



# ASHMAN CIRCLE ENHANCEMENT PLAN



MIDLAND

CIRCLE

AREA

ENHANCEMENT

PLAN

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# ASHMAN CIRCLE ENHANCEMENT PLAN

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## Chapter 1 STUDY CONTEXT

### INTRODUCTION



Originally, a countryside crossroads, Ashman Circle has always been a unique place in an ever-changing commercial landscape. As the surrounding community grew, the Circle responded to that growth. Over time, the Circle weathered challenges, such as competition from new strip commercial centers and development of the Midland Mall. Today, the toll from past changes is evidenced by the eroded identity of the district. The old traffic circle that once made the commercial center a unique place has been sliced into streets that navigate traffic quickly through the district rather than welcoming people to it. The changes dramatically improved roadway capacity and safety, but they may also have contributed to a decline in the area's vitality. For example, the one-way streets are confusing and impede access to shops. Also, pedestrian amenities and support for retail activities are, at best, afterthoughts in the current configuration.



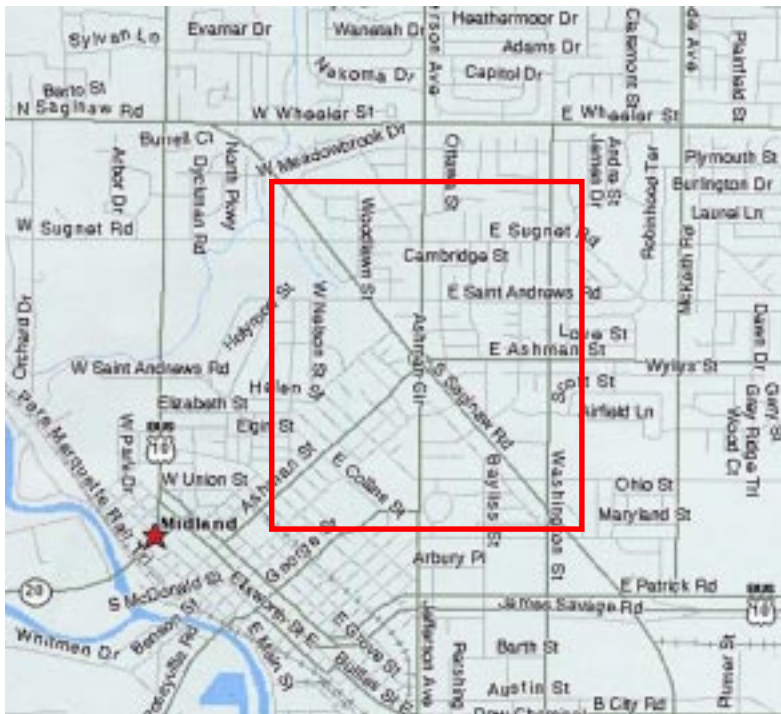
While this study examines many ideas to improve the Circle Area, revisiting street design issues is essential to solutions that promote both traffic safety and economic health. Some long-term residents fondly remember the Circle as a destination place for neighborhood shopping; others recall congestion. It was the home for entertainment venues, such as bowling and movies; and events like the Paul Bunyan Festival, sidewalk sales, barbecues and holiday celebrations. Shop owners look forward to revitalization efforts linked to the heritage of the Circle, such as changing the current street pattern to something resembling the original roadway that once brought traffic past their front doors. Other residents recall the old circle causing traffic jams, especially long delays during deer hunting season prior to the construction of freeways. The Circle's history stimulates controversy when discussing potential changes to the streets.

Beyond traffic and circulation issues, existing elements of public and private infrastructure detract from the district. Some older storefronts look tired, while others are vacant or underutilized. The streetscape is uninspired, and parking areas are disorganized and unattractive. These problems have been apparent for some time. Options for improving the business environment have been studied in the past, including the "Circle/Saginaw Road Commercial District – Area Improvement Strategies" report from 1991. Yet, many of the same issues persist today.

Despite its challenges, the Circle has many assets. It has a good retail base where shop owners have carved a niche to become destination stores. It has a different shopping environment compared to more typical suburban strip centers. This recognizable “brand” can be crafted into an effective marketing tool to create an attractive place. The Circle is surrounded by strong neighborhoods that are largely an untapped market, and it has high levels of traffic to support the retail environment. Finally, it offers a dedicated group of business people motivated to partner with the City in pursuing a public-private revitalization strategy. Business leaders recognize the time is right for pursuing a long-term approach to revitalizing the Circle. The success of the downtown area over the past ten years is a prime example of how public investment can fuel economic development. The City has a vested interest in the health of its commercial districts, and the Circle is a logical step for expanding the downtown -investment strategy. The Midland Circle Area Business Consortium initiated this study with the goal to create a unified plan for improvements, drawing on the historical role the Circle played in the development of the community.



City of Midland showing Circle Area.



Circle Area in context with surrounding neighborhoods.







Old City map of Circle before the bowling alley was demolished.



## CONTEXT

The Circle began as a rural hub for the surrounding farming community and travelers along Saginaw Road. As early as the 1930's, Ashman, Saginaw and Jefferson converged into an old style traffic circle. By the 1940's, Saginaw Road bisected the Circle much as it does today. Blocks of tree lined streets and homes began to encompass the Circle, and the rural crossroads evolved into a neighborhood center.

A review of historical aerial photographs illustrates how the Circle changed over time. An aerial photograph from the early 1960's indicates Saginaw Road barricaded at the center island, possibly because of traffic circulation problems. A boulevard extended east along South Saginaw. Buildings lined the perimeter of the traffic circle. During that time, a landmark building housing a theater and bowling alley anchored the southern split between Ashman and Jefferson. Photos from the mid-1960's show the traffic island with Saginaw Road routed around it. Traffic entering the Circle moved counterclockwise around the green space to reach connecting roads. Parking spaces were removed and all customers were directed to park in off-street lots behind the buildings, causing business owners to manage two entrance doors.

From the mid 1960's, various changes were made to improve traffic flow because the old-style traffic circle could not handle higher volumes. By the end of the century, Jefferson, Ashman and Saginaw Roads bisected remnants of the old traffic circle. What was once a center of community activity is now more of a place people pass through. Streets are designated as one-way, bypass routes and traffic signals have been added. Disjointed and clashing streets confuse uninitiated travelers, and access to businesses in the commercial district is difficult. Some business owners feel these cumulative layers of fixes accommodate those traveling someplace else, with little thought about the livelihood of those who live, work and shop in the Circle



1.



2.



4.



3.



Clockwise from top left:

1. Circle in 1945 with Saginaw running through it
2. Circle in 1962
3. Circle in 1966 with Saginaw removed
4. Circle in recent years before bowling alley was demolished.



Top: Circle configuration today with current buildings. Notice the landmark bowling alley building between South Jefferson and Ashman is gone, replaced by a Rite Aid Drug Store and parking lot that do not respond to the traditional circular form. Left and above: Examples of building architecture and the variety of small specialty shops around the Circle.



**EXISTING CHARACTER AND LAND USE**

Today the Circle functions as a small specialty retail and service district surrounded by residential and professional office uses. Multifamily apartments border the northern perimeter, framed by mostly single-family homes extending to the edge of the city. The south side is principally single-family neighborhoods bridging the Circle and downtown. A former shopping mall built just south of the Circle has been successfully converted into Midland’s law enforcement center. Two popular shopping destinations, a hardware store and grocery store, are located in back parking areas on opposite sides of the Circle. Drive-through services and strip commercial uses extend along south Saginaw, including Midland’s busy post office and a popular pub. Restaurants and entertainment uses are not represented in the business mix within the Circle itself.



Commercial buildings and automotive service shops occupy much of the Circle. A number of shops have not been substantially updated. Most businesses are independently owned specialty shops not found in regional shopping centers and malls. Buildings are typically single-story structures, with a few two-story buildings mixed in. Retail chain drug-store and gas station franchises are recent additions. These buildings are setback instead of fronting the Circle, causing a loss of continuity with historical precedent. A recent trend is for storefronts to be leased to institutional and service uses that do not have consistent business hours or other elements found in successful retail settings. This creep of non-retail uses detracts from the viability of the Circle because they lack amenities such as storefront windows, front entrances and detailed facades.



Left and above: Additional examples of building architecture and the variety of shops around the Circle. The influx of non-commercial uses, such as the Niagra Ministries can detract from goals for a successful retail environment.



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## Chapter 2 PLANNING PROCESS

### GOAL OF THE PLAN

The goal of the plan is to encourage investment in the Circle Area while enhancing its attractiveness as a place to work, shop and live; and to coordinate circulation and development activities to highlight the Circle's special character and features.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

An intensive two-day interactive work session (also called a charrette) was held at the Law Enforcement Center near the Circle. It provided a continuous, flexible public forum for discussing issues and concerns. The format was developed in advance with city officials and Circle Area stakeholders. The City distributed invitations and notices to explain the process and encourage participation.

The process included a walking tour, team meetings, analysis sessions and presentations. Photographs and maps were displayed to generate conversation regarding individual blocks and properties. Local media covered the final presentation. Participants worked together to explore alternatives for improving the Circle Area, including extensive discussion on vehicular and pedestrian circulation issues.



Investing in improvements to the Circle area buildings and streetscape will create places in which people want to live, work and shop.



The public, the City and the design team worked together to develop concepts to improve the Ashman Circle Area in a two day work session.

**WALKING TOUR**

A walking tour was held to gather ideas and share thoughts on the first morning of the charrette. Participants were divided into two groups to visually assess the site. The groups frequently stopped to discuss issues, such as pedestrian accessibility, circulation patterns, parking, facade strengths and weaknesses, landscaping, storefront visibility, and redevelopment opportunities on parcels surrounding the Circle. Participants standing on one side of the Circle noted the existing landscaping blocked views to shops on the other side. Also, benches, lighting and other elements seem either misplaced or out of scale. The new sewer pumping station adds another element to an already confusing place.

As discussed earlier, the main function of the Circle’s streets is to move traffic through the area. Business access and pedestrian circulation take a back seat to capacity. Walking across Saginaw and Jefferson was difficult and uncomfortable for participants on the tour. Telling comments from stakeholders include “you can’t get there from here” or “I can see it, but I can’t get there”. Streets are not functioning as the connective tissue for the Circle. They are not working in the true sense of a “public” right-of-way.

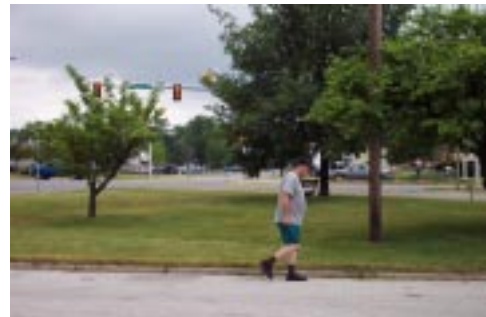
Circulation issues were a primary topic of discussion. Ashman and Rodd Streets are one-way “pairs” that lead in and out of the downtown, respectively. Jefferson is also one-way near the Circle. Some turning movements are allowed, while others are prohibited. People are often seen “cheating” the one-way controls to traverse the district. Curb medians within Saginaw Road deter cross movement of cars. This benefits traffic flow through the district but complicates access to the businesses. If a motorist parked in front of Ken’s Craft Shop on the north side wanted to drive toward the Plaid Giraffe on the south side, it is almost impossible to do so. The abundance of controls makes the Circle area very confusing for visitors and residents alike.



Thoughtful observations were gathered during the walking tour.



One way and wide streets make both vehicular .....



....and pedestrian movement difficult.



Most retail establishments manage two separate entrances because of front and rear parking lots. Many use the back as the primary entrance because of convenience to parking. Unfortunately, back facades lack desirable characteristics, making it difficult to create an attractive urban retail shopping experience. Because pedestrian and vehicular traffic is discouraged along the front of shops, it leaves an impression of vacancy and closed storefronts. Shop owners try to compensate by opting for bright color canopies or oversized signs to grab attention from traffic slicing through the district, but the low profile buildings are not strong enough to overcome the distance from intersecting streets.



Examples of the scale and unique qualities of Circle businesses.



An example of strong commercial architecture and signage in the Circle area.



Parking areas in the Circle lack appropriate amenities.



Remnant vegetation from past enhancement efforts lacks character, quality and theme.



Participants felt the Circle needed to become a "Place" again.

**S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS**

S.W.O.T is a planning acronym for Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats. It is used in public workshops to spark dialog and rank values that help determine priorities in planning for improvements. The S.W.O.T. analysis took place the afternoon of the first day. After much interaction and lively discourse, the group set the framework for improving the area.

**Strengths:** The best asset of the Circle is its uniqueness and central location. It is on the way to downtown, easily accessible from the freeway, and high traffic volumes bring people to the area. Participants especially like the breadth of businesses, the park-like setting, and the Circle’s sentimental value and fond memories.

The diversity of architecture adds charm to the district. Buildings themselves are an interesting mix of simple storefronts mostly of 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s vintage. Common elements like masonry facades, punched window openings, storefront windows and canopies provide goods tools to initiate renovation programs. Some shops have historic facades giving them a look that owners desire (Bookstore/Computer store). Smith’s Flower Shop has an attractive modern facade that is timeless. The pharmacy building offers an interesting 1960’s flair, and the Plaid Giraffe children’s shop has the classic retail image of a small town shop. Participants feel the Circle has many of the pieces needed to make it a great place.

**Weaknesses:** Weaknesses identified include poor identity and a lack of allegiance to Circle businesses. Annual events no longer take place in the Circle. Zoning ordinances allowing non-retail businesses like the Niagara Ministries are a problem. Some businesses use their storefront windows for storage. Poor pedestrian access, fast-moving traffic and a preponderance of one-way streets make the Circle area difficult to navigate. Carving up the Circle with streets goes beyond causing physical disconnections—some shop owners no longer recognize their neighbors and the Circle Area Business Association disbanded.

It was interesting to note Smith’s Flowers has been in the same family for over 60 years, and the Plaid Giraffe took over retail space from another children’s retail shop. Certain shopping patterns exist for years and image improvements are not critical for those shoppers. However, to



Lively dialog lead to an active and entertaining S.W.O.T. session.

**STRENGTHS**

- 10 Diversity of Businesses
- 9 The Circle
- 5 Commitment of Property Owners / Stakeholders
- 5 Kroger is a good store
- 4 The Greenspace
- 4 Location: We are the Center of Town
- 3 Saginaw Road
- 3 Related Businesses w/ Art Community
- 2 Neighborhood Hardware Store
- 1 Largest Number of Individually Owned Uses
- 1 Kids Events

**WEAKNESSES**

- 28 Traffic Problems
- 14 No Pedestrian Bike Traffic
- Not Pedestrian Friendly
- 10 Automotive Repair Places
- 6 Not Enough Parking in Front of Stores
- 3 People Go Wrong Way on one-Way Streets
- 3 Eliminate Alternate Routes / Cut Throughs
- 2 Businesses have Inconsistent Hours
- 1 Heavy Traffic Pattern - through road
- 1 Not Enough Parking at Post Office
- 1 Not Enough Plant Material in Front of Stores
- 1 Overhead utility / Lighting
- 1 Extg. Vegetation Not Well Maintained
- Blocks Views
- 1 Improve Truck Delivery / Circulation -
- No Management of Whole Circle
- w/ Events / Sales
- 1 Limits / parameter Difficult to Define





attract a new generation of people to the Circle, image improvements are needed to create a stable and comfortable environment. Outdated canopies, poor signage, dark colors, windows and doors need replacement.

**Opportunities:** The most popular ideas were landscaping improvements, turning Ashman into a two-way street, adding a restaurant, café or coffee shop, and reinstating annual events. The participants wanted to see stores that would contribute to the overall business area. Opportunities to introduce mixed-use development could help define the Circle as a place. Restaurants, coffee houses and pubs were mentioned as elements missing from the Circle. The vacant pharmacy building is an opportunity for adaptive reuse.

An attractive public streetscape is needed to unify and enhance the district. Yet most stakeholders express concern that if the traffic situation is not resolved, the potential impact of streetscape and facade investments will be greatly compromised.

**Threats:** Threats are defined as uses not currently in the area and are not wanted. Participants identified “adult” businesses, big box retail, party stores, nightclubs and fast food restaurants as threats. People do not want to see a single high demand parking use that would stress availability for a mix of smaller shops.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- 20 Remove Old Shrubs / Landscape Beautification (Pumping Station)
- 15 Make Ashman Two-Way
- 10 Add Restaurants / Cafe's / Coffee Shop
- 7 DEFINE CIRCLE
- 4 Create Fun Annual Events
- 3 Develop Mixed Use Residential
- 2 Create Coordinated Business and Directional Signage
- 2 Strengthen Bike / Pedestrian Access
- 1 Make Rodd Street Two-Way
- 1 Strength Connection to Residential
- 1 Improve Parking Behind Businesses (Smith's)
- 1 Rethink Parking Requirements
- 1 Create Alternatives for Trucks
- 1 Create Flexible Zoning Regulations
- 1 Create New Stores - Maternity, Bridal, Men's & Women's Clothing, etc.
- 1 Coordinate Effort for Children and Family Events and Classes
- 1 Bring Kroger into the Fold (2nd Phase)
- 1 Renew Interest in Circle Business Association

**THREATS**

- 10 "Adult" Businesses
- 10 Businesses (non-retail) with inconsistent hours
- 6 Businesses that would require a lot of parking
- 6 Party Store
- 5 Night Club
- 3 Drive-thru Fat Food Restaurants
- 2 Blighted Neighborhood
- 2 Teen Club
- 1 Too many Offices / Professional rather than retail



Many ideas and concerns were shared and documented during the meeting.

**PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS**

The intent of the conceptual design program is straightforward: explore options for improving the Circle Area and its long-term viability. Based on background material, the walking tour and S.W.O.T. session, priorities were set for pursuing a development concept. The second day was an open forum for participants to work together in melding ideas into a balanced strategy for improvements, illustrate the preferred planning approach and to share it with the greater community. Participants indicated improved traffic circulation as the top priority, pedestrian access was second, and improvements to structures and businesses third. Some business owners indicated the need for additional space to expand. Most participants like the idea of having high quality, urban residential living units as part of the Circle Area’s land use mix.

- PARTICIPANTS TOP PRIORITIES:**
- Improve traffic circulation
  - Improve pedestrian access
  - Improvements to structures and businesses

The dissatisfaction with the Circle Area is based on limitations imposed by traffic controls that impact opportunities for a better business environment, convenience and access. On a daily basis, the streets conflict with desires of people trying to get from one place to another. Drivers and pedestrians fight traffic controls built over the past thirty-five years. Despite barriers to discourage cross movement, people deftly weave their cars through parking areas and alleys, sneak wrong way turns against traffic, and dodge across fast-moving lanes to get where they want to go. People should not have to work so hard to navigate the Circle, and shop owners should not rely on their customers circumventing the web of public streets to do business. Comments from the charrette indicate that simple “window dressing” improvements are not enough. There is a strong desire by the community to address past traffic changes for something more responsive to their needs.



Individual and group discussions, and impromptu presentations helped generate and solidify ideas during the workshop.

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## Chapter 3 DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

### DEVELOPMENT APPROACH



City officials, staff and the Midland Circle Area Business Consortium worked in partnership with the public to create a plan focusing on key issues and capitalizing on strengths. Ideas were explored using quick sketches and plans. Ideas were debated, evaluated, reworked and refined as part of all day work sessions. Many were discarded, while others merited further consideration and study.

Recognizing the current street network inherently limits the potential health of the district is an important step in developing effective solutions for the Circle Area. It is equally important to understand the level of frustration people experienced with the old traffic circle. Both are essential considerations in exploring overall concepts to improve the Circle District.

The fact the Circle is an established district is an important asset. The recent market resurgence of older, established small commercial centers is just the beginning of a trend expected to last at least the next 20 years. Traditional shopping malls are starting to lose popularity, and a growing number are trying to reinvent themselves as mixed-use town centers. Strip commercial corridors are overbuilt and showing signs of blight. Shopping patterns are shifting as a wave of young adults seeks urban living experiences. Downtown and neighborhood commercial environments are rapidly emerging as desirable places to live for people looking for special places with unique identities. The Circle is perfectly situated to take advantage of these trends because it does not need to reinvent itself like malls, only amend what it already has. Consolidating properties to add critical mixed-use elements will be challenging, but the recipe for successful “place making” calls for reshaping and restructuring in order to be effective. The Circle Area cannot stand idle and expect good things to happen—it has to attack its stale image and pursue new development opportunities to gain the density and feel of an attractive, special place.



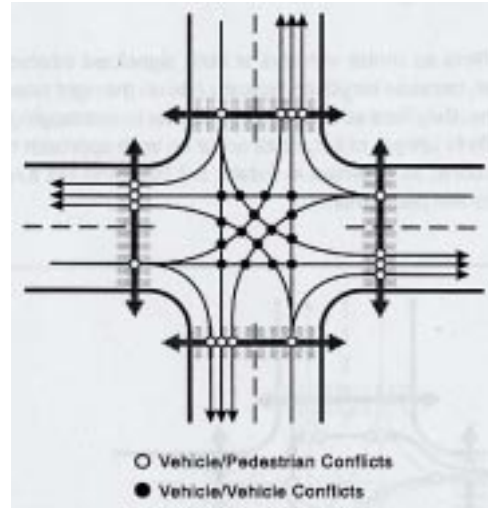
Streetscape improvements will make the Circle Area more pedestrian friendly.

The consulting team quickly ruled out resurrecting the old traffic circle as a legitimate concept. It would be inefficient and its large diameter could potentially cause traffic and pedestrian safety problems. However, the converging roads and dissatisfaction with the current system suggests a modern roundabout could solve many concerns.

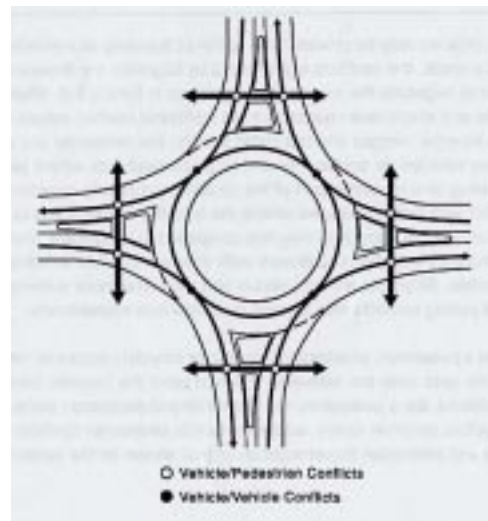
The modern roundabout is a distant relative of the confusing and inefficient old-styled traffic circles and “rotaries” found in the Boston area, Washington D.C. and other cities in the United States. It is substantially different in its functional characteristics from the traffic circle that served the Circle Area in the 1960’s. Given the traffic safety opportunities and unique heritage of the area, a roundabout should be seriously considered as part of an effective traffic design solution for the Circle.

Success with modern style roundabouts is leading to an increasing number being constructed. Traffic engineers anticipate the construction of roundabouts will increase significantly over the next five years, many of which will address intersections with high traffic volumes and/or crash problems. Already, over 1,000 modern roundabouts have been built in the United States since 1990. They include multiple projects in Colorado, California, Missouri, Florida and Maryland. Recently, several have been built in Michigan. One of the first roundabouts in the state was constructed in Okemos, and two more are planned as a result of its success. Among other roundabouts in Michigan, one has been built in Jackson, and two have been completed in Rochester Hills, and another was recently completed in Dimondale. Eleven roundabouts are planned for high traffic corridors (much higher than Midland) in Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield Township. A new roundabout is under construction in Muskegon, and old rotaries on the campus of Michigan State University have been redesigned to reflect the current technology. The Michigan Department of Transportation is also currently looking for good candidate intersections for implementing this technology.

Roundabouts are being considered as an improvement over signalized intersections or old-style traffic circles for a number of reasons. A major benefit of modern roundabout technology is reduced conflict points, especially compared with traditional intersections. Other advantages are slower speeds (15 to 20 mph) for improved safety, while at the same time increasing capacity and reducing emissions because vehicles no longer



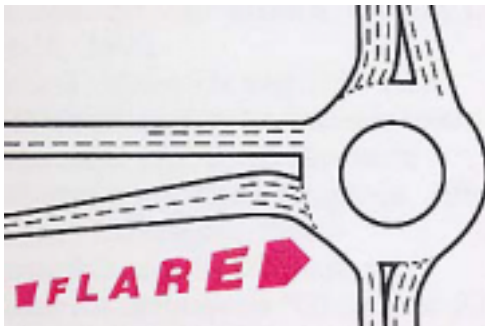
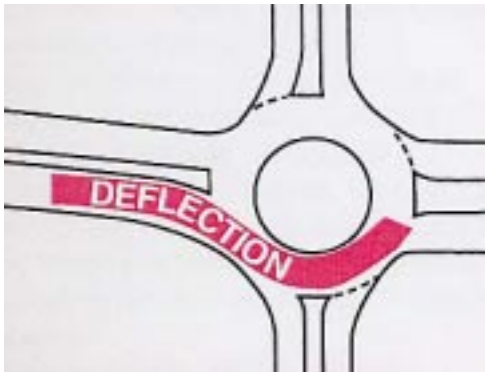
A typical intersection has many conflict points that can be hazardous



A modern roundabout has much fewer conflict points. Traffic is always coming from only one direction.



Simple signs help to direct traffic flow.



The modern roundabout incorporates design techniques to enhance safety and reduce conflict points.

stop and stage at traffic lights. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports 24 intersections in the United States with modern roundabouts show a 39% overall crash reduction, 76% injury crash reduction, and 90% fatal crash reduction from the intersections they replaced. A summary of differences between a roundabout and traffic circle follows:

#### Modern Roundabouts

Entering traffic yields to circulating traffic.

- Circulating traffic always keeps moving.
- Works well with heavy traffic.
- No weaving distance necessary: Roundabouts are generally compact.

#### Non-Conforming Traffic Circle

Entering traffic cuts off circulation.

- Circulating traffic comes to a dead stop when the circle fills with entering traffic.
- Breaks down with heavy traffic.
- Long weaving distances for merging entries cause circles to be large.

#### Modern Roundabouts

Entering traffic aims to the right of the central island and proceeds straight ahead at reduced speed.

- Slows traffic on fast roads, reducing crashes.
- Deflection prior to entry promotes the yielding process.

#### Non Conforming Traffic Circle

Entering traffic aims at the center of the central island and makes a right turn to enter the circle.

- Causes serious crashes if used on fast roads.
- No deflection reduces capacity and safety.

#### Modern Roundabouts

Upstream roadway often flares at entry, adding lanes.

- Provides high capacity in a compact space.
- Often permits two-lane roads between roundabouts, saving pavement, land and bridge area.

#### Non Conforming Traffic Circle

Lanes are not at entry.

- Provides low capacity even if circle is large.
- To increase capacity, requires multi-lane roads between circles, wasting pavement, land and bridge area.

## CONCEPTUAL PLANS

The design study explored two alternatives to the existing intersection design. Consultants and City engineers looked at the opportunities of a four-way intersection and a modern-day roundabout. The city engineer, the City’s consulting traffic engineer, the team’s traffic engineer and traffic planner worked together in exploring these ideas. These plans are preliminary by nature of the conceptual planning process and require further study and analysis.


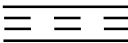

**CONCEPTUAL PLAN GOALS**

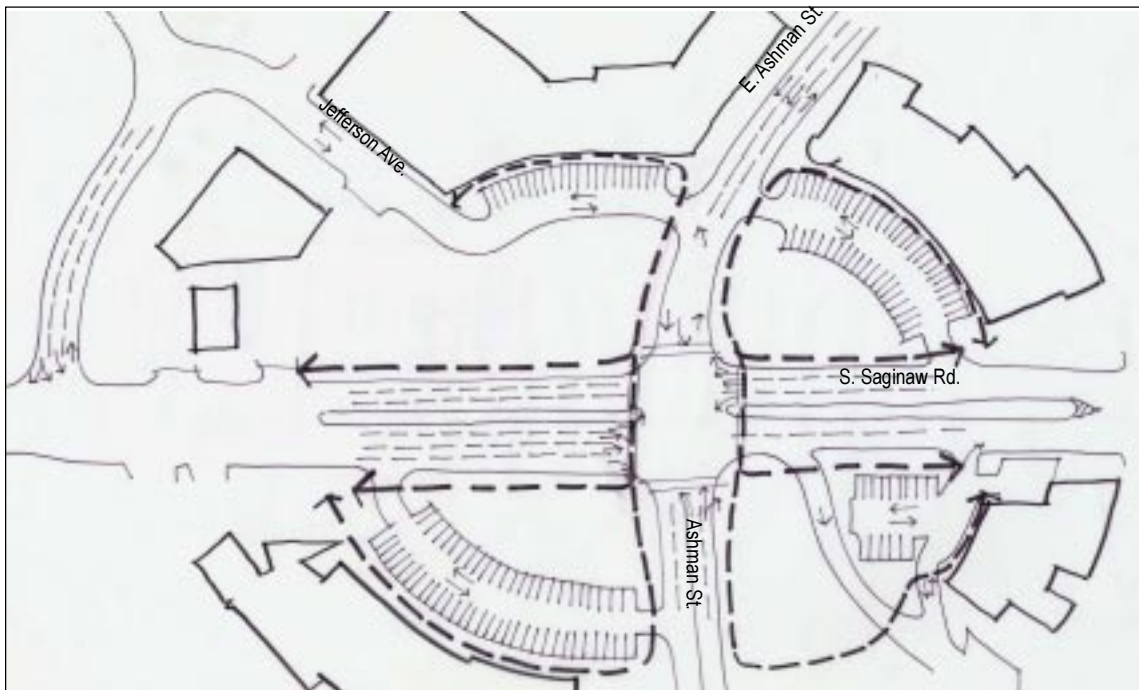
- Simplify Traffic Circulation / Reduce Confusion
- Improve Pedestrian Environment and Circulation
- Stimulate Business Vitality
- Improve Appearance / Aesthetics
- Organize Parking
- Create Opportunities for New Development

### CONCEPT A: THE FOUR-WAY INTERSECTION

Concept A examines a four-way intersection for Ashman and Saginaw Roads. Two-way traffic is restored and access is improved. Four-corner commercial redevelopment could frame this new intersection, but the community prefers building on the heritage of the district rather than radical changes to it. Since this concept completely deteriorates historic Ashman Circle, it destroys the character so many regard as its strength. Also, the number of new left turn movements creates additional conflict points for automobiles, potentially resulting in more traffic crashes than with the current system. It also retains long distances between roadways and storefronts.

KEY

Existing Buildings	
Streets	
Pedestrian Movement	

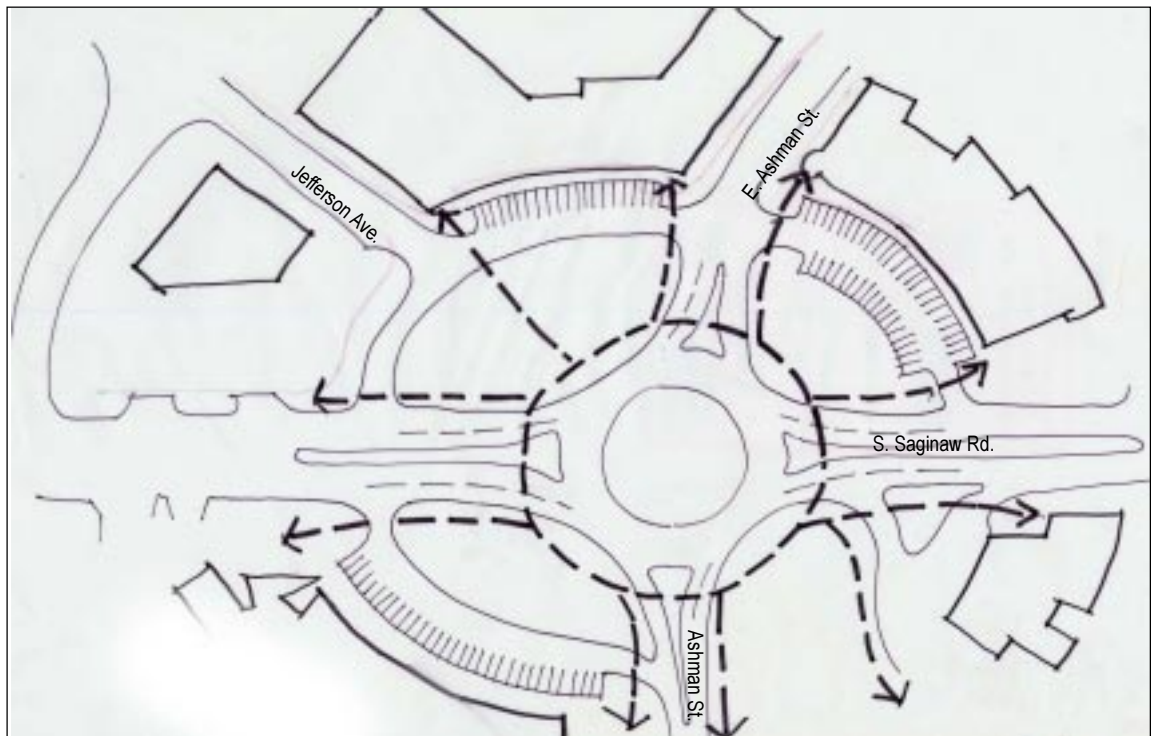


Concept A, The Four-way Intersection, further deteriorates the Circle theme and pulls pedestrian traffic away from businesses. ⊗

## CONCEPT B: THE MODERN ROUNDABOUT

Concept B illustrates a standard roundabout design with four intersections, or “legs”. The roundabout would be shifted toward the east, to avoid the new sewer pumping station. This plan allows for a higher level of capacity in moving traffic and improves safety. Traffic would move slower than today (15-25 mph) but would flow uninterrupted by traffic signals. The design reduces confusion and drivers would have easier choices to make than under the current system. Access also is enhanced. The small diameter of the roundabout (relative to the old nonconforming traffic circle) allows perimeter landscaping and parking opportunities, such as a small park-like area that would provide a green ring for shops to front on.

While traffic flow improves under this concept, the smaller diameter of this roundabout design forces pedestrians away from storefronts when they want to cross the four streets. This is inefficient and clumsy, so most people are likely to risk random crossings rather than using crosswalks that are inconvenient. Additionally, street visibility for the shops remains a serious concern because the setback and parking would limit exposure to traffic. However, if these challenges could be met through further design refinement, the concept would be an attractive solution.



Concept B, The Modern Roundabout, eases traffic with a modern roundabout but still keeps pedestrians from storefronts.



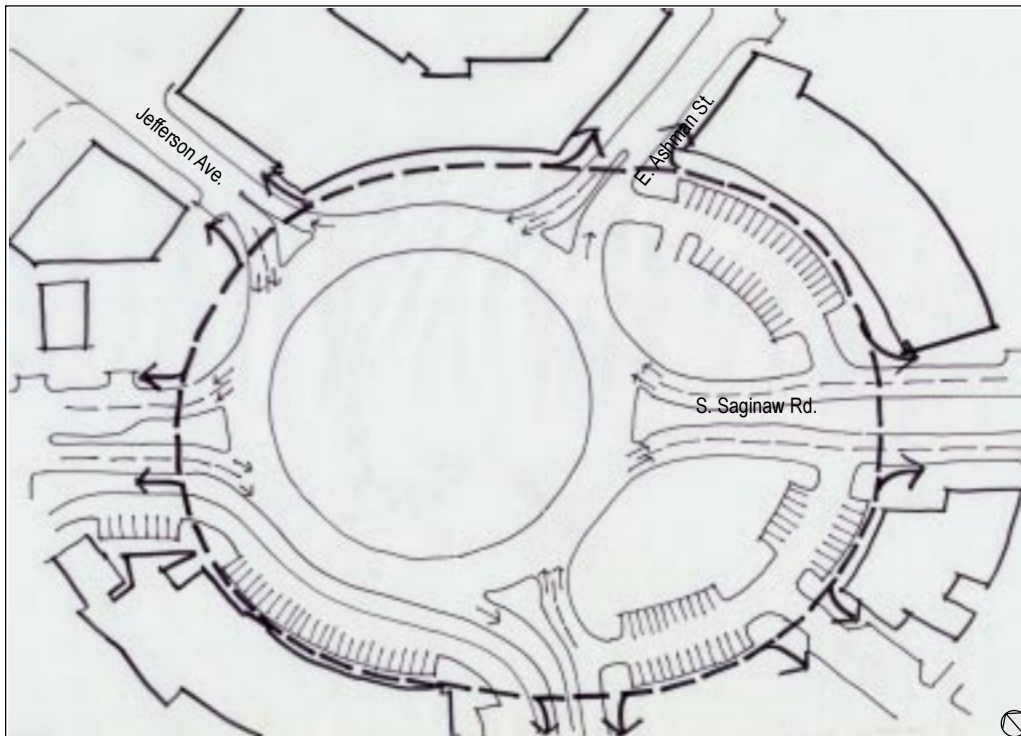
**PREFERRED CONCEPTUAL PLAN**

The preferred solution modifies the roundabout design of the previous concept to facilitate better pedestrian connections. It accommodates pedestrian movement along desirable lines of travel while still providing a roadway system to address needs for capacity and safe movement for automobiles and trucks.


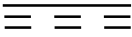

**Access & Circulation**

All the streets entering the roundabout are two-way traffic. This improves access dramatically, and flow is efficient because traffic signals are removed. Parking inside the Circle is reconfigured to accommodate the offset of the roundabout caused by the pumping station. This shift of the roundabout results in additional space along the eastern half of the Circle. It could be landscaped for event and street fair uses, or serve as the point for connecting south Jefferson to the roundabout, if desired. A landscaped boulevard extends east on Saginaw as it once did, helping to introduce people to the Circle and promote safe pedestrian crossing. It also allows cars to loop around for easy access to parking from the south side of Saginaw to the north.

- THE CONCEPTUAL PLAN.....**
- Simplifies Traffic Circulation with Modern Roundabout
  - Removes Two Traffic Signals
  - Restores Public Streetscape - Less Pavement
  - Converts Ashman to Two-Way North of Nichols
  - Converts Jefferson Two-Way Northbound
  - Creates Easier Pedestrian Crossings
  - Creates a "Special Place"
  - Organizes Parking
  - Recommends Facade Improvements
  - Creates New Mixed-use Infill Economic Development
  - Adds A New Residential Market to Midland
  - Suggests Foundation for New Mixed Use Zoning District.



**KEY**

- Existing Buildings 
- Streets 
- Pedestrian Movement 

The preferred plan shifts the traffic circle and pulls pedestrians toward businesses.





Parking treatments are recommended at rear entrances to define space and create a welcoming and comfortable environment for shoppers.

Parking areas along the rear of the shops are redesigned to improve organization, access, efficiency and attractiveness. Landscaping, paving, decorative lighting and a coordinated sign program will contribute to the cohesiveness of the district. Shared parking opportunities should be investigated. Since back entrances are often prime entries to businesses, a streetscape treatment to improve pedestrian access is necessary. Public right-of-way is limited and insufficient to accomplish this goal and would require coordination between the landowners and the City to achieve.

Other traffic alterations include revisions to the Cambridge-Ashman intersection. It represents a return to a more traditional street intersection by removing excess roadway to add land area for redevelopment opportunities. On the west end of the Circle Area, the roundabout would allow the connector street for Jefferson-Saginaw to be removed. This opens up the possibility of consolidating the vacated right-of-way with adjacent commercial properties to create a significant future redevelopment site.

**Gateways to the Circle**

The center island is designed in a formal landscape theme to reinforce the heritage of the Circle. The island is a feature, not a public use area ( no pedestrian access to the center island). Lush landscape elements are envisioned with seasonal interest. The addition of special accent lighting and holiday displays could create a spectacular setting. A large sculptural element, appropriate to the scale of the island, could highlight and solidify the Circle’s identity as a place. There are five points of intersection in and out of the roundabout. The streets are identified by tall pylons marking the points along the roundabout that serve as way finding and public art elements.

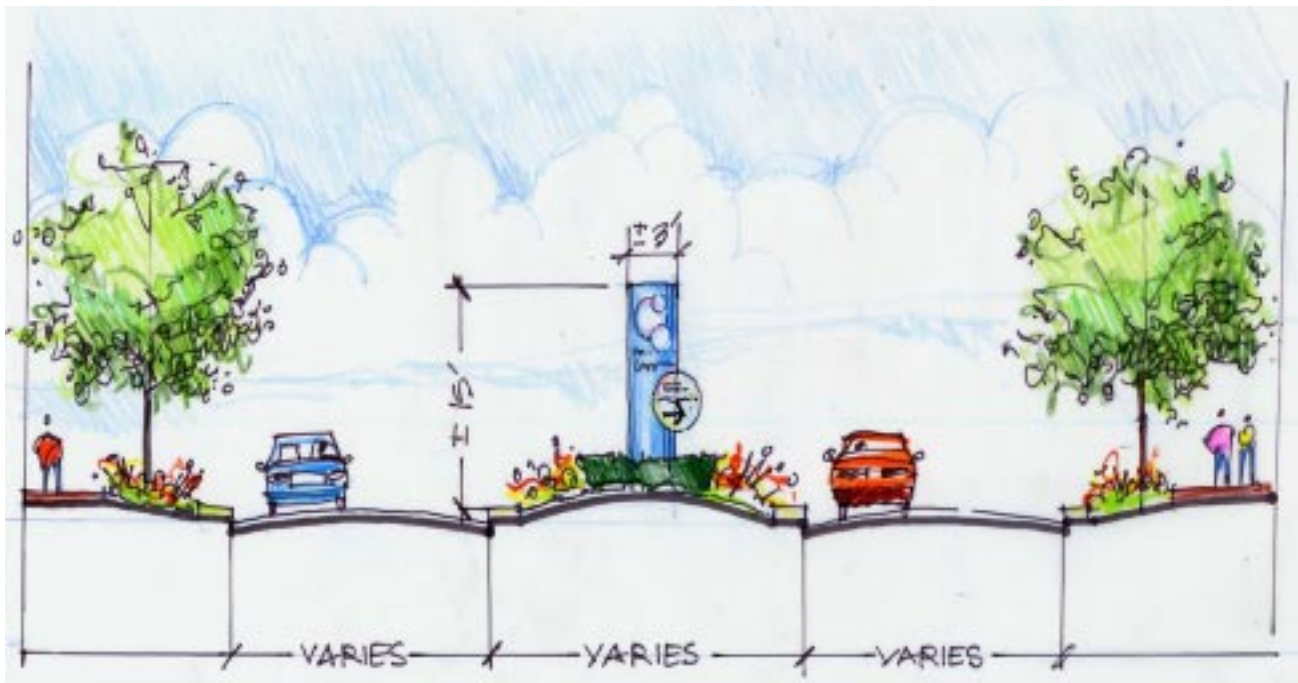
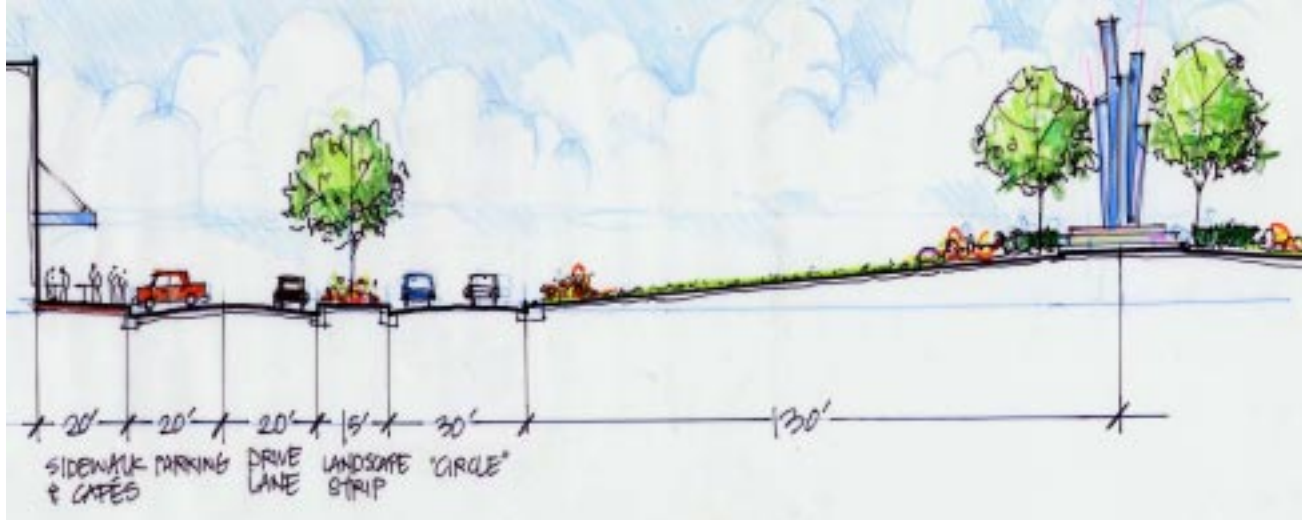


Illustration shows general size and potential character of entry pylon in boulevards with landscaping. These elements should have sculptural qualities to promote public art as part of the Circle environment.



Entry pylons ●  
 Section through NE quadrant ↑  
 Sketch viewpoint ◀



Section through northeast quadrant illustrates the relationship of the center focal point, traffic and buildings.



Character sketch of circle area with central focal point. The element should be a commissioned sculpture as part of the City's public art program.

**The Circle as a Place**

The concept plan illustrates opportunities for mixed-use redevelopment on the Circle. It reuses much of the existing building fabric, while also exploring opportunities for redevelopment and higher use. Some existing buildings originally built to support vertical additions for second and third story uses are shown as renovated to add density and scale to the district. An aggressive facade improvement is encouraged, and in some cases, new buildings up to three and four stories tall could be introduced to the Circle. Buildings of this size provide urban scale to frame the space. They feature a mixture of uses such as commercial/retail shops at the ground level and residential or office space in two to three stories above. They are popular prototypes for infilling older urban districts. The mixed-use environment is efficient, often reducing parking ratios. The plan uses the block occupied by Ken’s Craft Shop to illustrate redevelopment character and potential.



Key Map of Quadrants.



Existing conditions at east quadrant.



Elevation of proposed improvements.  
SOUTHEAST QUADRANT



Existing conditions at east quadrant.



Elevation of proposed improvements illustrates how display windows, color, appropriate signage and varying the height of buildings can create a more dynamic retail image.

**WEST QUADRANT**



Existing conditions in northeast quadrant.



Elevation sketch of proposed improvements showing a mixed-use retail environment.

**NORTHEAST QUADRANT**

A new sidewalk comfortably connects fronts of new and renovated shops, affording customers a one-stop shopping experience using the collection of shops around the Circle. Surrounding residents can stroll down to the district and window shop along the ring of shops in the evening, possibly share a cup of coffee, or sit and relax with friends at a street café. The vacant pharmacy building is used to illustrate this street scene. The characteristics of this building are ideal for creating a unique gathering place, adding an important entertainment/restaurant use to the business mix. It has the potential to become a popular destination for the entire Midland area. Full streetscape amenities would support the revitalized commercial environment of the Circle including pedestrian-scale features, such as special paving, landscaping, and decorative light fixtures.



Quick sketch illustrating the potential character and scale of mixed-use buildings.



Existing conditions at east quadrant.



Elevation showing potential redevelopment for higher density mixed-uses, including urban apartments or condominiums.

**EAST QUADRANT**



This is a good example of commercial uses at ground level with housing above.



Maisonettes look very much like townhomes with entrances at street level, but have higher density because the units are stacked.

### **New Housing Opportunities**

Adding density to the Circle Area will help create a stronger urban setting and contribute new land uses. Urban housing types like for-sale townhomes and maisonettes offer densities of 20 to 30 units an acre. This type of market-rate housing is popular with single adults, couples without children, active retirees, and young professionals. Residents can take advantage of conveniences like shops and restaurants. The concept plan shows how underutilized areas of the Circle area can be redeveloped. The plan illustrates about 120 new homes using these urban-living prototypes, likely to be enough to attract a developer. Building housing into the commercial mix encourages a more active environment with people living in the Circle 24 hours a day. Parking is usually in the rear and under the units, resulting in very efficient use of the limited land area. These homes face the street with row house character. Underutilized gaps along the outside of the study area are captured and used for infill housing to add density, diversify the residential base and bridge surrounding neighborhoods. The location for various types of units depends upon the land available and individual property ownership. Stakeholders indicated that one opportunity for infill development was along the six houses behind Smith's Flower Shop along Mertz to Ross Court. Another location for redevelopment was noted at the corner of Ashman and Cambridge. This area was recently rezoned and a developer had a proposal for a 53-unit residential building. Prototype housing units illustrated in the plan are described as follows:

**Flex Space Housing.** These are creative live/work units with first floor retail and living units above. An advantage of live/work is the flexibility of the spaces. Spaces above the first floor can be left raw, for use as living or working lofts, or can be finished to create market rate town homes. Balconies or large windows face the street. These buildings are envisioned to be 2 ½ to 3 stories tall with a mixture of unit sizes that vary from 800 square feet up to over 2,000 square feet per unit, whatever the market will bear.

**Maisonettes.** These are stacked units (one unit over another) that have the look of individual town homes but allow more density. Each living unit would have its own street level entrance and one car garage. The garages are internal to the building and space is provided just outside the garage door for additional parking. Units are often 2 ½ to 3 stories high. They work well in mixed-use areas because the density ratio is desirable in

- A** Mixed Use Building
- B** Townhouses
- C** Flex Space
- D** Maisonettes



maintaining compactness and urban feel. Generally 22’ wide x 40’ long, these units would be good to mix with the traditional townhome units, providing variety to price and living style options.

**Townhomes.** These are multi-storied homes assembled in a row house fashion. All units are individual without someone else living above or below. A two-car garage is provided on the ground level. Generally about 22’ wide x 40’ long, these for-sale units would be ideal for the Circle area.



Townhomes are an elegant addition to the urban fabric. These example shows ample landscaping at the entrances.





An active, people populated environment is the goal of streetscape improvements.



Example of how banners and lights help animate the spaces.

## DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept plan creates a vision for the future of the Circle Area. Without question, people feel the Circle offers dramatic opportunities to consolidate underutilized parcels for development, renovate buildings and add new streetscapes to make a special place. The most controversial issue is also the number one priority: the desire to correct traffic problems that hurt the health of the district. Participants of the charrette want the street system to address economic development along with capacity and safety, and the plan for revitalizing the Circle responds to that intent.

### CONCEPTUAL PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

- Traffic Circulation Simplified with Modern Roundabout
- Removes Two Traffic Signals
- Less Pavement - Restores Public Streetscape
- Ashman Two-Way North of Nichols
- Jefferson Two-Way Northbound
- Easier Pedestrian Crossings
- Design Creates a "Special Place"
- Parking Organized
- Facade Improvements
- New Mixed-use Infill Economic Development
- Adds A New Residential Market to Midland
- Foundation for New Mixed Use Zoning District.

The following guidelines are intended to reinforce and enhance the character of The Circle Area. The goal is to encourage development that enhances the experience for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic by creating an interesting, easily understandable and safe environment.

### Gateways

- Gateways are essential to making the area identifiable. They announce entry into the Circle District and set the tone for the experience.
- Gateways and portals must be consistent and appropriately scaled, and they should reflect characteristics of other elements used to define the district.

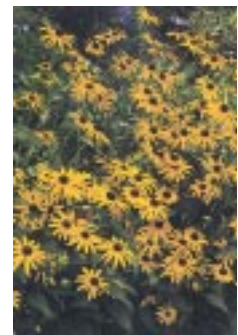
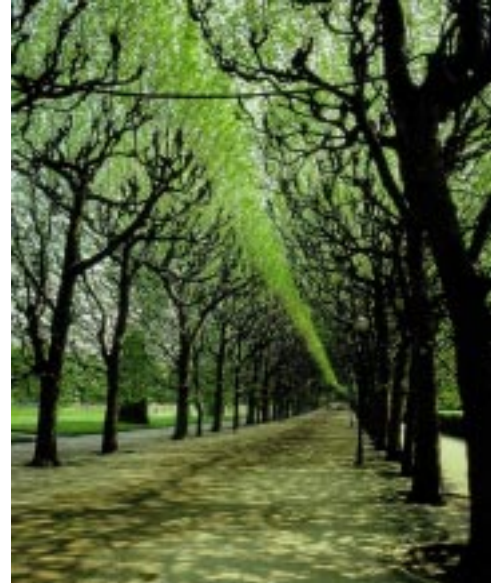
**Streetscape Elements**

- Reinforce pedestrian qualities by defining the street right-of-way as a public space.
- Add canopy trees to form the vertical “street wall” missing throughout most of the Circle Area—Consistent “street walls” will frame the Circle, creating a strong unifying proportion.
- Promote a street environment combining attractive architecture, tree-lined streets, coordinated street furniture and lighting, comfortable sidewalk widths and distinct wayfinding signage.
- Special paving materials, signage and other design amenities help create a distinct place and support goals for the character and quality of the Circle community.



High quality street furnishings and plantings add attractive amenities to pedestrian environments.

- Trees should be placed 25’ to 30’ apart along streets leading into the Circle.
- Flowering trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials and ground cover are encouraged at the large central island as well as in other highlight locations such as entries to add seasonal interest.
- Encourage decorative banners attached to streetlights to promote the district.
- Utility poles and multiple wires are not visually appealing and do not add to a desirable community character. It is costly and disruptive for a community to undertake burying the utilities. Encourage developers to bury utilities as parcels are redeveloped. An alternative is to negotiate easements with less impact than the current locations, or to install new straight poles to replace wooden poles misaligned or leaning to one side.



Four season interest can be provided with perennials, shrubs and bulbs.



Activate spaces in front of business with landscaping, seating and wide pavement as illustrated in this street scene.

- Require an integrated pedestrian circulation system that conveniently and safely links businesses, neighborhoods, places and key destination points.
- Encourage walkways adjacent to existing and proposed storefronts to be a minimum of 12' to allow for an amenity zone for landscaping, signage, outdoor seating and lighting.
- Clearly mark (special paving can be effective) and illuminate crosswalks to promote safety.

### Street Lighting

- Streetlights are a prime element in creating a theme or “brand” for the district.
- Lighting should be appropriate for the Circle, yet compatible with the overall palette of street furnishings.
- Lighting is also required within parking lots to ensure a safe environment. Lighting should be reasonably spaced and designed to minimize impacts on adjacent residential areas.
- Lighting levels should at least meet the minimum Illumination Engineering Society of North America lighting standards for commercial and residential area classifications, 3:1 average to minimum ratio.
- Use a family of metal street light poles and fixtures throughout the districts to provide continuity, promote activity, establish a safe environment for pedestrians and provide nighttime orientation.
- Metal halide light sources give the closest rendition to natural light and are recommended for pedestrian-oriented commercial areas like the Circle.
- Light levels should not interfere or create a negative impact on adjacent residential uses.



Parking, lighting, signage and both vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems mix to create a vibrant retail environment.

**Parking**

- All parking areas should be updated to meet the City’s current minimum standards for landscaping, screening, signage, lighting and paving.
- Allow easy access between uses and parking areas.
- Revise ordinances to ensure efficient use of parking areas and to discourage construction of more spaces than necessary in a mixed-use district.
- Plant large canopy trees and planting islands within parking areas in proportion to the number of parking spaces provided. Parking lot landscaping should enhance green space and help establish a block orientation in large parking areas.
- Parking lot landscaping should be distributed throughout to increase visual impact, direct vehicular circulation and create a more pedestrian scale environment behind the buildings.
- Screen service areas and waste receptacles from public view.
- Ensure access points are well spaced to minimize conflicts with the main traffic flow.



Spaces can be created for pedestrians at building entrances and still have vehicles parked closely.



Example of vehicular and pedestrian spatial relationships.

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## Signs

- Encourage standards for all building, street, directional and ancillary signage to help establish visual unity within the Circle Area.
- Storefront signs should be easy to read, enhance buildings rather than overwhelm them, complement the architecture and integrate into the facade design.
- Signs should be visible to vehicular traffic but should also accommodate pedestrians.
- Minimize the number of signs necessary to adequately direct vehicular and pedestrian travelers.
- Signs within the right-of-way should coordinate with the Circle Area's theme and gateways.



Examples of good signage for building storefronts.

**Building Design & Architecture**

- Building facades should contain architectural features such as awnings, cornice work, edge detailing or other decorative features typical of building fronts.
- Awnings, canopies or marquees should not cover significant architectural features.
- Awnings should not be backlit.
- Building mass should be broken up with varied rooflines, archways and other treatments.
- Use high quality materials such as brick, split-faced block, stone, etc.
- Neutral, subtle colors should be encouraged.
- Use common elements to bring the retail look together.
- Rooftop equipment must be screened from public view.
- Locations for loading and service areas should minimize public view.
- Minimum and maximum building heights should be established.
- Promote design that respects Midland’s vernacular architecture and distinctive style.
- Avoid “anywhere and everywhere” national franchise prototype buildings and drive-thru businesses.



This page shows examples of facade and architectural treatments that would be appropriate for buildings in the Circle area.



## Chapter 4 IMPLEMENTATION

### COMMITMENT

The Circle evolved over a long period of time and solving its problems will take time as well. It requires incremental steps accomplished over a period of years. Implementation often requires actions be taken simultaneously. Each year, work can be initiated by the City and/or Steering Committee for the Circle and implemented based on the priority of the recommendation, cost and funding availability. This chapter provides some immediate tasks that can be initiated to begin the implementation process, such as additional traffic modeling and the need to rezone the Circle Area.



Facade improvements can make a big difference in even simple building architecture.

### CONCEPTUAL BUDGET

The estimated budget for public infrastructure improvements is based on moderate to intense streetscape treatment, using high quality materials and amenities. This includes construction of the roundabout and other necessary street adjustments, parking area improvements, street rights-of-way enhancements extending a distance out from the roundabout, landscaped boulevards and the new commercial streetscape for the Circle. It also includes adding sidewalks and streetscape amenities to the back parking areas. The budget does not differentiate between public and private streetscape investment.

Architectural renovation budget estimates for the existing shops vary from \$100 to \$150/sf, depending on the complexity of renovation. Renovations limited to front and rear facades could be considerably less. The construction cost of new mixed-use commercial construction could range from \$90 to \$125/square foot.

New infill construction adds economic potential to the Circle area. Homeowners and renters tend to patronize the local businesses within walking distance from their homes, increasing sales for existing businesses and enticing new businesses to the Circle area. New housing could vary from \$80 to \$90/sf for new construction depending on the development design and finishes for interiors and exteriors, with the market ranging from \$130,000 to \$150,000 per unit.

Streetscape / Roadway Improvements	<b>\$ 3,700,000</b>
New Mixed-Use Construction Value	<b>\$ 8,000,000</b>
Parking Area Improvements	<b>\$750,000</b>
New Residential Construction Value	<b><u>\$ 12,000,000</u></b>
<b>Total Construction Costs</b>	<b>\$24,450,000</b>
(Bury Utilities = \$3 million / mile - not included)	

## PHASING

The phasing strategy is divided into sections including a list of specific action strategies. Since the plan is intended to go beyond a 10-year time frame, not all actions are implemented immediately. The schedule should be moved ahead whenever the opportunity presents itself. The priority of each action will be categorized as high, medium or low. Priorities will need adjustment over time as the plan evolves and each set of implementation strategies is refined or modified.

### **Planning and Development Activities**

These refer to activities that must be planned in order for comprehensive improvements to begin. A management framework should be established and the mixed-use zoning ordinance pursued. A traffic study should be performed to test the roundabout concept. Retail and residential market studies should be performed to determine the framework for mixed-use housing strategies.

### **Capital Improvement Strategies**

These include physical improvements in both the private and public sectors. Streetscape improvements, roundabout construction, facade improvements and general clean-up and fix-up are included in this category.

### **Mixed-Use Development Initiatives**

Activities geared toward implementation of the mixed-use component of the Concept Plan make up this category, such as determining a land assembly plan, developing a package to solicit qualified developers and phasing construction.

Responsibilities are not indicated at this time. It is important for the public and private entities to work together to determine common goals and strategies.



**IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

PROGRAM COMPONENTS	Priority	Implementation Timeframe in Years		
		1-5 years	5-10 years	10+ years
<b>1. Planning &amp; Development Activities</b>				
Establish appropriate management framework				
Perform traffic study to test roundabout concept w/ expert in roundabout design				
Create ordinance and implement mixed-use zoning district				
Initiate façade improvement program w/ professional design assistance for shop owners				
Assure the concept / improvement program is part of the City's Master Planning process				
Perform a retail market study w/ business recruitment strategies				
Perform a residential market study based on the concept plan - use consultants w/ experience in new urbanism				
Nurture public-private (business-government) partnerships				
Pursue funding and financing strategies				
Develop signage guidelines / ordinances that support the Concept- Continue to develop the design concept w/ schematic design and construction documentation of public infrastructure improvements				
Refine the roundabout concept based on traffic studies and analysis, and develop construction plans				
Implement marketing and promotion plans				
<b>2. Capital Improvement Strategies</b>				
Short term public and private clean-up / fix-up campaign				
Construct façade renovations and general image improvements				
Implement phased streetscape improvements for Saginaw, Jefferson and Ashman				
Construct roundabout and all related streetscape / traffic flow improvements				
Vacate the Jefferson by-pass				
Reconstruct the intersection of Cambridge and Ashman				
Reorganize and enhance the back parking doors / alleys w/ streetscape improvements				
Construct a new street connecting Saginaw and Mertz that will facilitate new residential infill				
<b>3. Mixed-Use Development Initiatives</b>				
Create public-private development partnerships				
Identify redevelopment opportunities, including existing buildings most likely to be replaced				
New retail mixed-use construction activities				
Implement land assembly strategy				
Package development sites to solicit competitive proposals from developers of prototype multi-family homes / condominiums				
Select development partner				
Phased implementation of mixed-use housing projects.				

## **FUNDING SOURCES**

Financing and implementing the recommendations of the Circle Area plan could be assisted by a host of funding sources from public, private, local, state, county and federal organizations and agencies. The recommended strategy is to establish a Public-Private Partnership to pursue a coordinated direction and to prioritize comprehensive funding. Some programs aim at capital improvement projects, while other programs offer loans or grants for encouraging new development. A few selected programs include:

### **FEDERAL PROGRAMS**

- Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA21 or TEA3 after 2003)
- The Transportation and Community System Preservation Pilot
- Community Character Act

### **STATE PROGRAMS**

- Highway Improvement Act
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) - Small Business Administration Natural Resource Development Program Street Trees Grants
- State Recreation Funds (MDNR)
- Site Assessment/Site Reclamation Grants (MDNR)
- State Foundations

### **LOCAL PROGRAMS**

- City General Fund
- Bond Financing
- Downtown Development Authority/Tax Increment Finance District
- Local Private Foundations/Patrons
- Local Private Corporations
- Special Assessment/Local Business Improvement District

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## FIRST STEPS

Estimating the cost of implementing the plan has many variables. The consulting team's primary focus is to set the vision for the future; more detailed study is needed. The summary of the potential magnitude of the budget for implementing the plan is provided based on previous project experience. More effort is needed to determine itemized costs and the role of the public and private sectors in financing improvements.

## DETAILED TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

Currently, traffic volumes are fairly stable in the Circle. In fact, daily volumes have decreased from the past because of changes outside the Circle Area. A more detailed analysis of the roundabout and its feasibility will be necessary to move the project forward. The City can initiate this study as the first step in the implementation process. It is essential that a consultant with long-term recognized expertise in the design and construction of modern roundabout technology be retained.

## MIXED USE ZONING DISTRICT

Zoning can be one of the tools to help implement the design concepts envisioned in this plan. One frustration of zoning is that, in developed areas, changes only occur over a series of years, as new projects are proposed or uses change. But zoning in combination with other tools, such as improvements within the right-of-way and changes to the circulation system, can collectively achieve the results desired.

While a number of approaches can be considered, the most simple and straightforward is to create a special zoning district for the area. Standards in a new zoning district could be applied as new businesses move into the area or wish to expand. An outline for such a zoning district is provided below. The actual language should be consistent with the format of the city's zoning ordinance that is currently undergoing a major revision. The specific district would need to be identified on the city's zoning map.

### **Midland Central Circle Zoning District**

**Findings and Purpose.** The Midland Central Circle area is a unique commercial district in the city. From its origins as traditional commercial cen-

ter, the area has undergone many transitions in terms of land uses and traffic patterns. Based on traffic and other studies, the city has determined that special zoning regulations are needed to support the unique features in this district and promote its long term vitality.

**Uses.** Permitted uses would include typical retail and commercial uses. Certain uses that create greater demands in terms of parking or traffic, such as restaurants, could be classified as Special Land Uses to allow more discretion to ensure the use is appropriate for a particular location. Other uses could be special land uses where they are less preferred than retail, such as office uses. While certain level of flexibility is desired to help ensure success of the commercial area, some uses are not appropriate. For example traffic oriented uses like auto repair centers and drive through restaurants are more appropriate for other areas of the city.

**Setbacks.** Front yard building and parking lot setbacks shall be consistent with the established setbacks in the Circle Area District.

Side and rear yard setbacks- no change from current but allow modification by Planning Commission consistent with the study concepts or later refinements.

**Parking.** A general standard of 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet of usable floor area is recommended, given the mixture of uses that encourage shared trips combined with the opportunity for some patrons to walk or ride bicycles because of the proximity to residential uses. The Planning Commission may require a parking study that includes an inventory of available parking that is convenient and available and the expected parking demand of the particular use, both at typical peak parking periods for the area. A reduction in required parking could be allowed if written shared parking agreements are provided.

**Site Design.** Site elements should be consistent with the design plan including:

**Pedestrian Facilities.** Provide sidewalks, sidewalk connections to building entrances and clear markings for pedestrian crossings in aisles of parking lots. Bicycle racks could be required.

**Lighting.** Lighting should be pedestrian in scale and limit glare onto the streets or adjacent residential areas. If the city selects a standard lighting detail, that light shall be used along the front yards or within parking lots. All lighting shall be metal halide with hooded fixtures, except approved ornamental light fixtures.

**THE DISTRICT IS INTENDED TO:**

- Accommodate a variety of complementary uses.
- Ensure such uses are designed to achieve uniform setbacks and a built environment consistent with the concepts on the Midland Central Circle Design Plan.
- Balance the needs of through traffic with pedestrians and patrons of district businesses.
- Promote public safety and efficient flow of vehicular traffic through management of access points.
- Provide an inviting atmosphere for pedestrians.
- Create opportunities for retention and re-development of appropriate businesses in the district.
- Improve the appearance of the area, both within sites and within the right-of-way.
- Provide reasonable procedures and standards to upgrade existing sites to become more conforming with the standards of this district.

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**Signs.** Special standards for signs could be considered, such as allowing sandwich board signs if certain standards are met to ensure their maintenance and proper placement. All freestanding signs should be pedestrian scale; pole signs should be prohibited.

**Waste receptacles.** Should be screened; no loading areas in the front yard.

**Landscaping.** Parking lots should have some landscaping to help buffer adjacent land uses.

**Building Architecture.** Some general standard could be used to ensure the building design and materials complements the existing buildings and is consistent with the design principles of the study.

**Site access points.** The number of site access points should be limited to help reduce confusion. If a roundabout is constructed, driveways should be at least 100 feet from the outer edge of the roundabout. Any driveway directly into the roundabout operational area must be reviewed and approved by a designer with expertise in modern roundabouts.

**Nonconforming Uses and Sites.** One goal would be to gradually eliminate the nonconforming uses that are not compatible with other uses or the design concepts, such as the automotive service uses. The district may need to be more restrictive with those types of uses than the regulations elsewhere in the city. For example, prohibit any expansion of such uses and closely monitor them to ensure their level of operation does not increase beyond the current, nonconforming situation. If the city decides to be more permissive, significant improvements to those sites should be expected. For example, the gas station would need to be redesigned to have a more compact arrangement, with a more attractive/unique canopy and building. Some type of screen wall or landscape hedge would be required along the front.

To maximize an upgrade through the area, the district should specify a site plan review for any change in use or expansion. The city could allow certain changes to be reviewed and approved administratively by staff to lessen the burden and apprehension of potential owners. The city could then determine the level of upgrade based on the extent of change proposed, and the level to which the particular building or site is inconsistent with the design concepts. Among the most important upgrades would be a strong pedestrian presence along the circle side, such as windows and a building entrance.

**BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID)**

One option for managing the improvement program and organizing the investment and marketing effort is to create a Business Improvement District for the Circle Area. A Business Improvement District, or BID, is an assessment and permanent funding mechanism to promote economic development. It allows for the collection of revenues, levying of special assessments, and issuing bonds in order to address the maintenance, security and operation of that district. The BID allows businesses to spread, among all participants of the district, the cost of development of the public improvements. The BID provides businesses with the opportunity to come together and use their expertise, experience and financing to improve the marketing, infrastructure and operational aspects of their business area, each of which has an impact on their individual businesses.

The local unit of government has the financial responsibility of managing the district. The advisory board determines policy, by-laws, levies, special assessments, fees and recommendations to City Council for approval. There are no reporting requirements to the State of Michigan. If a DDA already exists and the BID boundaries are the same, the same board may govern both. A BID empowers communities to:

- Open, widen, extend, realign, maintain or otherwise improve roadways.
- Construct, reconstruct, maintain or relocate pedestrian walkways.
- Prohibit or regulate vehicular traffic or parking, where necessary, for a BID project.
- Acquire, own, maintain, demolish, develop, improve or operate properties, off-street parking lots or structures.
- Contract or appoint agents for the operation or maintenance of city off-street parking lots or structures.
- Construct, maintain and operate malls with bus stops, information centers and other public interest buildings.
- Acquire by purchase, gift or condemnation and own, maintain or operate real or personal property.
- Promote economic development in the district through conducting market research and public relations campaigns, developing, coordinating and conducting retail and institutional promotions and sponsoring special events and related activities.
- Provide for the administration, maintenance, security and operation of the district.

## CONTINUE DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The concept needs further exploration and detail once the traffic study is completed. This includes programming of public use spaces, selection of furnishings and materials, detail design elements and schematic layout. Once the schematic design process is completed and approved, construction documents can be prepared for implementing various elements of the plan.



This study is the first step to creating the resurgence of economic development and community pride for the Ashman Circle area.

**SUMMARY**

Similar to Midland’s experience, many communities have modified avenues and streets over the past 40 years. In many, traditional streets were blown out for fast-moving and wide traffic lanes that slashed through established commercial districts on their way to feeding strip centers and suburban sprawl. By the mid-1990’s, leaders of these communities came to realize critical mistakes were made in aggressively engineering these one-dimensional roadways.

Today, cities are correcting mistakes of the past with new street designs to accommodate multiple functions and balanced needs. Communities across the United States are taking back their streets by converting one-way traffic back to two-way, reducing excessively wide lanes, returning on-street parking, adding sidewalks and bicycle paths, and putting in boulevards. New technologies, like the roundabout discussed in this report, are being embraced as alternatives to building and maintaining expensive signalized intersections. The reward for these reinvestment efforts is a resurgence of urban economic development, stronger neighborhoods, and a renewed sense of community pride.

Opportunities abound to create an active retail and living environment using unique attributes and market potential of the Circle Area. Options include new mixed-use development prototypes proven successful nationally. It also means applying advanced, state-of-the-art engineering solutions to correct the Circle’s streets without compromising capacity or safety. Within this framework, pedestrian activities need to be encouraged, a dynamic urban mixed-use environment accommodated and access to retail shops enhanced. This study is the first step by the business community and City to work together to define the role of the Circle as a successful, vital and attractive part of Midland for generations to come.

