

# THE SUMMIT AND WESTPARK NEIGHBORHOODS



2010

Part of the Canton Neighborhood Project

# The Summit and Westpark Neighborhoods

## INTRODUCTION

The Summit neighborhood and adjacent West Park have a long and impressive history in Canton. The original neighborhoods, located above Tuscarawas Street West, spanned from downtown to the water works and Monument Park. They included active businesses along Tuscarawas West and Timken High School. The blocks of housing stretched north along tree-lined streets all the way to 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW. With West Park included, they eventually extended up to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street NW. Many of the important founding families built homes in the original Summit neighborhood and later in West Park. Their homes were grand Victorian and Turn-of-the-Century houses and elegant apartment buildings, but there were also smaller houses purchased by middle-income homebuyers desiring quality housing close to downtown.

Of course, with that range of properties and easy access, other issues arose over time. Many larger houses were converted to multifamily structures, especially during World War II, and many continued as rentals after the war. Over time, the apartment buildings weren't able to attract renters who wanted more modern units and the houses on the small streets lacked the space needed for the increased use of cars. Through-traffic increased and commercial activities nibbled at the edges of both Summit and West Park. By the 1990's, home values in Summit were far too low and, as a result, vacancy and even abandonment were appearing. In turn, this caused homeownership levels to continue to drop. Although West Park avoided the worst of these problems, it still saw a stagnation of house prices that continues to this day.

Fortunately, over the last few years there have been active initiatives to upgrade the area, especially in parts of Summit. The traffic patterns were improved and properties near the Timken campus were replaced with needed parking. Sub-standard houses were demolished while dozens of houses were purchased and renovated, both by nonprofit groups and by private investors. Wilson Pointe, a complex of senior apartments, was constructed and an older apartment building was renovated. A tract of land was cleared and made available for constructing new houses, ten of which have been completed. Moreover, the deteriorating public school was demolished and replaced with the Arts Academy at Summit School, which now attracts a student body throughout the city.

Nevertheless, even with all of these improvements, much of the area continues to be troubled. In the renewal process there are no simple answers for Summit, but there are certain clear observations. The first is that the real estate market is profoundly undermined. There is very little conventional confidence beyond some investor renovations. The second is that there are far too many houses for any reasonable expectation of market demand. Third, the neighborhood itself is too large for the public and private resources to address quickly. The fourth recognition is that Summit is not just one neighborhood; it is actually best called the Neighborhoods of Summit.

This last observation is the necessary first step in addressing the renewal challenges. The target neighborhoods should be conceived as at least four areas, if we include a portion of the West Park that is also below 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW. When the larger neighborhood is broken down into its various parts, it becomes clear that different strategies will be needed for each part.

For these workplans, two parts of Summit and all of West Park were selected. The first area has been designated Top of Summit because it includes many of the northernmost blocks. It is bounded by Fulton Road NW and Shorb Avenue NW from 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW up to 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW. It is especially important because of the Arts Academy at Summit School, which attracts visitors from all over Canton. The second section has been labeled Fulton Parkside. It includes the blocks from Tuscarawas Street West up to 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW west of Fulton Road NW. This boundary street is critical because it is seen by substantial through-traffic, but more importantly because of the impact on the otherwise stable West Park neighborhood.

What follows are three workplans: Top of Summit, Fulton Parkside, and West Park. Each workplan takes a very different approach. This diversity reflects the current mix of ownership, the real estate market, the level of abandonment, the extent of disinvestment, recent investments, and the varied potential roles for residents.

## TOP OF SUMMIT

### FOCUS AREA BOUNDARIES

North	East	South	West
11 <sup>th</sup> Street NW	Shorb Avenue NW	9 <sup>th</sup> Street NW	Fulton Road NW

### WORKPLAN

This initial focus area includes a cluster of northwest blocks from Shorb Avenue NW to Fulton Road NW and from 9<sup>th</sup> Street NW to 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW. These blocks near the Arts Academy at Summit School are a diverse mix of elegant older structures, more modest houses, recently renovated properties, newly constructed houses, and a number of abandoned properties. In this specified area, there are 100 houses, three-quarters of which are single family. Nineteen are duplexes and seven are multi-family properties created through subdividing larger, original single-family houses. Most of the houses are from the first decade of the last century, although few are only three or four years old. The average size of the houses is between 1500 and 1600 square feet. Investors and nonprofit housing groups own many.



The Top of Summit neighborhood has seen some of the city's most innovative approaches to renewal. Various nonprofits have renovated houses for sale or for rental purposes. Ten new houses were built on land cleared of substandard properties. Investors have improved older houses and some long-term residents have continued to maintain their homes in excellent repair. These properties taken together are the gems of the Top of Summit.



On the other hand, these same houses define the challenge for the Summit neighborhood. Even fully renovated properties cannot be easily sold, so today most of the homeowner-quality properties developed by nonprofits are used as rentals. Likewise, even though new houses were built, sales have been very difficult and buildable lots remain vacant. The number of abandoned houses has not gone down and many rental houses sit vacant for months between rentals. The real estate sales market remains extremely depressed and too many houses aren't competitive with properties in nearby neighborhoods. Although one of the newer houses sold for \$100,000, two older properties recently sold for less than \$5,000 each.



This dichotomy must shape any viable workplan for Top of Summit. The primary goal of any workplan must create images of Top of Summit as having numerous special properties that deserve a second look. This will minimize the current attention on very low sales prices, poor property upkeep, and irresponsible residents. Instead, positive stories communicated about Top of Summit will focus on the attractiveness of the older structures, the extent of recent investment, the qualities of the elementary school, and the city government's continuing interest in the neighborhood through such programs as the Federally-funded Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

Of course, the problems might be played down but remain very real. Obviously, many of the older buildings that have outlived their competitive lives are obsolete and require complete renovation. This is difficult to achieve because there is such a weak housing sales market. As noted, even quality renovations by nonprofits and individuals haven't attracted buyers and there is an impact on rental properties as well. Disinvested properties are difficult to rent to stable tenants, but few landlords are willing to risk being far ahead of the real estate market to attract a stronger pool of renters. These dynamics have become a cycle that reinforces marginal repairs and even abandonment.

In the past, the responses to the market dysfunctions have been varied. Most efforts were focused on costly renovations or new construction. Other challenges, like failing infrastructure and abandoned buildings, were not fully addressed because of limited public resources and an absence of established priorities. There has been no attention to the doable small steps that could help stabilize this area and there has been no agreed-upon policy to promote those priorities.

Therefore, it is proposed that a workplan be put in place that builds on those positive actions that have already been accomplished. Simultaneously, it can be determined what negative conditions should be treated through a reasonable amount of resources. This workplan essentially polishes the Summit "diamonds", while actively removing the "lumps of coal". The suggested workplan argues that everything is better done by the dozens in order to make a visible impact.

**Polish the "Diamonds" should include:**

- ✓ Find and polish up to two dozen standard-setting houses, whether owned by homeowners, investors, or nonprofit organizations
- ✓ Assist two dozen additional houses to install lighting and/or landscaping
- ✓ Install four dozen identity signs or logos
- ✓ Distribute six dozen seasonal flags, flowering pots, or other markers
- ✓ Involve at least two dozen residents at each of three neighborhoods events





**Remove the “Lumps of Coal” should include:**

- ✓ Demolish a half dozen properties
- ✓ Complete a quarter dozen neighborhood clean-up efforts
- ✓ Upgrade one dozen more houses through volunteers, nonprofits, and for profits



**Working in cooperation with the residents of Fulton Parkside, the “Polish the Diamonds” Initiative should also:**



- ✓ Work with partners and others on a variety of techniques and tools for addressing vacant lots
- ✓ Broaden the mix of involved residents and other stakeholders, possibly with the assistance of the Stark Community Foundation and Community Building Partnership special programs
- ✓ Create an awards program to honor good neighbors, good landlords, and outstanding properties
- ✓ Develop a property repair program that involves city resources, nonprofits, volunteers, and funders to deal with both minor repair needs and major rehab challenges
- ✓ Build relationships with committed landlords willing to invest in the neighborhood and willing to improve the tenant mix

This workplan is intended to take place over 24 to 36 months. The timeframe is left ambiguous for two reasons. First, there are a relatively small number of homeowners and stable renters, so there will be a significant challenge in creating a strong resident group with a consistent voice and message. Second, the boundaries of the neighborhood are arbitrary and could easily expand by a block or two based on interest of residents, stakeholders, and the availability of city resources.

Once it has been determined how much resource is available and the willingness of the residents to participate, the residents, involved nonprofits, and city officials should sit down and acknowledge their positions and resources and commit to their respective portions of the plan.

In particular, the city government needs to determine that over the next three years, resources will be provided to achieve the following:

- ✓ A targeted number of demolitions both in Top of Summit and nearby,
- ✓ A priority list of sidewalk and street repairs,
- ✓ Support for innovative financing approaches to small repairs of houses,
- ✓ Active participation in a vacant lot treatment plan, and
- ✓ Assistance in neighborhood-based clean-up programs.

When the residents and the participating nonprofits work with this commitment from the city, they should agree to undertake a workplan like the one outlined above on a benchmarked schedule to match the investments by city government.

For those residents and supporters concerned about setting priorities, addressing vacant lots, dealing with celebratory activities, promoting curb appeal, and similar topics, the readers are urged to use the questions in the Canton Neighborhoods Workbook.

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Description	Number
Houses	74
Duplexes	19
Multi-family	7
Average year built	1909
Average size	1,557
Properties lived in by homeowner	45 (46.4% of known)
Investment Properties	52 (53.6% of known)
Unknown	2

## REAL ESTATE INFORMATION

### Overview

There have been 3 properties sold in the neighborhood in the last 6 months. Sale prices ranged from \$4,211 to \$100,000. The houses were on the market for an average of 148 days before selling.

There are currently 2 houses for sale in the neighborhood. Listing prices are \$29,900 and \$37,000. These houses have been on the market for an average of 49 days. There are 4 houses in the neighborhood whose listings recently expired without selling. The list prices ranged from \$25,000 to \$86,000. These houses were on the market for an average of 156 days before expiring.

### Recent Sales

Address	Listing Price	Sale Price	Listing Date	Sale Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1127 11 <sup>th</sup> St NW	\$3,600	\$4,211	7/17/09	2/12/10	Single family	1911	1,248
1139 11 <sup>th</sup> St NW	\$12,000	\$4,500	1/21/10	4/16/10	Single family	1914	1,456
1106 11 <sup>th</sup> St NW	\$109,900	\$100,000	8/18/09	1/13/10	Single family	2007	1,522

**Currently on Market**

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1110 11 <sup>th</sup> St NW	\$29,900	4/16/10	Single family	1918	1,006
1100 Fulton Rd NW (tented, rented month to month)	\$37,000	2/12/10	Single family	1915	1,634

**Recently Expired**

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Expire Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
910 Fulton Rd (vacant, bank owned)	\$25,000	1/12/10	4/12/10	Single family	1923	1,680
923 11 <sup>th</sup> St NW	\$25,000	7/5/09	12/30/09	Single family	1897	1,745
920 11 <sup>th</sup> St NW	\$35,000	7/5/09	12/30/09	Single family	1911	1,560
1003 Fulton Rd	\$86,000	10/20/09	4/16/10	Single family	1919	2,380

**Withdrawn**

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Withdrawal Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1116 11 <sup>th</sup> St NW (tenant \$550 rent)	\$21,000	7/1/09	12/18/09	Single family	1880	993



## FULTON PARKSIDE IN SUMMIT

### FOCUS AREA BOUNDARIES

North	East	South	West
10 <sup>th</sup> Street NW (south side only)	Fulton Road NW (west side only)	8 <sup>th</sup> Street NW	Monument Road NW

### WORKPLAN

Fulton Parkside is a study name applied to those blocks between Tuscarawas Street West and 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW that stretch from Fulton Road NW to Monument Road. Except for the commercial properties on Tuscarawas and on or near Monument Road and the excursion train station, the neighborhood largely consists of 100-year old residential properties in the southern portion and only slightly newer properties further north. Many of the oldest houses are also the smallest and are among the better maintained.



Overall, this cluster of blocks has always had more modest houses than the blocks along or east of Shorb Avenue NW in the older part of Summit. However, the area hasn't been seen as a separate neighborhood historically. Over time, it has become a distinct community with unique issues, strengths, and challenges. As such, it needs carefully tailored strategies appropriate to the neighborhood and real estate market issues. At this time, a full-blown workplan for the whole area is too ambitious until some initial victories have been achieved. Therefore, the focus of this workplan is smaller and targets those critical blocks immediately south of West Park from 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW down to 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW.

What defines these particular blocks as a unique place is the odd mix of stable blocks with adjacent clusters of abandonment. Today, in this section, there are over a dozen abandoned houses, but there are blocks with almost no abandoned houses and many well-maintained homeowner and investor properties. Other blocks, especially on some interior streets, are rapidly becoming completely derelict. Moreover, these dynamics are playing out in ways that negatively impact more stable areas to the north and the south.

Fortunately, the targeted disinvestment zone in this workplan is a manageable size of only about half the total neighborhood. There are only 183 residential structures; with 150 being single-family houses and 30 being duplexes or larger houses that have been converted into multiple units. There are three apartment buildings with less than 20 units each. While vacancy appears to be increasing, less than 10 percent of the properties are currently abandoned. Still, these abandoned properties create a disproportionately negative impact on the adjacent properties. They already suffer from having extensive rental use, are hard-to-maintain structures with an average age of 90+ years, and were built at a relatively high level of density. While many of the houses on the main streets are quite large, with over 1800 square feet on average, the yards are typically small and parking can be called inconvenient at best.

The positioning of the structures near the streets and close to each other makes some blocks appear crowded and even forbidding, a negative feeling which is reinforced by the abandoned houses. But remarkably, if one turns the corner, there will be an open, attractive block of well-maintained houses. Those are the ones that should be setting the tone for stabilizing this community. Regrettably, this will not likely happen if the real estate market values continue to be so depressed.



There are few conventional sales. The properties that do sell change hands for very reduced prices. There were no properties sold in the neighborhood in the last six months, and there is only one property that is a pending sale. It was listed at \$14,900 and was under contract within one month of listing. There is currently one house for sale in the neighborhood. The asking price is only \$10,000, although it is on the generally well-maintained McGregor Street. One house listed in the neighborhood recently expired without selling. The list price was \$49,900. That price was likely based on its location on Fulton Road, NW.

This data indicates an extremely flat housing market and undermines any effective purchase market for potential homebuyers. Currently, the interest from qualified homebuyers is very low; mostly investor purchases are occurring when the few sales actually close. This is problematic for these blocks since many houses are large and don't readily lend themselves to single-family rental use. Potential homebuyers see the many problems (especially the abandonment issue) and even shy away from the better houses and blocks.

When these conditions (a soft housing market, increasing low quality rental, and significant abandonment) prevail, usually a whole series of other problems arise. No new buyers mean that good houses don't get listed for sale. Low quality rental units mean that stronger tenants look elsewhere. Abandoned properties mean that nearby owners make reasoned decisions not to reinvest. When all of these factors take place at once, it is common for the perception of crime, youth problems, and neighborhood discord to increase. While those perceptions might be exaggerated or simply wrong, the message is clear. This neighborhood is being disinvested in terms of its property and its residents. It isn't a stable place of choice and its future is uncertain.



Fortunately, this doesn't have to be the message or the result. This can be a solid community of stable residents in good properties. It can be a place where people choose to be. It doesn't have to be a place to live when they have no other options or a place where people feel stuck. There are ways out of this cycle and the first step is to be realistic about what is happening and what needs to change. This work should be done through a small working committee of residents and stakeholders partnering with the city government and with local nonprofits. A similar approach has been in place in recent years through coordinated block walks of interested parties, but the format is mostly addressing neighborhood problems. The proposed approach is much more focused on leveraging neighborhood strengths. In the Canton Neighborhoods

Workbook, there is a range of suggestions about how this work can be done and about specific approaches to community change.

In the case of Fulton Parkside and the primary activities over the first three years, the **neighborhood committee** should:

- ✓ Determine a shared vision of what is happening and what is needed
- ✓ Identify the key properties that must be removed and the critical distressed properties that must undergo exterior code enforcement
- ✓ Establish an initial priority list of sidewalk and street repairs that reflect what can be reasonably accomplished each year for the next three years
- ✓ Expand the target area over time to include the southern half of Fulton Parkside
- ✓ Create and grow an identity program for the neighborhood and for the nearby attractions

Working jointly with the residents of Top of Summit, the **neighborhood committee** should also:

- ✓ Work with partners and others on a variety of techniques and tools for addressing vacant lots
- ✓ Broaden the mix of involved residents and other stakeholders, probably with the assistance of the Stark Community Foundation and Community Building Partnership special programs
- ✓ Create an awards program to honor good neighbors, good landlords, and outstanding properties
- ✓ Develop a property repair program that involves city resources, nonprofits, volunteers, and funders to deal with both minor repair needs and major rehab challenges
- ✓ Build relationships with committed landlords willing to invest in the neighborhood and willing to improve the tenant mix

As is well known, the resources in Canton are very restricted and the ability to undertake large-scale interventions is limited. Each action noted above must be tailored to reflect that reality. However, this need not be seen as a recipe for failure. Remember that the goal of this work is not to make the neighborhood a fully repaired place with no problems. The much more realistic goal is to rebuild confidence. Simply said, faced with the flat housing market and a growing pattern of disinvestment, the residents, investors, city officials, and funders need to act intentionally to build confidence in the viability of Fulton Parkside. Building confidence requires crafting a series of strategies aimed at quickly minimizing the negative features while building on the strengths of the community.

The following is a proposed three-year approach to such an effort. Keep in mind the scale of each action is expected to be measured and appropriate to the neighborhood and the resources.

## YEAR ONE

### CREATE A SMALL WORKING COMMITTEE

As noted, this group should not be a traditional neighborhood association. The nature of the problems and the small size of the area suggest that a partnership working committee is best.

### DEVELOP A PRIORITY LIST FOR DEMOLITION OF EVERY ABANDONED STRUCTURE

Remember, the goal is not strictly to remove blighting buildings; instead the primary outcomes should be the building of confidence as well as reducing the density of certain blocks. The Canton Neighborhoods Workbook discusses demolition and priority setting and should be helpful to the committee.

### CREATE A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLAN FOR CODE COMPLIANCE TO MAKE SURE NO PROPERTY IS UNDERMINING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Code compliance need not be draconian. There can be levels of application that can focus on the negative impacts of exterior under-maintenance, which are primary concern in this area.

### ESTABLISH PRIORITIES FOR REPAIRS TO STREETS AND SIDEWALKS, WITH EMPHASIS ON SAFETY AND ON ACCESS TO MONUMENT PARK, WATER WORKS PARK, ETC.

Make the hard decisions based on information and discussion. Don't just assume that the common knowledge is accurate; test every option.

### WORK WITH THE CITY GOVERNMENT AND OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS ABOUT THE REUSE OF VACANT LOTS

Review the vacant lot discussion in the Canton Neighborhoods Workbook and determine the options for this area.

## YEAR TWO

### BROADEN THE PARTICIPATION OF RESIDENTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

Once the first steps of change have been achieved, it is time to reach out to other residents and, especially in this case, to committed investors.

### COORDINATE WITH TOP OF SUMMIT NEIGHBORS ON LOCAL PLANS FOR PROPERTY REPAIRS AND EXTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS

While increased confidence should encourage all owners to improve their properties, many will find this difficult so there should be programs to encourage the use of volunteers, city programs, and the resources of nonprofits and local funders. It's important to not see this as strictly a repair effort; the goal is to establish strong standards of curb appeal that will increase confidence and real estate value.

## YEAR TWO (CONT.)

### DEVELOP A GOOD NEIGHBOR/GOOD HOUSE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

As part of the confidence building, avoid negative citations, such as crime watch signs. Instead, install welcoming signs such as “The Ray Place Neighbors Welcome You.”

### REACH OUT TO QUALIFIED LANDLORDS TO ASSURE BETTER QUALITY RENTALS

The residents of Fulton Parkside certainly know which are the better rental properties. Every effort should be made to reach out to the owners so that the investors are encouraged to keep up the high standards and potentially acquire and improve additional properties.

## YEAR THREE

### EXPAND BOUNDARIES AND EXTEND SERVICES AS ABOVE

Out of the many structures in the southern half of the neighborhood, many are commercial. The residential structures are often much smaller and perhaps more manageable for a working income homebuyer, but the houses tend to be a few years older.

### DEVELOP AN IDENTITY CAMPAIGN FOR THE WHOLE AREA

For many people in Canton, 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW is an important thoroughfare to access other areas, parks, and of course, to find excellent BBQ. It is likely that an image building campaign should start here and extend to the larger neighborhood over time.

### EXPLORE STRONG PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES, ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS, AND PROMOTERS OF THE RAILROAD, THE PARK, AND OTHER CIVIC VENTURES

It is in the best interests of many groups and businesses to see this neighborhood thrive; these potential partners can be critical in keeping the renewal of Fulton Parkside on a sustainable path.

For a relatively small neighborhood with few resources, the workplan outline is a substantial one. Much like Top of Summit, Fulton Parkside has long been considered a symbol of a changing Canton and there remains a core of civic leaders who are committed to making this neighborhood a community of choice once again. This dedication is to be commended, but with that said, the leaders need to understand that the demands for resources and attention are great. Unless the effort is scaled at a realistic level, there is little hope of dramatically changing this neighborhood. Each of the partners – the residents, the nonprofits, the city government, and the funding community – should think through this challenge and determine the amount of resources that can actually be available for this effort.

If it is determined that a comprehensive treatment at the level of this purposed workplan cannot be funded, there should be an open conversation about what can be funded and supported over three years. Once that is known, the local leaders can meet to realistically adjust the goals and timeframes to meet the funding expectations. Such a conversation should not be seen as a failure; rather, it would support a business-like approach to community change that has not been offered to this community in the past.

## FULTON PARKSIDE FOCUS AREA DATA

Description*	Number
Houses	155
Duplexes	26
Multi-family	7 (3 are apartment complexes)
Nonresidential Buildings	5
Average year built	1917
Average size	1,399 square feet
Properties lived in by homeowner	104 (54% of known)
Investment Properties	88 (46% of known)
Unknown owner	1
Abandoned Houses	16

\*IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD, THERE ARE 3 APARTMENT COMPLEXES WITH 4 TO 19 UNITED, FOUR TRIPLEXES, AND COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS INCLUDING AN OFFICE BUILDING AND A LARGE WAREHOUSE.

## REAL ESTATE INFORMATION

### Currently on Market

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
813 McGregor Ave	\$10,000	4/18/10	Single family	1918	1,250

### Pending

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1200 8 <sup>th</sup> St NW (Vacant)	\$14,900	4/16/10	Single family	1911	1,596

### Recently Expired

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Expire Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
907 Fulton Rd (tenant)	\$49,900	9/16/09	3/16/10	Single family	1913	2,406



## THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF WEST PARK

### NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES

North	East	South	West
23 <sup>rd</sup> Street NW	Fulton Road NW (west side only)	10 <sup>th</sup> Street NW (north side)	Monument Road NW

### WORKPLAN

West Park is a large neighborhood that extends from 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW all the way to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street NW. It is bounded by Fulton Road NW on the east and Monument Road NW on the west. There are 249 residential structures, which consist of 221 single-family houses, 19 duplexes, and 9 apartment buildings. There are also 10 nonresidential buildings that range from small office buildings, to an ice cream and sandwich shop, to a root beer stand. Most of the properties are in good repair although about 1 out of 6 are showing early signs of disinvestment that can lead to substandard conditions. There are three abandoned buildings, which is very low for Canton but stand out in West Park.

The neighborhood of West Park is widely acknowledged and valued as one of Canton's premier communities and is certainly well worth preserving and enhancing. This historic neighborhood is especially important because it offers housing that is attractive to households that could otherwise easily afford suburban housing. Retaining and attracting such households increases the economic diversity that is so vital to Canton.



With that being said, it should also be noted that the West Park name is widely known, but the neighborhood's identity remains somewhat unclear. This ambiguity should be expected for a neighborhood that spans from 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street NW and has housing built over a 50-year span from before World War I to the Vietnam War era. The southernmost blocks along parts of 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> streets reflect the large 80 or 90-year-old brick houses that define many common perceptions of the neighborhood. But these houses aren't typical of West Park, which has a much more varied housing stock. The neighborhood



has ranch style houses from the 1950's and 1960's and large frame colonial style houses from the 1930's to the 1950's. And there are many high quality but modest-sized houses built just before and after World War II. Further, the neighborhood offers duplexes, apartment buildings, and a range of local and citywide businesses, all of which add diversity to this historic neighborhood.

This variety of housing is one of the strongest features of the community, since it allows for a larger pool of potential buyers. The close-in location, the tree-lined streets, access to an outstanding park, and the visual impact of the well-

maintained beautiful homes attract such buyers. While the majority of the properties have a homeowner, even the rental properties are maintained at or near a homeowner standard. Finally, there are involved residents with a history of working together through the neighborhood association.

In sum, the primary market **strengths** are:

- ✓ High quality of original construction
- ✓ Variety of housing types and costs
- ✓ High level of quality ownership and maintenance
- ✓ Excellent park access, especially for the well-used walking trails
- ✓ Easy access to downtown, hospitals, and highways
- ✓ Presence of mature vegetation
- ✓ Involvement of an active and creative neighborhood association

With all of these positive factors, West Park is well positioned to remain one of the finest neighborhoods in Canton, but there are some very real emerging risks for this community.

1. First, many of the houses are quite large with some houses well over 2000 square feet. With older properties of this size, the costs of maintenance and utilities are very high. High operating costs are clearly reflected in the depressed sales prices. The low sales prices, in turn, cause many owners to minimize large, capital improvements in order to not be over-invested.
2. Second, houses that are 50 to 90 years old reflect the design features of earlier eras. Closets are smaller and bathrooms are fewer. Kitchens weren't designed as family meeting areas as they are today. Garages hold only one car and off-street parking is limited in some areas. What is offered in newer suburban properties just isn't available in most West Park houses. Of course, these older houses offer solid construction, beautiful wood floors, and attractive woodwork and mantels. But with so many two-income households, the conveniences of modern designs can easily outweigh the attractions of a historic house.
3. Third, like all of Canton, the neighborhood is aging and buyers have a number of newer options in suburban areas. Older streets and infrastructure can cause buyers to have second thoughts. When this is coupled with the heavy traffic volumes on 12th Street NW and Fulton Road NW and the marginal quality of some of the commercial activities in or near the neighborhood, potential buyers may lose confidence.
4. Fourth, there is a serious challenge from nearby disinvestment, especially near the Arts Academy at Summit School and the blocks along the southern boundary of the neighborhood. A drive down Fulton Road NW below 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW shows an increasing pattern of disinvestment and even abandonment. This can be disheartening to a householder considering a significant upgrade to a West Park house. Likewise, to live on the north side of 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW means looking across the street at many lower quality houses, some of which have become marginal rentals or are now vacant or boarded.

## THE IMPACT OF THESE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The result of these kinds of positive and negative market factors is a set of mixed messages about the real estate market and people's willingness to invest in their homes. While the real estate market activity is similar to historic neighborhoods in other cities with soft markets, there are concerns. For example, six single-family properties have sold and closed in the last six months even though the national housing market has been very soft. On the other hand, the range of sales prices remains a concern since the lowest price was less than \$18,000 and the highest was only about \$90,000. On average, these properties were offered for sale for nearly six months before selling. Simply said, while there is a functioning real estate market in West Park, the sales activities have been slow and spotty.



Fortunately, the picture might be improving slightly. According to research in the spring of 2010, there are three houses that are pending sale. The listing prices for these properties range from \$45,900 to \$110,000. These properties have been on the market for an average of 77 days. Even though the sample is far too small for definitive comments, the trend shows that listing times might be dropping even as prices edge up.

There are eight properties for sale in the neighborhood. Listing prices for these single-family homes range from \$35,020 to \$124,900. On average, the properties have been on the market for 81 days. There are three houses in West Park whose listings have recently expired without selling. The list prices ranged from \$104,900 to \$119,900. These houses were on the market for an average of 194 days before expiring. One property, listed for \$104,725, was withdrawn from the market. These slower sales, listing expirations, and a withdrawal primary relate to the higher priced properties. There seems to be a ceiling above which the West Park houses are not competitive.

If this is accurate, it reinforces the notion that substantial renovation is not a wise decision in this real estate market, even though the houses are of the age and quality that renovation is likely needed. This is the conundrum for West Park; it is a valued asset for Canton and desirable place for a family to live, but it is also an expensive decision to purchase and upgrade a West Park home. The challenge then is to enhance the perceived value of living in West Park, so that more households make the decision to move there and more current owners make the decision to upgrade their homes.

Improving perceptions about living in West Park should include two major components. The first pays attention to particular conditions and opportunities that the neighborhood faces and the second focuses on the need to control the way West Park is understood by the residents and by others.

## PART ONE: ADDRESSING THE CURRENT CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Every neighborhood is in competition with other neighborhoods and other communities for stable households willing to live there. Therefore, all at-risk neighborhoods must develop strategies to maximize what is working well while minimizing what is not as successful. For example, West Park has two very busy streets: Fulton Road NW and 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW. The latter is scheduled to be rebuilt through a city infrastructure investment. A successful community will piggyback on that work by installing signs that talk about “another great improvement in West Park.” This maximizes the value of the city’s effort and it makes West Park look like a place where investment makes sense.

Another example is the commercial properties. There are some substandard business structures at 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW and Fulton Road NW, which should be removed by the city government’s demolition efforts. Meanwhile, it is important to focus on viable businesses. In particular, two destination businesses should be promoted: Taggart’s Ice Cream and the A&W Root Beer Stand. These are places that people will drive out of their way to visit, so they create a positive image that counteracts the impact of the distressed structures.



Once it’s agreed on what features of the neighborhood need to be promoted and what negative aspects need to be minimized, a series of strategies can be put in place. Even though the Canton Neighborhoods Workbook surveys a number of ideas, for a moment, let’s consider a situation that applies directly to West Park. Let’s acknowledge that the larger houses are difficult to market because people see them as overwhelming. In that case, there might be a series of holiday house tours that show how homeowners are creatively using their large homes as great living spaces. Then it becomes part of a marketing strategy.

What if the neighbors determine that the houses on Fulton Road NW and 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW are critical to a positive impression of West Park? In that case, there might be a plan for a volunteer project that upgrades landscaping and minor painting while a strong effort is made with the city government to give priority to sidewalk repairs along those streets. This approach simply emphasizes a strategy around creating a positive image.

Assume there is shared recognition that disinvestment south of the neighborhood is having significant impact on West Park. In those conditions, it would be sensible that the residents of West Park would reach out to the residents of the nearby blocks to create joint strategies for demolitions, property repair, landscaping, and volunteer projects. Also, there would be efforts to promote the Arts Academy at Summit School. Such promotion has immediate impact on those blocks near the school, but it also has long-term positive impact on the whole area because the school draws its students and their parents from across the city. In effect, these efforts become a strategy about setting standards and expectations that reinforce investment in nearby neighborhoods and ultimately build value in West Park.





Finally, let's say the residents determine that the perception of crime is devaluing the neighborhood. Instead of announcing this with crime watch signs, the neighbors might agree to install porch lights that operate automatically from dusk-to-dawn as a way to make the neighborhood appear more open and welcoming. Such an approach creates a sense of stability and safety and shows the government that the neighbors are willing to do their part to improve the city. These kinds of strategies position the neighbors to ask the city government for help on other issues, which are not easily resolved by neighbors themselves.

In each case, the effort is to determine the challenges that the neighborhood faces and develop strategies that are positive opportunities for the community. Perhaps the most important area in which this must happen is the way West Park is described and understood, both internally and from the outside. This means there is a second fundamental component to revitalizing the neighborhood.

## **PART TWO: TAKING CONTROL OF THE MESSAGE**

Most blocks in West Park communicate a solid message of midwestern values around family, home, responsibility, and pride. However, these virtues are easily missed when the news reports cite crime or when a house becomes vacant and remains unsold or when a troubled rental ends up in an eviction. There might be a valid explanation connected to each of the events: the crime could relate to a stolen car being chased off the Interstate, the vacancy might be the result of a death with an unsettled estate, or the eviction could be the result of a landlord deciding to upgrade a property. Nevertheless, in today's urban environment, the easily remembered stories are those that focus on what is not working in a community and seldom is there equal emphasis in how the community is thriving as a place where people are good neighbors and caring individuals.

As a result, there is a need to determine what the neighborhood story actually is and to decide how to communicate that story. Usually, the first step is finding out why people live in the neighborhood, why they choose to stay and reinvest, and why the place is special. Out of that process, the community can decide what it needs to market and how to best tell the story. A number of discussions around these themes can be found in the Canton Neighborhoods Workbook, but there are particular examples that should be considered for West Park.

While there are a number of neighborhood identification banners throughout West Park, the signs are of modest size and don't express a branding theme. More signs, larger signs, and more information would help create a stronger image. Moreover, banners that cross whole streets carry real impact, as do permanent at-grade entry signs. The message on these signs needs to identify what people value in West Park. Is it the sense of history? The beauty of the homes? The reality of the neighborliness? The quality of the construction? Any successful effort at branding will research these questions by interviewing residents, especially those that have purchased recently and those that have made significant property investments.

Out of this process, marketing strategies will begin to emerge. There is the potential to partner with real estate agents, to facilitate open houses, and to encourage referrals from current residents for new owners. Other approaches will also develop. Once the current residents have described their recent property improvements, they will become a resource for referring quality contractors. Once neighbors know more about each other, they will expand the neighborly activities already in place. This could include sharing

garden cuttings or offering unused ladders and lawnmowers to new residents. Finally, working on messages about West Park will lead to a stronger neighborhood association, which will in turn strengthen the message about the neighborhood and its ability to set priorities and manage its own challenges.

## A PROPOSED WORKPLAN FOR WEST PARK

There are two overriding issues that must be dealt with in West Park over the next 36 months. The first is the need to set the strategies for direct action by the residents to produce positive change while minimizing negative issues. The second is the need to create a consistent message that encourages current residents to invest more. This attracts potential new residents to commit to the neighborhood. Both need to take place in tandem.

### Year One

There should be broad outreach to households to determine what people like most about West Park and what they are willing to do to make the neighborhood stronger and more attractive. This outreach can be by a survey in most cases, but for those residents that are relatively new (perhaps the last two years) and those residents that have made major investments during the same time period, there ought to be one-on-one interviews.

Once this is completed, a task force of residents should convene to determine action strategies such as those cited above and communication goals for the neighborhood.

To make these decisions substantive, during the first year, there should be at least one major event that addresses a challenge through an agreed-upon activity. This could be a volunteer improvement project on a key property or block or a neighborhood welcoming or landscaping campaign. There should also be at least one branding activity that clarifies the image of West Park and promotes one or more of its assets.

### Year Two

After an evaluation of the activities noted above, a second round of initiatives should take place that encourages setting high standards in the neighborhood and communicating a positive image of West Park. This round of actions should include strong emphasis on working with partners such as nonprofits, local foundations, and most of all, the city government. It is critical that the neighbors remind the larger community that it is a key resource and that investing in West Park will have a major impact on the whole community.

### Year Three

In addition to addressing the central issues, this time, it is equally important to celebrate the neighborhood as a place of choice. By now there should be a number of outstanding examples of community improvement and even stronger messages about the place. Local businesses should be urged to join in on these celebrations and reinforce the notion that West Park is a varied community with a positive future.

### Next Steps

As the annual workplans are put together, the residents are strongly urged to use the Canton Neighborhoods Workbook for ideas and tactics. While West Park might be one of the stronger neighborhoods in the city, it cannot overlook its competitors both inside Canton and in the suburbs. Each year is an opportunity to strengthen the community and to build the sort of place that generations will want to call home.



The neighborhood of West Park presents a unique set of challenges for the city government and for foundation leaders. It is always difficult to apportion limited resources to particular programs and neighborhoods. Why should one group or area receive more than any other? We are a democracy and public and philanthropic resources should be fairly distributed, or at least tailored to better serve households and communities in need. In other words, it is very difficult to rationalize more than minimal resources being invested in West Park.

Of course, that sort of reasoning has a very real downside. If special places with historic and architectural importance slowly decline, an important part of the character of the city is lost forever. Areas that once attracted new homebuyers and stable renters could quickly become places people refer to when they say, “It used to be so nice.” Canton can’t afford to have such an important neighborhood lost. Visitors will still drive by West Park on the way to downtown, to the park, to the Hall of Fame, and to the ice cream store and root beer stand.

While the residents must take the lead in the renewal process, city officials, civic and corporate leaders, and funders must supply the encouragement, the training and the financial support, so that this iconic neighborhood remains a role model for Canton in this new century. The leaders are challenged to look carefully at the workplan and to see where support and involvement from outside West Park can be critical in assuring success, because without success here, it’s hard to imagine success for the city.

## NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTION

Description	Number
Houses	224
Duplexes	20
Multi-family	9
# Commercial vacant land	3
Residential vacant land	30
Non-residential Buildings	10
Structures Below Standard	44
Number Abandoned	3
Average year built	1927
Average size	1634 square feet
Properties lived in by homeowner	210 (83% of known)
Investment Properties	42 (17% of known)
Unknown	1

## ADDITIONAL FOCUS AREAS

BECAUSE A PART OF WEST PARK IS ADJACENT TO TOP OF SUMMIT AND FULTON PARKSIDE, A SEPARATE SET OF DATA WAS COLLECTED TO GIVE A SNAPSHOT OF KEY BLOCKS.

	Fulton Road NW below 12 <sup>th</sup> Street NW	12 <sup>th</sup> Street NW	South side of 10 <sup>th</sup> Street NW
Buildings	8	2	0
Below Standard Houses	10	3	5
Abandoned houses	0	2	0
# Houses	26	11	5
Duplexes	9	4	4
Multi-family	4	4	0

## REAL ESTATE DATA

### Recent Sales

Address	Listing Price	Sale Price	Listing Date	Sale Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1007 Ridge Rd.	\$17,900	\$17,500	9/16/09	12/14/09	Single family	1918	1700
1403 Ridge Rd	\$16,900	\$33,100	2/19/10	3/30/10	Single family	1924	2084
1003 Fulton Rd (cash deal)	\$86,000	\$75,000	10/20/09	4/29/10	Single family	1919	2,380
1617 16 <sup>th</sup> St	\$84,900	\$88,000	8/21/09	11/24/09	Single family	1941	1,031
1260 Perkins	\$89,900	\$88,900	5/11/09	10/23/09	Single family	1923	1,416
1301 Fulton Rd	\$89,900	\$89,900	6/3/09	2/2/10	Single family	1922	1,836
2121 Fulton	\$189,900	\$138,000	4/1/09	3/16/10	Four unit	1965	2,568

**Currently on Market**

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1230 Ridge Rd NW	\$35,020	4/28/10	Single family	1957	1,302
1241 Ridge Rd	\$89,000	4/16/10	Single family	1926	1,440
1222 Ridge Rd	\$89,500	3/30/10	Single family	1925	1,448
1699 18 <sup>th</sup> St	\$99,975	1/12/10	Single family	1949	1,780
1917 Fulton Rd	\$86,900	4/8/10 (originally listed 9/19/09)	Single family	1949	2,498

**Pending Sale**

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1525 16 <sup>th</sup> St. NW (short sale)	\$45,900	4/11/10	Single family	1924	1,284
1118 Monument (tenant)	\$59,900	4/1/10	Single family	1957	1,404
1217 Perkins Ave (owner occupied)	\$110,000	3/8/10 (original list 12/2/09, withdrew 1/25/10)	Single family	1920	1,780

**Recently Expired**

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Expire Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1244 Ridge Rd	\$104,900	9/7/09	12/14/09	Single family	1929	1,520
1139 Ridge Rd	\$119,900	7/22/09	12/22/09	Single family	1925	2,295
1638-1640 17 <sup>th</sup> St	\$106,900	5/4/09	4/1/10	Duplex	1928	2,408

**Withdrawn**

Address	Listing Price	Listing Date	Withdrwl Date	Type	Year Built	Square Footage
1699 18 <sup>th</sup> St NW (owner occupied)	\$104,725	12/17/09	2/12/09	Single family	1949	1,780