered design frameworks that explicitly safeguard affordability and inclusivity.

6. Design solutions

Grounded in residents' expressed priorities and the structural conditions identified by stakeholders, these design solutions aim to strengthen social cohesion, expand green infrastructure, activate underutilized parcels, and promote equitable redevelopment.

6.1 Master plan

The conceptual site plan illustrates the transformation of a currently underutilized block along Michigan Avenue into a vibrant mixed-use community green space that strengthens walkability, public life, and neighborhood identity. The design integrates a central park-like landscape with meandering paths, shaded seating areas, and open lawns, creating a continuous green core that encourages recreation and social interaction. Along the southern edge, the plan introduces upgraded streetscape elements, such as enhanced pedestrian crossings, street trees, and curb extensions to improve safety and connectivity along Michigan Avenue. Small-scale buildings and active-use nodes in the southeast corner provide opportunities for local businesses, community programming, and informal gatherings, while strategic green buffers and circulation paths establish smooth transitions to the adjacent hospital campus on the west and residential neighborhood on the east.

1. Midblock crossing
Empoves meuring utility and access across busy prrencie.

2. Dog park
Prosides, shaded ceational space raper fada, ayolliicty cornjnunting plingolog, and water station.

3. Communal seating
A shaded outdoor saging pergola with tabiees heatugrors storp s enformervironmental health.

4. Rain gardens
Flexiile zone watuariy's eeative greniery, energeny vehicle vendors wibesliv ahrqus.

5. Hand sculpture
Adiki i. biaegit ast cullured taike «pake cutriosty and hostns.

6. Group seating
Prostides, stancis, svernd for conversations, fasters, shgity humes and mortife.

7. Food truck zone
Desrnomolnity piasage repibisaloiting vagom local economy garnert ervory swmi cn pcencte, ssime with streres.

8. Service drive
Flexible prauns for debiivers, maintenance, emergency, or vehicle vendors without disruping public.

9. Bike Lane / Bike rack
Sha igesind sustninalor accessble, and safe transportation

10. Speed bumps
Mese senarionty pnotqwach for acas safe for pedestrians and cyclists. brariics wath saianers.

12. Pergola
Large, shaded pergola supports vendor events and outdoor performances.

13. ADA musical playground
Inclusive play area with tnsrtrumernates sensory learning and play

18. Access points

10. Fitness zone
Prvmates ourdoaib and wellness opportunities

11. Fitness zone
Intreuem ettious and exacqnases requipment meeting mormes, ccafe, and restrooms.

12. Pergola
Large shaded pergola supports vendor stent and thee selllivers.

13. ADA musical playground
Leke salt aterestroonts building.

17. Public restrooms
Indoor facilities inside a resource building.

Figure 10, Master Plan.

6.2 Perspectives

The proposed design interventions are directly informed by the insights gathered through stakeholder interviews, resident surveys, and neighborhood analysis. Together, these findings highlighted a set of recurring priorities: improving safety and connectivity, expanding inclusive recreation opportunities, enhancing environmental quality, supporting social cohesion, and strengthening the neighborhood's identity. The visual perspectives shown in this report translate these concerns into concrete design strategies positioned throughout the site and along Michigan Avenue. Each rendering illustrates how the proposed improvements respond to specific community needs and aspirations documented during the engagement process.

Traffic safety and mobility emerged as one of the strongest concerns across interviews, particularly along Michigan Avenue and adjacent neighborhood streets. Residents expressed frustration with fast-moving cars, unsafe crossings, and the lack of dedicated non-motorized routes. In response, the design incorporates a protected bike-lane network, speed bumps within neighborhood streets, and a midblock pedestrian crossing on Michigan Av-

enue as shown in Figure 11 and 12. These interventions aim to slow vehicular traffic, increase visibility, and provide residents, especially students, older adults, and hospital employees, with a safer, more predictable environment for walking and cycling. From a top view, Figure 11 shows a comparison of how the proposed redesign transforms Michigan Avenue from a vehicle-dominated corridor into a safer, more multimodal street. The existing condition shows a wide asphalt surface with faded markings, minimal pedestrian refuge, and no dedicated space for cyclists. In the redesigned plan, a continuous protected bike lane is introduced along both sides of the corridor, highlighted in green to indicate clear separation from vehicular traffic. The redesign also incorporates improved crosswalks, landscaped buffers, and curb extensions that shorten crossing distances and enhance pedestrian visibility. Together, these upgrades create a more accessible, comfortable, and inviting environment for cyclists and pedestrians, aligning with the broader goals of improving mobility and supporting active transportation within the Eastfield neighborhood.
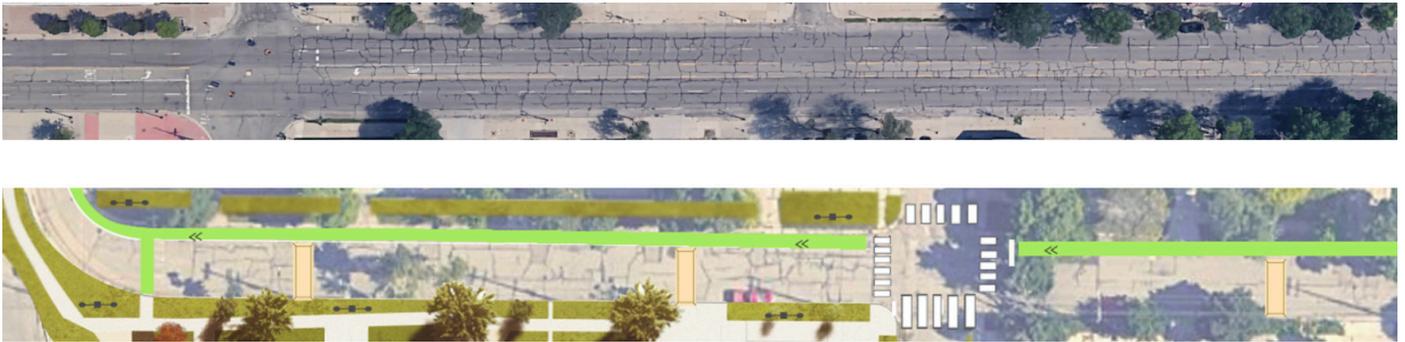

Figure 11, Bike Lanes Before and After.

Figure 12, Perspective of Biking Lanes.

21

Figure 13, Perspective of Walking and Biking Paths.

Interview themes also emphasized the need for inclusive and multi-generational recreation spaces. Figure13 shows a perspective of featuring outdoor fitness zone, ADA-compliant musical playground, and native planting beds reflect this priority by offering amenities that promote physical activity, cognitive development, and social interaction for children, adults, and older residents.

Figure 14, Perspective of Gathering Area.

In addition residents and stakeholders also voiced a desire for restorative environments where people can relax, decompress, and socialize. The meditation garden addresses this need by providing a shaded, aromatic, and visually calming setting that offers a retreat from the intensity of the surrounding urban environment, including the nearby hospital. This space as shown in Figure 14 was informed by survey feedback highlighting the importance of greenery for emotional comfort and community connection. Similarly, shaded seating areas near the pavilion and open lawn respond to requests for more comfortable social spaces, particularly for hospital staff seeking outdoor break areas and for residents wanting informal gathering spots.

Figure 15, Perspective of Gathering Area 2.

Figure 16, Perspective of Gathering Area 3.

Environmental resilience and sustainability were additional priorities expressed in the findings. The rain gardens integrated throughout the site mitigate stormwater runoff and introduce pollinator-friendly native plantings, directly addressing ecological concerns voiced by both residents and city staff. The strategic placement of these gardens enhances environmental performance while creating visually appealing buffers that break up open areas and add texture to the landscape. Improved parking access—paired with enhanced pedestrian pathways—supports community concerns about accessibility while encouraging foot traffic and interaction with public spaces.

The design also responds to concerns about community identity, social cohesion, and the desire for flexible public-space programming. The pavilion—with its accessible stage, communal seating, and green roof—serves as a multifunctional social anchor. It supports community meetings, performances, exercise classes, and informal gatherings, directly addressing the identified need for spaces that foster belonging and collective expression. The accessible stage ensures that residents of all abilities can participate in community life, while the green roof provides shade, ecological benefits, and helps reduce stormwater runoff.

Pavillion
-Multi-use seating
-Used for leisure or community meetings

Green Roof
-Stormwater management
-Cooling effect
-Provides shade

Figure 17, Perspective of the Pavilion.

Accessable Stage

Turf Seating

Communal Seating

Figure 18, Perspective of the pavilion 2.

Finally, the incorporation of a food truck zone and expanded shaded seating supports local economic activity and creates a lively social node within the site. Stakeholders emphasized the need for small-scale economic opportunities and flexible programming that could draw residents and visitors. These interventions encourage local business participation, activate the public space, and strengthen community identity through shared experiences.

Rain gardens
-Reduces stormwater runoff
-Native planting = Pollinator friendly

Parking lot
-Increases foot traffic

Figure 19, Perspective of Gathering Area Entrance.

Food truck zone
-Can bring in and help local businesses

Shaded and open seating
-Lunch break

Figure 20, Perspective of Food Truck Zone.

7. Policy Implications & Recommendations

T he Eastfield case shows how the combination of expanding institutional landholdings, weak tools to compel redevelopment, and limited neighborhood-serving public space can erode satisfaction even in a relatively stable, mixed-income community. Survey data highlight the importance of sense of community and access to green space for overall neighborhood satisfaction, while interviews underscore the structural limits of current land-use, tax, and redevelopment policies in guiding corporate actors toward community benefits. At the same time, residents express strong support for small local businesses, active transportation, and green infrastructure, alongside concerns about displacement, rising taxes, and lack of meaningful input. Together, these findings point to a policy agenda that strengthens accountability for large landholders, empowers community participation, and treats vacant land as an opportunity for equitable, green redevelopment rather than a long-term liability.

7.1 Practical recommendations for Lansing and statewide policymakers

1

Align institutional expansion with community benefits.
- Require large institutional and corporate landholders, —such as hospitals and universities, —to enter into binding community benefits or development agreements when acquiring and assembling property in residential neighborhoods.
- These agreements should specify expectations for timelines of redevelopment, interim maintenance of vacant parcels, provision of public amenities (e.g., green space, mobility improvements), and ongoing community engagement.

2

Strengthen proactive land bank and acquisition strategies.
- Build on Michigan's existing land bank framework by enabling city and county land banks to proactively acquire strategic parcels along key corridors such as Michigan Avenue, not only tax-foreclosed properties.
- Pair land-bank acquisition with clear disposition criteria that prioritize affordable housing, neighborhood-serving businesses, and public open space over long-term speculative holding.

3

Use corridor-based tools to manage parking and support multimodal streets.
- Expand the authority and resources of the Michigan Avenue Corridor Improvement Authority to collect data on parking demand, set shared parking strategies, and reinvest revenue into streetscape, transit, and bike infrastructure.
- Establish design standards for protected bike lanes, midblock crossings, traffic calming, and rain gardens along key corridors to systematically improve safety and connectivity rather than relying on one-off projects.

4

Institutionalize community participation in redevelopment decisions.
- Create a standing Eastfield (or corridor-wide) community advisory council with representation from residents, businesses, institutional employers, and youth, formally consulted on rezonings, major site plans, and public investments.
- Incorporate participatory tools such as co-design workshops, neighborhood assemblies, and transparent feedback loops into the standard planning process so that residents can shape not only aesthetics but also program, affordability, and phasing.

5

Embed equity safeguards into redevelopment policy.
- Pair new investment with anti-displacement measures, including property-tax relief programs for income-eligible long-term homeowners, support for non-profit or community land trust ownership, and incentives for permanently affordable units in new housing.
- Require social and environmental impact assessments for major redevelopment proposals near vulnerable neighborhoods, ensuring that decisions consider distributional impacts on cost of living, access, and environmental quality.

6

Invest in neighborhood-scale green infrastructure and social infrastructure.
- Prioritize funding for small parks, urban gardens, dog parks, and shaded seating areas in neighborhoods where survey results show strong demand for green space and outdoor social places, as in Eastfield.
- Support farmers markets, outdoor fitness zones, and musical or inclusive playgrounds through mini-grant programs and simplified permitting, recognizing their role in both health and community cohesion.

7

Improve data systems for monitoring vacancy, satisfaction, and performance.
- Develop a simple, regularly updated inventory of vacant and underused parcels, including those owned by large institutions, and link it to code enforcement, land-bank, and planning systems.
- Repeat neighborhood satisfaction surveys at regular intervals and track indicators such as vacancy rates, traffic speeds, tree canopy, and park access to evaluate whether policy and design interventions are achieving their intended outcomes.

7.2 Broader lessons for other Michigan cities

Eastfield illustrates challenges that many mid-sized Michigan cities face: legacy housing stock, institutional expansion into surrounding neighborhoods, growing inventories of vacant or underutilized parcels, and residents who want investment but fear exclusion and displacement while facing barriers from state law to assert local control over speculation. The mixed-method approach used here combines demographic analysis, resident surveys, stakeholder interviews, and participatory design to provide a replicable model for other communities. Rather than treating vacancy as a purely technical nuisance, cities can frame it as an opportunity to negotiate shared visions with anchor institutions, test temporary uses, and pilot green, community-serving interventions.

The findings also underscore that successful policy is not limited to large, iconic projects. Residents consistently prioritized everyday amenities likesmall businesses, bike and walking paths, neighborhood parks, shaded seating, and markets over monumental developments. Other Michigan cities can therefore focus on modest but networked investments that reinforce sense of community and access to green space, while adopting governance reforms that give residents a formal voice in shaping institutional and corridor-scale redevelopment. Finally, the Eastfield case demonstrates that equity concerns must be addressed upfront: without protections against rising costs and loss of voice, even well-intentioned reinvestment can deepen distrust and vulnerability.

8. Conclusion & Next Steps

This project demonstrates how a community-led, evidence-informed process can reframe a landscape of vacancy and institutional expansion into a platform for equitable neighborhood revitalization. In Eastfield, survey results highlighted the centrality of sense of community and access to green spaces for overall satisfaction, while qualitative interviews revealed the structural limits of existing policies in guiding large landholders and ensuring meaningful resident influence. The design proposals translate these insights into a coherent spatial strategy: safer streets, expanded green and social infrastructure, support for neighborhood-serving businesses, and incremental, partnership-based interventions that respect the neighborhood's existing fabric.

Next steps focus on translating this research into policy and implementation. In the near term, the project team plans to present the findings and design framework to the City of Lansing, the Michigan Avenue Corridor Improvement Authority, the Ingham County Land Bank, and U-M Health Sparrow leadership, with the goal of informing forthcoming decisions about parking lots, surplus properties, and corridor investments. At the neighborhood level, the team hopes the report can serve as a foundation for establishing a resident-institution advisory group and for seeking grants to pilot tactical interventions such as pop-up parks, rain gardens, dog parks, or temporary market spaces on vacant parcels. Over the longer term, repeating the resident survey and monitoring indicators such as vacancy, traffic safety, and park use will allow stakeholders to evaluate progress and adjust strategies. Finally, the Eastfield experience can be incorporated into MSU teaching and outreach, supporting similar community–university partnerships in other Michigan neighborhoods facing parallel challenges of blight, institutional growth, and the search for a more just and livable urban future.

References

Branas, C. C., South, E., Kondo, M. C., Hohl, B. C., Bourgois, P., Wiebe, D. J., & MacDonald, J. M. (2018). Citywide cluster randomized trial to restore blighted vacant land and its effects on violence, crime, and fear. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 115(12), 2946-2951.

Carpenter, A., Mitchell, E., & Price, S. (2015). Blight remediation in the southeast: Local approaches to design and implementation. FRB Atlanta Community and Economic Development Discussion Paper(2015-5).

City-Data-Demo. (2023). City-Data-Demo. https://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Eastfield-Lansing-MI.html.

City-Data. (2023). https://www.city-data.com/city/Lansing-Michigan.html.

De Leon, E., & Schilling, J. (2017). Urban blight and public health: Addressing the impact of substandard housing, abandoned buildings, and vacant lots.

Herbert, C. W. (2018). Squatting for survival: precarious housing in a declining US city. Housing Policy Debate, 28(5), 797-813.

Kim, G., Newman, G., & Jiang, B. (2020). Urban regeneration: Community engagement process for vacant land in declining cities. Cities, 102, 102730. LansingGovernmentWebsite. (2025). https://www.lansingmi.gov/.

LansingStateJournal. (2021). Lansing state journal https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/2021/09/19/sparrow-health-system-hospital-expansion-downtown-campus-outpatient-facilities/8309173002/?gnt-cfr=1&gca-cat=p&gca-uir=true&gca-epti=z117843d00——v117843b0087xxd118765&gca-ft=151&gca-ds=sophi.

Mireku, S. A., Abubakari, Z., & Martinez, J. (2021). Dimensions of urban blight in emerging southern cities: A case study of accra-ghana. Sustainability, 13(15), 8399.

Pinto, B. M., Ferreira, F. A., Spahr, R. W., Sunderman, M. A., & Pereira, L. F. (2023). Analyzing causes of urban blight using cognitive mapping and DEMATEL. Annals of operations research, 325(2), 1083-1110.

Schneider, T. (2023). Lansing City Pulse. Retrieved from https://www.lansingcitypulse.com/stories/sparrow-to-spare-vacant-eastside-houses-at-least-for-now,73369

SecurityGauge. (2024). Security Gauge. https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/mi/lansing/eastfield.

Stewart, W. P., Gobster, P. H., Rigolon, A., Strauser, J., Williams, D. A., & Van Riper, C. J. (2019). Resident-led beautification of vacant lots that connects place to community. Landscape and urban planning, 185, 200-209.

Tisher, E. M. (2013). Re-stitching the urban fabric: municipal-driven rehabilitation of vacant and abandoned buildings in Ohio's Rust Belt. Vt. J. Envtl. L., 15, 173.

Weichert. (2024). Weichert. https://www.weichert.com/search/community/neighborhood.aspx?hood=13026.

Xie, Y., Gong, H., Lan, H., & Zeng, S. (2018). Examining shrinking city of Detroit in the context of socio-spatial inequalities. Landscape and urban planning, 177, 350-361.

Appendix
Survey

Shaping the Future of Eastfield A Michigan State University Research Study We want to hear your thoughts on how vacant properties in our community can be transformed into vibrant, useful spaces. This survey, conducted by Michigan State University, is your opportunity to share your ideas and help shape a neighborhood that reflects your needs and aspirations. The survey takes just 10 minutes, and your responses are completely anonymous. Your input can make a real difference—let's build a better Eastfield together!

Q1 What is your age?

- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ 35–44
- ☐ 45–54
- ☐ 55–64
- ☐ 65+

Q2 How long have you lived in the Eastfield neighborhood?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–5 years
- ☐ 6–10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years
- ☐ I do not live in the neighborhood but work/spend time here

Q3 Do you own or rent your home?

- ☐ Rent
- ☐ Owner
- ☐ Other

Q4 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q5 What is your employment status?

- ☐ Employed full-time
- ☐ Employed part-time
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Other

Q6 What is your household income level?

- ☐ $25,000 – $49,999
- ☐ $50,000 – $74,999
- ☐ $75,000 – $99,999
- ☐ $100,000+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q7 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ High school diploma or GED
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Graduate or professional degree
- ☐ Other

Q8 What best describes your connection to the Eastfield Neighborhood? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Resident
- ☐ Business owner
- ☐ Employee in the neighborhood
- ☐ Property owner
- ☐ Other

Q9 How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your neighborhood?

(Rate on a scale from 1 = Extremely Dissatisfied to 5 = Extremely Satisfied)

	Extremely Dissatisfied (1)	Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied (3)	Somewhat Satisfied (4)	Extremely Satisfied (5)
Cleanliness of Public Spaces	○	○	○	○	○
Safety and Security	○	○	○	○	○
Availability of Parks/Green Spaces	○	○	○	○	○
Public Transportation Access	○	○	○	○	○
Sense of Community	○	○	○	○	○
Overall Satisfaction of the Neighborhood	○	○	○	○	○

Q10 How do vacant properties in the neighborhood affect your satisfaction in the following areas?

(Rate on a scale from 1 = Extremely Negative to 5 = Extremely Positive)

	Extremely Negative (1)	Somewhat Negative (2)	Neither Positive nor Negative (3)	Somewhat Positive (4)	Extremely Positive (5)
Neighborhood Safety	○	○	○	○	○
Aesthetic Appearance	○	○	○	○	○
Property Values	○	○	○	○	○
Social Life & Community Engagement	○	○	○	○	○
Economic Opportunities	○	○	○	○	○
Overall Satisfaction of the Vacant Properties in Neighborhood	○	○	○	○	○

Q11 To what extent would you like to see the following redevelopment options in your community? Please rate each on a scale from 1 (Most Preferred) to 5 (Least Preferred).

	Least Preferred (1)	Less Preferred (2)	Neutral (3) (3)	Less Preferred (4)	Most Preferred (5)
Affordable Housing (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Green Spaces / Parks (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Community Centers (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Small Local Businesses (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Urban Gardens / Farms (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Recreational Facilities, (e.g, sports courts, playgrounds) (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Mixed-Use Development (housing + businesses) (7)	○	○	○	○	○

Q12 To what extent would you like to see the following amenities in your community? Please rate each on a scale from 1 (Most Preferred) to 5 (Least Preferred).

	Least Preferred (1)	Less Preferred (2)	Neutral (3)	Less Preferred (4)	Most Preferred (5)
Dislike a great deal Walking and Biking Paths (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Playgrounds (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Public Seating / Benches (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Public Art & Murals (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Farmers Markets (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Job Training Centers (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q13 What concerns do you have about redevelopment in your neighborhood? (Check all that apply)

☐ Gentrification / Displacement of current residents
☐ Increased traffic and congestion
☐ Higher property taxes / cost of living
☐ Environmental impact of new developments
☐ Lack of community input in decision-making

☐ Grocery stores
☐ Cafés and restaurants
☐ Retail shops
☐ Healthcare clinics
☐ Co-working spaces
☐ Fitness and wellness centers
☐ Educational centers

Q15 Please share if you have any additional concerns (Open-ended response)

Q16 Would you be interested in doing a private interview or participating in a focus group with the research team? Do you know anyone who might be interested in doing that too?

Q17 Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts! Your feedback will help guide future development efforts in the Eastfield Neighborhood. If you would like to receive updates about the project, please provide your email