

# THE NORTH MAIN STREET - HURON RIVER CORRIDOR

## Vision for the Future



The North Main-Huron River Corridor Vision Task Force has developed a vision to improve conditions for pedestrian and bike connections, public access to river-side amenities, and traffic congestion; and recommend best uses for 721 N. Main Street and the DTE site.

SEPTEMBER 2013



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is the result of the efforts of the North Main-Huron River Corridor Vision Task Force (the “Task Force”). It was aided by stakeholders in the corridor, meeting participants and members of the public who provided invaluable insight and feedback at public meetings and online. The vision contained in this report would not have been possible without this input and engagement.

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Respectfully submitted,

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# BACKGROUND & VISION

The City of Ann Arbor’s North Main-Huron River Corridor Vision Task Force (the “Task Force”) has developed a vision for the improvement of one of Ann Arbor’s northern gateways and surrounding areas (Figure 1). It is home to the Huron River, a complex mix of parks, private residences, recreational facilities, industrial and office uses, high volumes of motorized traffic, and the primary rail corridor through Ann Arbor.

The North Main Corridor is a community asset. Its concentration of high activity recreational and natural amenities and proximity to downtown and the University of Michigan Medical Center make it so. However, in passing the resolution that formed the Task Force, City Council recognized that significant barriers exist that limit the Corridor’s potential and diminish it as a City gateway. Specifically, in its May 7, 2012 Resolution (file # 12-0655), Council directed the Task Force to consider and propose a vision to address the following aspects of the Corridor:

- The best use of the City’s decommissioned maintenance yard at 721 N. Main Street as part of the Allen Creek Greenway trails;
- Creating, completing and enhancing pedestrian and bike connections from downtown to Bandemer and Huron River Drive;
- Increasing public access to the river-side amenities of existing parks in the Corridor;
- Easing traffic congestion at Main and Depot Streets at certain times of a day; and
- Recommending the use of potentially available public land at the DTE property where Broadway Street intersects the Huron River.

At Council’s direction, the Task Force included a member of the Park Advisory, Public Arts and Planning Commissions; a resident from the Water Hill, North Central, Broadway/Pontiac, and Old Fourth Ward neighborhoods; two business and property owners in the Corridor; a member of Huron River Watershed Council; a City Council member; and a representative of the Huron River boating/fishing community and the Huron River



North Main-Huron River Corridor Figure 1

Citizens Association. The members of the Task Force are as follows:

- |                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Bonnie Bona, <i>Secretary</i>  | Planning Commission             |
| Sabra Briere                   | Councilmember                   |
| Connie Brown                   | Ann Arbor Public Art Commission |
| Tamara Burns                   | Broadway/Pontiac Neighborhood   |
| Rita Combest                   | Huron River/ Newport            |
| Ray Detter                     | Old Fourth Ward                 |
| Paul Ganz                      | Business and Property Owners    |
| Julie Grand                    | Parks Advisory Commission       |
| Cynthia Ives                   | Boating/ Fishing/ River Users   |
| Mike Martin                    | Business and Property Owners    |
| Darren McKinnon                | Water Hill Neighborhood         |
| Elizabeth Riggs                | Huron River Watershed Council   |
| David Santacroce, <i>Chair</i> | North Central Neighborhood      |
| Sandi Smith                    | Ward One                        |

Pursuant to its charge, over the course of thirteen months the Task Force held nineteen regularly scheduled public meetings, numerous public sub-committee meetings and four well attended community meetings. Public input and participation extended beyond these meetings to A2 Open City Hall on-line civic engagement forums tied to the community meetings. At nearly every Task Force meeting, area stakeholders, City staff and/or other interested parties spoke on various issues. The Task Force also considered the 1988 and 1993 City of Ann Arbor studies of the area.<sup>1</sup>

Through this process the Task Force developed an underlying mission: To make the Corridor an identifiable, vibrant and unique destination that is connected to the community. With this mission in mind, the Task Force developed a vision for the future of the Corridor that is described in the pages that follow. At bottom, the vision recognizes that the Corridor can and should better serve the community as both a connection to various parts of the City and beyond and, as importantly, as a destination itself.



*Views Along the Huron River: Riverside Properties and Railway*



*Views Along the Huron River: Argo Cascades*

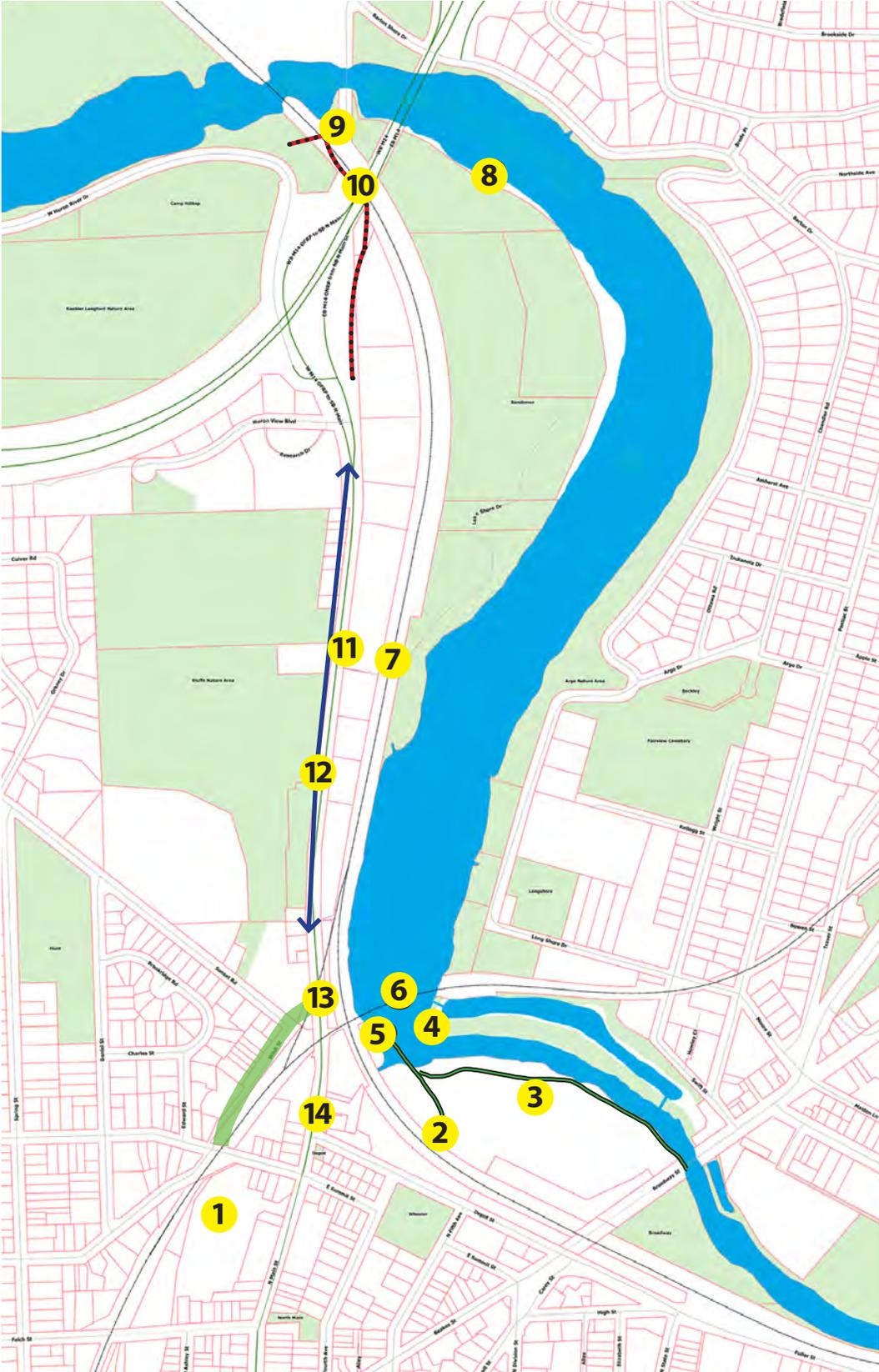
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1. *Land Use Plan: North Main Street/ Huron River Corridor*, Deardorff Design Resources Team, Inc. (1988); and *Argo Framework Study*, Johnson/Pollock Group and the Park Advisory Commission Citizen Advisory Task Force (1993).

This Report is organized in two principle ways: geographically and with specific reference to the City of Ann Arbor Sustainability Framework goals adopted by the City in February of 2013.

## Geographical Organizations

The Task Force recommendations are oriented geographically by four different areas within the Corridor and, in many instances, are specifically keyed to numbered points on the Corridor “Key Map” (Figure 2). While there is some inevitable overlap and interplay between the four different areas, they are and appear in the following order: 721 N. Main Street, the DTE property at Broadway, N. Main Street and adjacent parks and amenities between M-14 and Summit Street, and the N. Main and Depot Street intersection.



North Main-Huron River Corridor: Key Map

Figure 2

## Sustainability Framework Connection

Recommendations in this Report include reference to Sustainability Framework goals that are an element of the City of Ann Arbor Master Plan and intended to guide all City plans. Within the Sustainability Framework structure and where appropriate, recommendations are sometimes divided into short and long-term. While all Sustainability Framework goals may not be immediately relevant for the Task Force’s recommendations, the pertinent ones are included in the descriptions at right. Sustainability Framework goals are referenced throughout the Report by use of corresponding icons, defined as follows:

### Land Use and Access



**Transportation Options**- Establish a physical and cultural environment that supports and encourages safe, comfortable, and efficient ways for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users to travel throughout the city and region



**Sustainable Systems**- Plan for and manage constructed and natural infrastructure systems to meet the current and future needs of our community



**Integrated Land Use**- Encourage a compact pattern of diverse development that maintains our unique sense of place, preserves our natural systems, and strengthens our neighborhoods, corridors, and downtown

### Community



**Engaged Community**- Ensure our community is strongly connected through outreach, opportunities for engagement, and stewardship of community resources



**Safe Community**- Minimize risk to public health and property from man-made and natural hazards



**Active Living and Learning**- Improve quality of life by providing diverse cultural, recreational, and educational opportunities for all members of our community

### Resource Management



**Clean Air and Water**- Eliminate pollutants in our air and water systems



Views Along the Huron River: Border-toBorder Trail





721 N. Main Street Existing Site Conditions: Masonry Buildings

At the January 7th Council meeting the Task Force also recommended, with respect to the non-floodway portion of the site, that the Task Force continue to investigate potential uses for it and make final recommendations in this Report. The Task Force also requested that Council provide it with the resources to conduct a structural and environmental assessment of the two connected buildings on this portion of the site which, in total, are slightly in excess of 25,000 square feet. Council provided these funds and the City commissioned INFORM STUDIO SDI-STRUCTURES to conduct the assessment.

INFORM delivered its written report to the Task Force on May 29, 2013 (Appendix A). INFORM concluded that the buildings were predominantly in “poor” condition and that the estimated cost of restoring their structural integrity to bring their shells to a “maintainable condition” would approach 3.5 million dollars. This expenditure would not “include interior renovations and/or improvements other than the building envelope, basic services, and code compliance.” INFORM representatives advised the Task Force that very modest improvements to leave the City with a “white box” suitable for further build-out for tenancy would most likely cost an additional 2.5 million dollars.

## Potential Solutions

Rehabilitating these buildings is an option and both for- and non-profit groups expressed interest in using them. In these or other discussed reuse options, the Task Force grappled with the projected rehabilitation costs in the context of whether the square footage was worth the projected 6 million dollar expense. The Task Force also closely considered the significant rehabilitation costs in the broader context of the priority and breadth of all

the expenditures the Task Force is recommending in this Report.

Demolishing the buildings and repurposing the entire non-floodway portion of the site raised additional considerations that weighed heavily in Task Force deliberations. A very preliminary estimate for abatement, demolition and grading was \$300,000. Subsequent potential redevelopment on the site brought significant and, in the view of the Task Force, well founded concerns from surrounding residents about ensuring that the size, scale and density of any redevelopment fit in context with the neighborhood.

The potential use of the entire non-floodway portion entirely as open space brought additional considerations. First, using the *City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2011-2015 (PROS)* as a guide, and given the high density of parks and nature areas in the Corridor, there appeared no need for more parkland. Second, the hilly and hidden nature of the parcel weighed against making it entirely open space, as did adding additional expense to the City’s parks budget. The Task Force and many members of the public expressed concern that because the entire parcel is largely hidden from all surrounding streets and adjoining properties, an immediate and active use on the non-floodway portion would help prevent undesirable activities in the natural area on the floodway portion.<sup>2</sup> None of these concerns weighed against the recommendation for the natural area on the floodway portion of the site because the FEMA grant imposes restrictions on the floodway

2. A dog park was cited by many nearby residents as a desirable and relatively inexpensive active use option and coincides with the Park Advisory Commission’s current search for a near downtown location for one.



721 N. Main Street: Context Overview

Figure 5

portion of the site for use as open space in perpetuity.

## Opportunities

Located near the intersection of Summit and N. Main Streets, the 721 N. Main site is proposed as the first component of the Allen Creek Greenway. It is also a logical part of the Greenway's connection to the Huron River and related natural areas and parks and is a short distance from downtown and the Amtrak Station (Figure 5). The site is currently zoned as public land which allows the City to tightly and easily regulate any potential redevelopment on the site.

## Barriers

The most significant barrier to saving the buildings in the non-floodway portion of the site is the very significant cost. Demolishing the buildings and repurposing the land presents additional barriers that vary depending on the intended use. Barriers to additional open space on the non-floodway portion of the site include the likelihood of undesirable activities on this predominantly hidden parcel and ongoing park maintenance expenses. The primary barrier to new development is ensuring that zoning regulations are in place that fully protect the scale, character and integrity of surrounding neighborhoods.

## Recommendations

The Task Force presented the following permanent recommendations to City Council on January 7, 2013 and reaffirms them here:



Per City Council Resolution 374-8-05 approved on August 15, 2005, the area of the 721 N. Main site within the floodway be included in the Allen Creek Greenway.



That this approximately 2.5 acre floodway portion of the parcel be developed to include walking and biking paths to form the first component of the Greenway. Paths should connect from Felch Street to both N. Main and W. Summit Streets to encourage future connections beyond the site limits to the Washtenaw County Border-to-Border Trail and other parts of the Greenway (Figure 4).



That it is essential that any development of open space coincide with efforts to activate the amenity. Such efforts should consider unique and unmet needs near downtown (e.g., a dog park adjacent to the floodway portion).



That in accomplishing these goals, design

strategies and partnerships be employed to improve, if possible, the quality of stormwater.



That if any future development occurs on the non-floodway portion of the site, such development should remain consistent with the residential scale and character of the neighborhood and surrounding zoning districts.



That the City initiate discussions with DTE and other relevant parties that will lead to the removal of the Compressed Natural Gas fueling station adjacent to the site in order to accommodate future uses on the parcel.

Based on additional Task Force study and deliberation since the January 2013 Council meeting, the Task Force now further recommends the following with respect to the non-floodway portion of the 721 N. Main site:



Demolish the two buildings as soon as possible and clear and grade the site to avoid undesirable activities and eliminate the potential liability presented by these two vacant and unsound structures.



- Issue a City Request for Information (“RFI”) to seek potential redevelopment options from profit and non-profit organizations. Any RFI must include:
- Clear redevelopment scope limitations that result in proposals that are consistent with the residential scale and character of the neighborhood and surrounding residential districts;
  - An openness to public and private uses or a mix thereof;
  - An openness to commercial and residential uses or a mix thereof; and
  - A requirement for public right-of-ways allowing entry and egress from the planned floodway natural area to N. Main and Summit Streets that are consistent with (though not necessarily identical to) those depicted in the Task Force January 7, 2013 recommendations to City Council (Figure 4).



Provide an active use on the parcel as soon as possible to avoid undesirable activities.



Potential Active Uses for the 721 N. Main site

# THE DTE SITE AT BROADWAY & RELATED CONNECTIONS

## Background

The findings and recommendations discussed in this section center around a 14.2 acre site owned by DTE at 841 Broadway (Key Map 2 - 5). Located near the intersection of Depot and Broadway Streets, the DTE site borders the Huron River to the north/northeast, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) owned railroad to the south/southwest, and Broadway to the east. A short distance to downtown and the Amtrak Station, the site is situated close to numerous public recreational amenities, including the Argo Cascades and canoe livery, Bandemer, Riverside and Wheeler Parks, and the Border-to-Border Trail. The site is currently zoned M1 (light industrial use).

From 1899 to 1939, the eastern parcel of the site was used as a manufactured gas plant. After decades as idle space, in 1962 DTE converted the site to a service dispatching center for local operations. Due to the environmental concerns, between 1985 and 2012 DTE conducted multiple efforts to remove contaminants from the soil and groundwater. In 2012, DTE implemented a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality approved Response Activities Plan to address affected sediment, near shore soil and upland source material located at the site. According to a 2013 DTE Request for Information ("RFI"), "the sediment excavation area and the area of near shore soil excavation have been remediated to the most restrictive residential standard, with

the balance of the site remediated to an 'industrial site' standard." DTE has not formally proposed making any of the land discussed below available for public use. These recommendations are explicitly based on the assumption that some portion of the site may be made available to the public in the future.

## THE DTE SITE

### Potential Solutions

Figures 6 to 8 present examples of improvements on and related to the DTE site (Key Map 3 - 5). All of the images are purely conceptual and the majority are proposed on a site that is privately owned. Therefore, any decisions regarding potential recreational amenities on the DTE site would occur with the cooperation and consent of DTE and should include robust public input. A proposed non-motorized accessible path could connect Broadway Park to the south and the Border-to-Border Trail to the north. Similar pathways are included in the PROS Plan, among other City documents, and have long been desired by advocates for non-motorized transportation. In order to connect to the Border-to-Border Trail, a small pedestrian/bicycle bridge could be constructed across the Allen Creek drain outlet into the Huron River (Key Map 5 ; Figure 6).

An additional pedestrian/bicycle bridge across the river linking the Argo Cascades and Livery to the DTE site would further enhance trail connectivity and river recre-



Allen Creek Drain Bridge: Before and After

Figure 6



Huron River Bridge: Before and After

Figure 7

ation (Key Map 4 ; Figure 7).

The Argo Livery often operates at or above capacity. A small livery building (similar in size to the current structure at Argo Livery), additional docks, and fenced storage area for canoes, tubes and whitewater boats would ease current congestion while increasing access to the Huron River. Kayaks would continue to be rented from Argo while those interested in canoeing could begin their trip at the proposed livery. If the planned whitewater amenities just below the Argo Dam are approved by the State of Michigan, this livery would be the

ideal location for whitewater rentals and programming. The DTE site could also offer public boat storage lockers which are often requested by residents.

Beyond water related recreation, the DTE site has the potential for both formal and informal gatherings. The development of amenities such as picnic shelters, pavilions and/or an amphitheater would complement open space and enable a wide range of events (Key Map 3 ; Figure 8).



DTE Site: Proposed Amenities

Figure 8

Vehicular access from Broadway and a shared use 100-space parking area would allow residents and out-of-town visitors to use the proposed recreational amenities. Parking at Argo Livery is already over capacity and the City currently leases private property to help accommodate the need for additional spaces.

## Opportunities

On January 8, 2013, DTE issued a RFI from developers for the site. According to the RFI, DTE’s “primary objective in developing the site is to bring about a first-class, mixed-use development, capitalizing upon the unique features of the riverside site, incorporating significant green space open to the public.”

In service of this primary objective, DTE specifically requested that responses to its RFI consider the following goals:

- Creation of a first-class, mixed-use development, possibly including restaurant(s), retail, residential, commercial office space and/or medical office space;
- Creation of positive economic value for Ann Arbor;
- Minimization of traffic impacts;
- Incorporation of significant green space allowing public use and access;
- Utilization of unique water front location with public access, e.g., Border-to- Border Trail, future Allen Creek Greenway and potential new whitewater activities on the Huron River; and
- Creative financing strategy including use of public and private funding.

The City does not typically make recommendations regarding private property. However, given the stated purpose of DTE’s RFI, there is a high likelihood of private development on the DTE site that includes land set aside for public use. Thus, the site potentially offers a unique space for placemaking along the Huron River. While undetermined, it appears that the undeveloped western portion of the site is a strong candidate for the expansion of both active and passive public recreational activities. The design process for public amenities on the site will inevitably lead to opportunities for public

input and engagement. Public-private partnerships, in conjunction with private development or through civic donations, may also arise to fund development and maintenance of the recreational amenities. The recreational amenities would also likely be strong candidates for various grant opportunities.

## Barriers

There are three significant barriers to potentially achieving these solutions. First, the property is privately owned. Second, reconfiguring the site to allow for large volumes of additional vehicles off of Broadway may prove particularly difficult. Third, the potential need for and cost of soil remediation to active recreation standards which is currently unknown.

## Recommendations



City staff should maintain a dialogue with DTE representatives as they review and consider the responses to the RFI.



Public recreational elements should focus on creating a unique place along the Huron River, increasing access to water-based recreation and enhancing connectivity to the Border-to-Border Trail, the Allen Creek Greenway and downtown.



A pedestrian bridge should be constructed over the Huron River to connect the Argo Cascades to the DTE site across the Huron River (Key Map 4 ; Figure 7).



A pedestrian bridge should be constructed to connect the site to the Border-to-Border Trail across the Allen Creek drain outlet into the Huron River (Key Map 5 ; Figure 6).



City staff should devise a robust process for public input and engagement regarding all potential site uses.



Public and private funding should be sought for the construction and maintenance of potential site uses.

## PEDESTRIAN CROSSING OF THE RAILROAD ADJACENT TO THE DTE SITE

### Potential Solutions

The City's 2013 *Allen Creek Railroad Berm Feasibility Study* has identified the potential for an under-rail pedestrian passage near the 4th Avenue and Depot Street intersection that would connect to the DTE site (Key Map 2 ; Figure 9). This solution provides flood mitigation benefits by reducing the upstream floodplain, especially on Depot.

### Opportunities

The creation of a safe, legal and accessible means of crossing the railroad would benefit pedestrians and cyclists desiring a reasonably expedient means of reaching the Huron River and the DTE site from downtown. Development proposed for the 721 N. Main site, as well as the Allen Creek Greenway, highlight the value of the increased connectivity that could be provided by such a crossing.

As new owners of the railroad, MDOT is concerned about pedestrian safety from illegal crossings. If a fence or other barrier along the rail lines is erected to prohibit pedestrians from crossing, demand for an alternate crossing will certainly increase.

### Barriers

The most significant barriers to creating a pedestrian connection to the DTE property are cost and the need for cooperation from MDOT and DTE. In terms of financial commitment, crossing under or over the railroad would require millions of dollars. According to FEMA requirements for funding design and construction, the ratio of the risk reduction (value of mitigated potential damage) must exceed the cost of the improvement. The latest draft of the *Allen Creek Railroad Berm Feasibility Study* shows that all options included in the study do meet this FEMA requirement raising the possibility of external funding.

MDOT's concern about disruptions to rail service and long-term maintenance of crossings intersecting its property will need to be addressed. Finally, any poten-

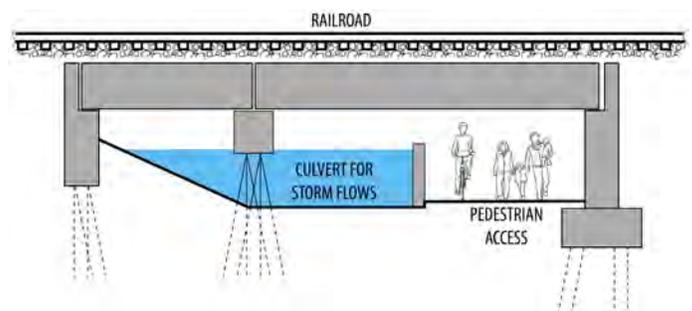
tial crossing of the railroad will likely require the cooperation of adjacent private property owners.

### Recommendation

So long as it is deemed financially feasible by the *Allen Creek Railroad Berm Feasibility Study*:



The under-rail pedestrian passage to allow pedestrian access through the berm should be built north of Depot Street between 4th Avenue and N. Main Street in conjunction with the City's flood mitigation efforts (Key Map 2 ).



Proposed Under-rail Pedestrian Crossing

Figure 9

# N. MAIN STREET & ADJACENT PARKS & AMENITIES BETWEEN M-14 & SUMMIT STREET

Because of the geographic scope and complexity of uses in this area, this section of the Report is structured differently than the others. “Background” and “Potential Solutions” discussions are divided into two discrete sections by issue (Transportation and Connections and Land Use and River Amenities) rather than location. “Recommendations” are, however, provided in a single location covering both issues. Each recommendation is presented with the specific opportunities it highlights and the related barriers to implementation. The Key Map areas 6 - 13 are discussed in this section.

## TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIONS

### Background

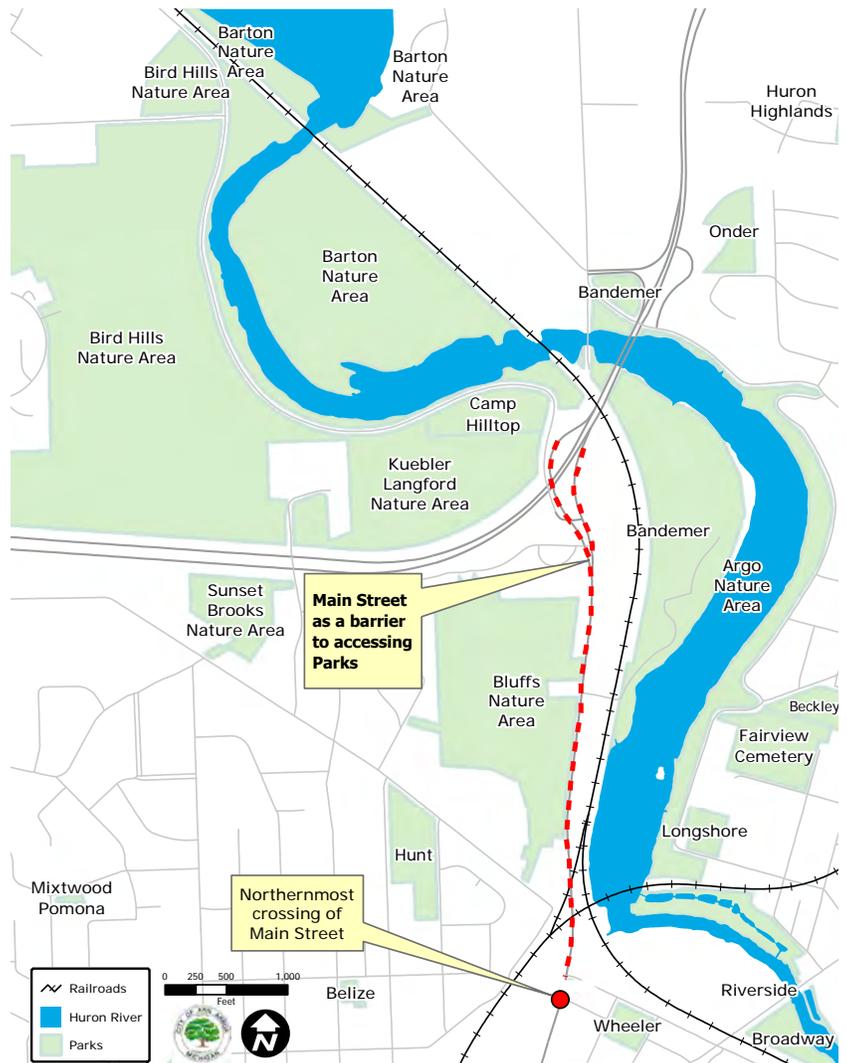
N. Main Street is the gateway to the City beginning with the expressway ramps and ending near Depot and Summit Streets and the 721 N. Main site. A large number of commuters and visitors come in and out of the City through this corridor every day. The right-of-way width is limited, with four narrow traffic lanes, sidewalks close to or right at the curb on the east side only, buildings close to front property lines, and a steep slope on the west side.

Traffic speed and volumes on N. Main from Depot to M-14 often make this stretch of road feel like a ramp on and off the highway. Drivers exiting M-14 onto N. Main must quickly reduce their speed to 30 mph to navigate the tightly curved ramp. They then immediately encounter an intersection with crossing traffic at Huron River and Huronview Drives, and then several driveways. This happens as the speed limit increases to 45 mph. There are no traffic signals until Depot and no crosswalk until one block south of Depot at Summit. This encourages high speeds in both directions on N. Main. Finally, due to traffic speed and volume, drivers exiting the various properties along the east side of N. Main (e.g., The NEW Center) encounter an extremely hazardous left turn towards downtown and points south.

N. Main is also a biking and walking conduit to,

from and between the many parks and natural amenities to the east along the Huron River, and, as importantly, natural amenities to the west that are sometimes overlooked (e.g., Bluffs, Barton, Bird Hills and Kuebler Langford Nature Areas, Camp Hilltop) (Figure 10). At present, the northern most pedestrian crossing of N. Main is at Summit. Those wishing to enter or exit Bluffs Nature Area from N. Main face several particularly unattractive options: make the prohibitive walk to Summit along the west side of N. Main where there are no sidewalks, or cross N. Main at the Bluffs exit in a 45 mph zone without the protection of a crosswalk.

The MDOT railway that lies between N. Main and the Huron River presents an additional obstacle to bicyclists and pedestrians. At present, the only legal access to the



North Main - Huron River Corridor Parks

Figure 10

river and related amenities along this stretch of N. Main (or anywhere in the vicinity other than from the distant bridge over Broadway) is the at-grade rail crossing at Lake Shore Drive. Because of these circumstances, non-motorized traffic largely crosses the railroad illegally, cutting through a private parking lot behind office buildings just north of the N. Main and Depot intersection. This unsafe and illegal crossing is untenable and, with MDOT's promise of high speed rail through this corridor, may likely be eliminated by MDOT's erection of a fence or other barrier. Yet demand for a legal crossing in this area is only likely to increase with the development of the 721 N. Main natural area as the starting point for the Allen Creek Greenway.

Construction of the under-rail pedestrian passage recommended by the Task Force near the 4th Avenue and Depot Street intersection would relieve some of the pressure that leads to the illegal rail crossings (in addition to providing flood mitigation benefits). However, the Task Force believes that the passage would not alone be a sufficient solution for two reasons. First, the distance between the proposed under-rail passage and the Lake Shore Drive at-grade crossing is a long walk. Second, with MDOT's promise of high speed rail in the area, there are well founded worries that the at-grade crossing at Lake Shore will be lost. This potential loss would not only affect non-motorized traffic, but would also present issues for the rowing and boating community who use the Lake Shore crossing to access the boat-house and docks located there.

## Potential Solutions

The Task Force has struggled with the conflict that exists between improving vehicular flow on N. Main and increasing safe bicycle and pedestrian access through the area and to the riverside amenities. Overlapping modes of travel and a wide variety of private property uses along this stretch of N. Main that sits adjacent to the railroad and riverside amenities have created a growing number of serious conflicts. While most motorized traffic is traveling through the corridor to access other parts of the City, the Task Force believes that their experience at this gateway could and should much better represent Ann Arbor.

Destinations along this corridor exist, but they are few compared to the number of vehicles that use it. On the other hand, quality of life and safety are critical to the existing businesses and residents on this stretch of N. Main and, because of the various parks and amenities, to the community at large. The Task Force strongly believes that improvements need to be made to more safely harmonize all of these uses. Such improvements should make passing drivers aware of, and draw them to use the parks and amenities. Improvements must also be planned and implemented to accommodate the growing number of recreational users.

These improvements fall roughly into two categories; first, calming traffic to a speed that is compatible with pedestrians and bicyclists. This measure will require an ambitious and thorough Complete Streets<sup>3</sup> design approach and close work with MDOT who has design and improvement control over this area of N. Main. Second, increasing connections between the east side of N. Main and the Huron River and related amenities. This will also require close work and cooperation with MDOT who owns the railway that is the principle impediment.

## LAND USE AND RIVER AMENITIES

### Background

One of the Task Force's assigned goals was to encourage changes to the Corridor that will open access to the parks and nature areas adjacent to N. Main. As the Corridor becomes a destination as well as a passage to M-14 and downtown, the area will very likely experience pressure for change in land use as well as opportunities to enhance the riverside and related amenities.

3. "The City of Ann Arbor maintains a decades-old commitment to a Complete Streets philosophy for transportation planning, project development and delivery. A "Complete Street" is one planned, designed and maintained to comfortably accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and motorists of all ages and ability levels. While there is no standard complete street design in the newly adopted state law, Complete Streets often feature elements such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, full-featured transit stops, pedestrian and bicycle oriented traffic signals, medians, pedestrian crossing islands, and curb extensions." City of Ann Arbor File #11-0200, March 7, 2011-11-088; Resolution Proclaiming the City of Ann Arbor's Commitment to Complete Streets. This policy mirrors MDOT's Complete Streets policy.

The railroad separates mostly privately owned and commercial property on the east side of N. Main from the recreation area along the river. This narrow strip of property is currently zoned M1 and M2 (primarily for manufacturing and industrial uses). The corner of N. Main and Depot is zoned C3 for fringe commercial (which assumes little pedestrian use). The properties adjacent to 721 N. Main are zoned O for office use and C1 for local commercial (neighborhood) use. Many residents expressed concern that development pressures could encourage taller and larger buildings in the “near-river” areas to the east of N. Main and, more generally, along the entire Corridor.

## Potential Solutions

Given what appears to be outdated and incongruent zoning in the context of the community’s current needs and desires for this area, revaluation of the zoning with vigorous public input is suggested. Based on what appears to be broad community consensus, the Task Force believes that new construction on the east side of N. Main should be regulated

so that it enhances the experience of the river for users and residents of those potential buildings and for the community at large. Accordingly, the Planning Commission should carefully consider appropriate zoning requirements that achieve these ends and provide clear guidance to prospective developers. Numerous other communities have required that the river facade of buildings be designed as a principal or major facade, and have at least the same design elements, articulation, relief, and other architectural considerations as the other facades; and new structures and buildings be oriented to both the waterfront and adjacent roadway or other dominate means of building ingress and egress. The Task Force endorses such requirements.



Views Along the Huron River: Rowers

While the Task Force posits no all-inclusive or prioritized list of considerations for the Planning Commission to consider, it believes that at a minimum it should follow the recommendations in the *Central Area Plan* to rezone Felch for residential, not commercial/office use (potentially excepting the 721 N. Main site); create a riverside zoning category that addresses the special considerations of massing, scale and view of the river; consider mixed use and residential applications; consider tax increment financing opportunities for redevelopment in sensitive areas; support art that is located on private property and visible to and accessible by the public; and require stringent stormwater management systems including green infrastructure practices appropriate for the urban setting.

In tandem with the work of the Planning Commission, the Task Force also believes that the Park Advisory Commission should consider the current and projected uses of the riverside parks. Amenities such as improved boathouses that can be used by the entire community, perhaps with mixed use or meeting space incorporated, would be

a significant benefit to the entire community and offer new access to river recreation. Thus, at a minimum, the Park Advisory Commission should consider the following in any update to the PROS Plan:

- Improving dock access roads;
- Working with the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission to improve way-finding at park entrances and along the Border-to-Border Trail;
- Improving pedestrian-scale lighting and connections to and from all parks and nature areas; and
- Improving riverside amenities for all river users.

## Recommendations



Provide safe access for non-motorized transportation across the railroad tracks in the area of N. Main and Depot Streets.

### Short-Term Recommendations:

- A. *Work with MDOT to improve safety at the existing at-grade crossing at Lake Shore Drive. (Key Map 7 & 11; Figure 11).*

*Opportunities:* Increase safety of current at-grade crossing and maintain cost efficiencies of current boating facilities and amenities.

*Barriers:* MDOT has jurisdiction over the railroad and would make the final decision about improving the safety at this crossing. Additionally, Michigan State Law prohibits the “construction” of new at grade crossings except for crossing consolidations or relocations approved by MDOT (MCL §462.307(3)). The ambiguity in this statute makes it unclear whether the simple addition of traffic safety control devices to the current at-grade Lake Shore Drive crossing (Figure 11) is prohibited.

- B. *Enhance visibility and use of existing Broadway Bridges entrance to riverside parks and amenities with wayfinding and placemaking principles.*

*Opportunities:* This is no cost, currently in-place infrastructure.

*Barriers:* These entrances are a long distance from the at-grade crossing at N. Main and Lake Shore and users of the riverside parks and amenities will still likely utilize illegal rail crossings between that location and the Broadway Bridge entrances.

### Long - Term Recommendations:

- A. *Build a pedestrian bridge over N. Main and the railroad tracks. (Key Map 13; Figure 12)*

*Opportunities:* This bridge is the best and most sustainable long-term solution. There are multiple possible locations for its placement, several of which use the increased elevation on the west side of N. Main as a cost saving measure. There is also potential for synergy with the reconstruction of the private rail bridge over N. Main. Coordination with the private rail owner could result in the widening of the current bridge abutments. This would help alleviate some of the chronic congestion at the intersection of N. Main and Depot which is discussed later in this Report.

*Barriers:* Effective ADA compliant access would require ramps and/or elevators.



Lake Shore Drive Crossing Improvements: Before and After

Figure 11



Pedestrian Bridge Over Main Street

Figure 12

- B. *If the at-grade crossing at Lake Shore Drive is to be closed, develop and implement a plan to either construct a road to permit motor vehicle traffic from the portion of Bandemer Park north of the Huron River to the current boathouses and docks; or relocate boathouses and docks to a point further north in Bandemer Park relying on current parking in, and access from the portion of the Park north of the river (Key Map 8).*

*Opportunities:* Maintaining rowing facilities is essential to the continued river vitality the rowing community brings.

*Barriers:* Moving vehicular access to the boathouse (existing or relocated) will require a cost analysis and traffic study to confirm that rowing traffic at Barton Drive will not further congest commuting traffic at peak times and cause traffic backups onto Barton and Whitmore Lake Road. The traffic study would need to determine whether the existing single lane bridge should be widened for two-way traffic, and the City would need to determine whether there is adequate space along the railroad

easement for boathouse access.



Improve non-motorized experience in the parks and public areas along the N. Main corridor.

**Short-Term Recommendations:**

- A. *Widen and enhance the existing Border-to-Border Trail along the river to lessen traffic conflicts and increase enjoyment for all users. This should include widening the current crossing over the Argo Dam (Key Map 6).*

*Opportunities:* The existing non-motorized Border-to-Border Trail could be widened to at least 10 feet in some places, increasing both pedestrian and biker safety and creating a more pleasurable route. Trash, recycling and dog waste stations and potable water would improve user experience. Signage that incorporates historical, environmental notes of interest and “trail use ethics” (e.g., announcing presence behind when overtaking pedestrian, giving way, disposing of trash), would improve both safety and user experience.



Figure 13



Figure 14

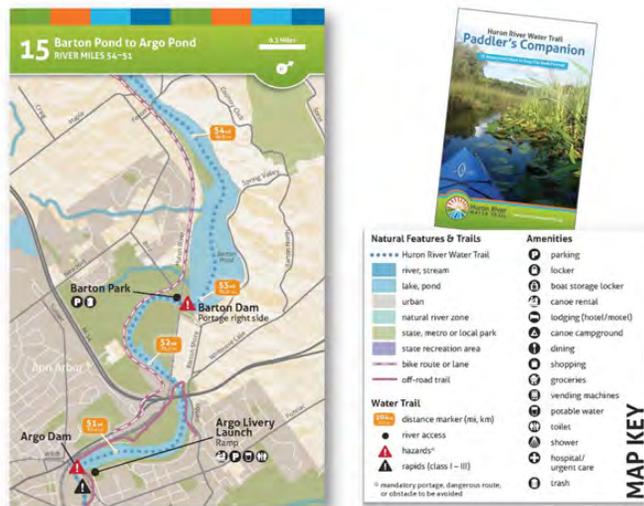


Figure 15

**Barriers:** There is limited land available between the river and railroad easement making a 10 foot path unlikely in certain areas and there is currently no potable City water on the east side of the railroad tracks. Preliminary estimates for the cost of widening the crossing over the Argo Dam reached up to \$600,000.

- B. Use the principles of placemaking to identify, embellish and encourage existing connections and views between parks and pathways in the N. Main area.

**Opportunities:** Signage and way-finding can be improved, directing travelers to the Border-to-Border Trail and ways to access it. Entrances and approaches to the Trail, Bandemer Park and Argo Nature Area and related public recreation areas can be more clearly marked. Art, architecture and landscaping would create beautiful and inviting entries and a sense of arrival by highlighting scenic views and passages (Figures 13 & 14).

**Barriers:** Access off N. Main to park entrances remains difficult without improved non-motorized access. Traffic volumes, current speeds and existing architecture on N. Main limits view to entrances along the corridor.

- C. Improve gateway between the Huron River Water Trail and the City and downtown.

**Opportunities:** Ann Arbor is one of five Trail Towns on the Huron River Water Trail and, as such, needs a gateway from the water to the City and downtown. Kiosks, way-finding signs, canoe/kayak lockers, and trail amenities for river and Water Trail users would cement this part of the City as the gateway to and from the river (Figures 13-15).

**Barriers:** There are minimal costs associated with these improvements.

- D. *Improve existing sidewalk along east side of N. Main Street from M-14 on-ramp to Depot Street.*

*Opportunities:* Leveling and resurfacing the sidewalk will remove safety hazards for both pedestrians and bicyclists as would extending the sidewalk to connect with a future connection to Bandemer Park or Huron River Drive (Key Map 12 ; Figure 16).

*Barriers:* Private ownership of properties adjacent to N. Main could be an impediment or increase costs. Existing uneven topography may also present challenges.

- E. *Work with MDOT to find near term ways to reduce vehicle speed on N. Main from Huron River to Depot.*

*Opportunities:* There is currently considerable pedestrian and bicycle traffic in this area. Slowing motor vehicle traffic will provide a safer environment for these users and encourage others. Bus service might also be better extended through this area, perhaps connecting to the existing Park & Ride slightly north on US-23.

*Barriers:* MDOT’s current interpretation of allowable vehicular speed is not compatible with

safe non-motor vehicle use. The current road layout and design does not naturally cause vehicles to travel at an appropriate speed for a shared roadway.

Long -Term Recommendation:

*The Task Force recommends that a comprehensive, multi-modal (motorized and non-motorized) mobility study be conducted to better understand the risks and benefits associated with various options for improving the experiences for all users of the N. Main Street right-of-way from M-14 to the Depot and Summit Streets intersection. Close study of the corridor into downtown and on Depot to the medical center is necessary to understand the destinations of commuters and where the recreational users are coming from. A wide variety of ideas for components to possible solutions were discussed by the Task Force at length. Ultimately, the Task Force concluded that a professional assessment incorporating the interconnected relationships between possible solution components was necessary.*

*The Task Force recommends that this N. Main multi-modal mobility study include passenger vehicles, transport and commercial vehicles, mass transit (buses), bicycle commuters, recreational cyclists of all abilities and ages, pedestrian commuters, and recreational walkers and*



Main Street Sidewalk Improvements; Looking South: Before and After

Figure 16



Signalized Pedestrian Crossing of Main St. at Lake Shore Drive: Before and After

Figure 17

runners. The redesigned corridor should integrate the elements of Complete Streets and be designed to accommodate vehicle speeds consistent with the vision for the area and no greater than the M-14 exit ramp (30 mph).

The ideas that surfaced from the Task Force about traffic patterns are not all-inclusive and are not prioritized. At a minimum, these elements should be considered in the study:

Extend bus transit to the north end of N. Main:

- Left turn lane and/or reversible lanes;
- Bike lanes;
- Widen the sidewalk to a bike/pedestrian pathway width (10 feet);
- Landscape to protect sidewalks;
- Improve signaling for vehicles and pedestrians;
- Install sidewalks on the west side of Main (Key Map 12 ; Figure 16); and
- Create a signaled pedestrian crossing of N. Main between Lake Shore Drive and the entrance to Bluffs Nature Area (Key Map 11 ; Figure 17).

Additionally, the entrance to Bandemer Park off Barton Drive may need to be studied if this becomes the new access route to the rowing club facilities. This study should include MDOT staff and other external stakeholders and be used to

communicate community desires to MDOT.

**Opportunities:** Implementation of a thoroughly studied and well executed multi-modal transportation plan will create a better experience for all traffic types, provide a safer environment and encourage and allow pedestrian use of sidewalks.

**Barriers:** MDOT’s current posted speed limits and the current road design are incompatible with pedestrian and bicycle use. The implementation of such a plan will also be costly, though those costs might be reduced somewhat if properly timed to relate to MDOT’s current plans to resurface and make some improvements to this stretch of N. Main.



Provide safe motorized and non-motorized access from N. Main Street to Bluffs Nature Area and Huron River Drive and improve connections within Bluffs Nature Area.

**Short-Term Recommendation:**

Implement improvements and connections to and through Bluffs Nature Area (Key Map 11 ; Figure 17).

**Opportunities:** Well-defined pedestrian and bike paths in Bluffs Nature Area could lead to

N. Main at Lake Shore in a number of configurations. Creating and/or improving paths for some general users is cost effective and could bring more people into Bluffs Nature Area. Well defined pedestrian and bike paths in Bluffs could lead from Sunset to Huronview Drive for access to either Beechwood/Bird Hills Nature Area (to the west) or Huron River Drive (to the east).

*Barriers:* Steep slopes within Bluffs Nature Area may limit a significant increase in use. Careful planning is necessary to avoid mountain biker and pedestrian conflict.



Figure 18

that varied on passageway design, with a more open underpass being preferable to a tunnel.

- B. *Build a shared use bike and pedestrian path adjacent to the M-14 on-ramp and under the M-14 bridge thus avoiding the need to cross the railroad tracks to travel from Bandemer Park to Barton Nature Area and eventually to Huron River Drive (Key Map 10 ; Figure 19).*

*Opportunities:* This option is low cost relative to others and will reduce non-motorized traffic on N. Main eliminating the need for more costly alternatives.

*Barriers:* An easement across the property adjacent to M-14 would be necessary in order to create this path. MDOT would need to allow path to be built under the M-14 bridge.

Long-Term Recommendations:

- A. *Provide crossing under the railroad through Bandemer to Barton and Huron River Drive. (Key Map 9 ; Figure 18)*

*Opportunities:* Links between parks create a natural flow for users and there is already an informal path over the tracks. The PROS Plan calls for a tunnel and it would help move non-motorized traffic off of N. Main and onto the Border-to-Border Trail.

*Barriers:* The costs may be prohibitive and MDOT must agree to these plans. There was some concern among the public about safety



Pedestrian Crossing Under M-14: Before and After

Figure 19

- C. *Implement Complete Streets solution which would include a sidewalk and/or bike path on the west side of N. Main and a signaled crossing at Lake Shore and N. Main (Key Map 11 & 12).*

*Opportunities:* This vision is in line with the City's Complete Streets vision. These improvements would allow bikes and pedestrians to safely travel from downtown to Barton, Bluffs, Bird Hills and Kuebler-Langford nature areas.

*Barriers:* The terrain is hilly, with slopes dropping to N. Main sharply. Any path would need to involve a significant retaining wall and/or ramping. This would add cost. The City would need to work closely with MDOT regarding the right-of-way and the non-motorized path.



Improve the overall entry corridor experience by closely regulating future development, improving riverside amenities and using placemaking principles to provide visual access and awareness of the river and surrounding amenities.

Short-Term Recommendation:

*Use placemaking principles to provide visual access and awareness of the Huron River, its connections, the riverside activities, parks and nature areas along N. Main Street. ( Figure 14).*

*Opportunities:* There are significant opportunities to enhance visual access for motorized and non-motorized users. Improved way-finding at Lake Shore, Bluffs Nature Area and the proposed greenway at the 721 N. Main site entrance along N. Main would help guide visitors and users to the river and associated amenities. Way-finding signage and pathway lighting would improve their experience.

*Barriers:* The barriers to such improvements are small as their cost is relatively low. Careful planning around placement and contiguity with other City way-finding is necessary.

Long-Term Recommendations:

- A. *The Planning Commission should carefully consider appropriate zoning requirements that enhance the experience of the river – both for users and residents of those potential buildings and for the community at large. Such restrictions should provide clear guidance to prospective developers about design, placement and massing and should require new buildings to be oriented to both the waterfront and N. Main.*

*Opportunities:* There are significant opportunities to enhance this stretch of N. Main and provide visual and vehicular access to the river and adjacent amenities. New development should help achieve the opportunities, not interfere with them.

*Barriers:* There are no barriers to such planning and regulation other than ensuring robust public input and insisting that no significant new development takes place until the appropriate regulations are in place.

- B. *In tandem and in cooperation with the Planning Commission's work, the Park Advisory Commission should update the PROS Plan in this area specifically considering:*

- *Improving riverside amenities for all river users;*
- *Improving dock access roads;*
- *Working with the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission to improve way-finding at park entrances and along the Border-to-Border Trail; and*
- *Improving pedestrian-scale lighting and connections to and from all parks and nature areas.*

*Opportunities:* The river and parks in this area are significant and irreplaceable community assets. The City should make a significant commitment to improve them.

*Barriers:* There are no barriers to such planning other than costs which will increase with the

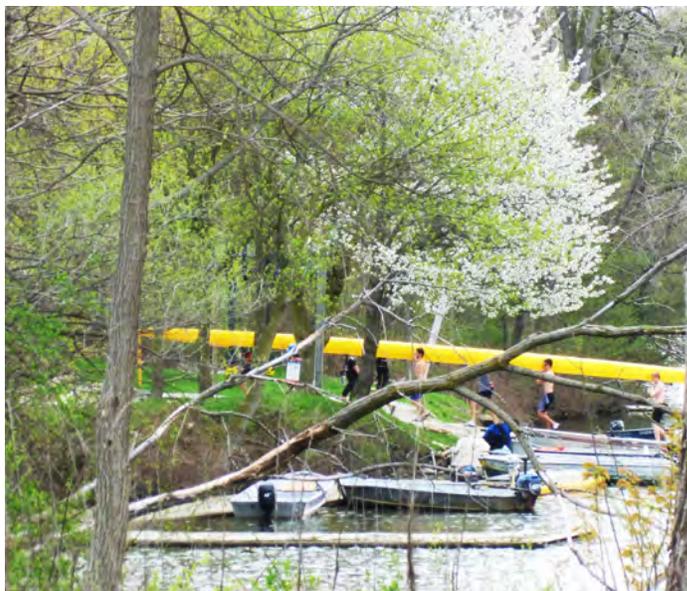
ambitiousness of any proposed improvements.



Take proactive measures to promote awareness and safe use of parks and other Huron River amenities and plan for the impact of increased use. This includes identifying areas where appropriate activities are occurring and ensure that those areas are safe, inviting and accessible.

*Opportunities:* The installation of rental storage lockers and temporary storage for kayaks and canoes at the Bandemer Park docks should increase visitor use and satisfaction. Signage indicating Park’s policy (e.g., “No Swimming” at docks) should be installed. Signs would also help recreational boaters learn about the travel patterns, mobility and vision and other aspects of rowing shell use to help reduce collisions.

*Barriers:* The barriers here are the various costs associated with signage, lockers and storage facilities.



Views along the Huron River



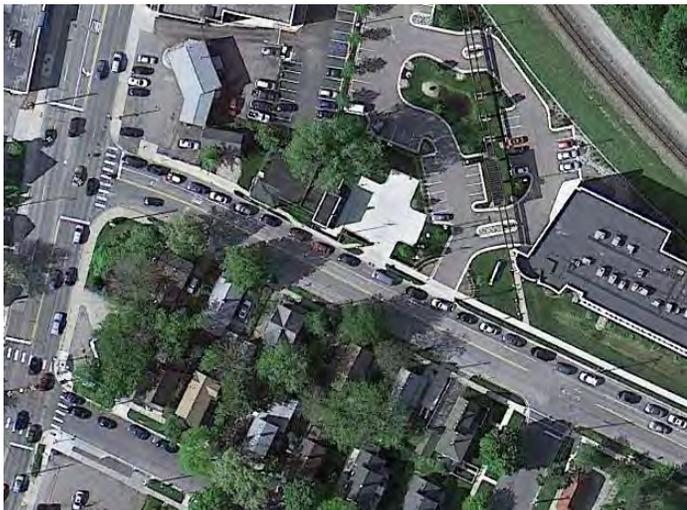
Views along the Huron River: Argo Canoe Livery

## Background

The intersections of N. Main and Depot and N. Main and Summit Streets present significant issues for the corridor (Key Map 14). During rush hours, motorists passing through the Main and Depot intersection experience significant backups. In the morning, southbound N. Main motorists turning left at Depot experience backups, not infrequently as far north as Lake Shore Drive. In the afternoon, westbound Depot traffic often backs up as far east as the Broadway Bridges.

Motorists leaving town via Depot during the evening rush hour frequently attempt to avoid the backup at Main with an “unofficial bypass”: left onto 4th Avenue, right onto E. Summit and then right onto Main. This practice adds to the gridlock at Main and Summit and increases wait times for those not using this bypass to go north on Main from Depot. Accordingly, all four intersections (Main/Depot, Main/Summit, Depot/4th and Summit/4th) need to be considered holistically. The current congestion in this area negatively impacts air quality due to the high volume of idling vehicles and also makes pedestrian movement more difficult and dangerous.

The only officially permitted pedestrian crossing at Main and Depot is to cross Depot on the east side of Main. Many members of the public and the Task Force consider this a dangerous crossing: motorists traveling through this intersection often do not pay attention to pedestri-



Traffic queue at N. Main and Depot Street

ans and instead focus on navigating the heavy traffic. Finally, there is no crosswalk across Main at Depot.

## Potential Solutions

There are several potential solutions to the issues in this area. Installation of legal crossings at Main and Depot and Depot and 4th and the installation of a right turn arrow onto Main for westbound Depot traffic are relatively low cost, potential near term solutions once the barriers to such changes are addressed. Longer term and more effective solutions discussed by the Task Force all involve road widening which implicate the same barriers as the short term solutions in addition to significant right-of-way and financial hurdles.

## Opportunities

Located near the 721 N. Main site, this group of intersections is significant in creating inviting non-motorized access to the Huron River and related nature areas and amenities. This group of intersections is also critical to the development of long-term plans to better accommodate ever growing amounts of traffic through this area in harmony with non-motorized traffic.

## Barriers

A potentially significant barrier to improvements here is the fact that improvements to N. Main are solely within MDOT's discretion. Cost also becomes a barrier with any solution that involves widening roads. Also possibly present with longer term widening solutions are the barriers of lack of City ownership of the right-of-way necessary to accomplish the widening. As discussed earlier in this Report, the widening of N. Main would also require working with the private rail company that owns the rail bridge and supporting abutments over N. Main as they presently limit the street's width.

## Recommendations



- Short-Term Recommendations: The following recommendations can be accomplished quickly in cooperation with MDOT (Figure 20):
- Install a green, right turn arrow for westbound Depot Street traffic at Main Street.
  - Convert the existing left turn only lane on

Depot at N. Main to allow right turns as well, essentially creating a double right turn lane.

- Install a pedestrian crosswalk across Depot at 4th Avenue. That crosswalk is currently planned when Depot is resurfaced on a date yet to be determined.
- Install a pedestrian crosswalk across N. Main at Depot.



Long-Term Recommendations: The following long-term recommendations will require significant cooperation with MDOT and, possibly, financial expenditures by the City.

- Extend the left turn lane on N. Main from Depot north as far as the Lake Shore Drive/ N. Main intersection. This would require the widening of the right-of-way, most likely on the west side of N. Main where the City presently owns most of the land. It will also require the reconstruction of the railroad overpass over N. Main.
- The distance between the railroad abutments for the overpass across N. Main needs to be increased to permit the widening of N. Main. This would eliminate the “pinch point” created by the abutments which prevent the northward extension of the left turn lane on southbound N. Main.
- Commence discussions with the relevant parties (MDOT, WATCO Rail, and private property owners) to discuss the possibilities of implementing these long-term solutions within the next 5 to 10 years and budget these projects in the Capital Improvement Plan.



Main and Depot Intersection Improvements: Before and After Figure 20