



Westwood Coalition
Revitalization of the Historic Westwood Business District

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
September 24, 2013

Introduction

The Westwood Coalition, a voluntary organization, was formed in spring 2013 and is composed of representatives from Westwood Civic Association, WestCURC, Westwood Works, Westwood Historical Society, business owners, and residents. A senior city planner attends Coalition meetings. The Coalition's purpose is to gather, synthesize, report, and recommend action to the City of Cincinnati based on community input on how best to improve pedestrian traffic, safety, and business opportunity in Westwood's historic business district. This effort is based on the conviction that a thriving business district will help to transform and stimulate Westwood while retaining the special character of Westwood, and, thus, clearly establish the business district as a distinctive place and a destination.

The Coalition has met nine times to date and has held several community meetings. It has employed a website (revitalizewestwood.com) and an email address (revitalizewestwood@gmail.com) in order to share information and solicit comments. Coalition members have publicized the initiative and meetings widely, via organizations' mailing lists and social media, the mainstream media, postcards, posters, and word of mouth. As compared to other public meetings in Westwood, the Coalition's community meetings have been well attended, as described below, and were characterized by enthusiasm for potential enhancement of the business district and an interest in addressing challenges and taking advantage of neighborhood strengths and coordinated planning.

This document seeks to summarize the research done thus far and to make recommendations based on the data analysis and community input.

We offer our thanks to the individuals, organizations, city officials, and businesses that have supported our work by providing meeting space, funding for supplies, copying, and postage, and meeting support and facilitation.

Background

In 2008, Cincinnati City Council directed the Planning office to develop and implement the form-based code. A planning grant has facilitated a process rich in public participation and substantive research, including engagement with Westwood since 2010 via city-wide and Westwood-specific design workshops and, more

recently, with the Coalition's involvement. Westwood was selected by the City as a pilot neighborhood for the planning process and possible application of the form-based code in its historic business district. Much more information about the City's process can be found at these sites:

<http://revitalizewestwood.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/cinci-fbc-7-27-13-westwood-coalition.pdf> (Westwood meeting)

<http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/planning/planning-projects-studies/form-based-codes/> (Form-Based Codes)

<http://www.planbuildlivecincinnati.com/> (Plan Build Live Cincinnati)

<http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/planning/planning-projects-studies/form-based-codes/> (Plan Cincinnati).

Further, Westwood's Strategic Plan informs the current discussion. Written in 2010, it presents values that resonate still with many residents. Examples include an emphasis on owner-occupied housing, a desired vibrancy of the business districts, a closer alignment of code and community vision, and enhancement of the quality of life in Westwood. The Strategic Plan is online at

<http://westwoodcivic.org/documents/strategicplan.pdf>.

City Council approved unanimously the form-based code in May 2013, leaving it to the neighborhoods to elect to apply this voluntary tool. The Westwood Coalition has met with area residents to gather new perspectives and to validate earlier findings and now presents them for community response.

Public Input

As mentioned above, publicity regarding the Westwood Coalition was disseminated broadly, through:

- mailings to all households within the quarter mile walkshed of the business district
- media coverage of the public forums (Cincinnati Enquirer, WVXU, WCPO, Fox 19, WKRC)
- posters and cards left at area businesses, Westwood Town Hall, the YMCA, My Neighbors' Place, and all Westwood churches
- announcements via our several organizations' mailing lists and websites
- word of mouth

All of these announcements referenced the Coalition's website and email address, in addition to serving as invitations to specific meetings.

Email and Website

Westwood residents have been invited to share comments via the Westwood Coalition's website and email address. As of this writing, the revitalizewestwood.com website has had 1,344 views. Although the community meetings generated much more input than have these electronic means, the seven substantive responses are summarized here.

One respondent voiced concerns about possible changes to traffic flow, citing problems she sees with slowed traffic on Montana Avenue. She encouraged the use of visual art, containers for plantings, and increased police presence. Several other respondents expressed current concerns including the following: ugly, poorly maintained buildings, limited work opportunities in our neighborhood, quality of work by private contractors on

public street projects, and our ability to attract and maintain quality businesses and to deter undesirable businesses. Most of the respondents made suggestions, including these: hold family events at Westwood Town Hall and on its grounds, identify vibrant neighborhoods to model ours after, identify appropriate branding for Westwood, improve and expand parking in the business district, attract additional restaurants and boutique shops, encourage light industry and business incubators in Westwood within and outside the business district, and add a coffee shop and a biergarten. Several respondents hoped that the process would clarify the means by which revitalization would happen (the dependencies on public and private funding), the methods of deterring crime through a combination of public activity, design principles, and increased policing, and the future of Westwood as a vibrant, family-focused, arts-rich neighborhood.

It must be noted that the number of comments received via email and the website is low and should not be represented as significant. On the other hand, many of these respondents' concerns, hopes, and suggestions were echoed in the community meetings, for the most part, and can be considered representative, if not statistically significant.

Business Owners' Meeting

The Coalition held a meeting at Henke Winery on July 8 with business owners from the historic business district. Approximately 25 business owners attended for this session which served primarily to provide background information about the revitalization effort to date, to encourage business owners' participation in the public forums, and to invite discussion about stimulating business opportunity. Attendees were generally positive about the potential opportunity for commercial ventures, while expressing some concerns, not unlike those of residents generally, such as public safety, a welcoming environment, and a cohesive business community. As Coalition members discovered, most of the attendees were unfamiliar with the revitalization discussion, so this meeting served primarily to inform and to invite business owners into the wider discussion. Therefore, there is no report of data.

Community Meeting, July 27

A community meeting on July 27 at the Westwood United Methodist Church attracted over 150 Westwood residents for a three hour-long meeting about the historic business district. The meeting consisted of several parts: first, an introduction and summary of the process to date; second, small group discussion related to question prompts; and third, a reporting back and next steps segment. See the appendix for a more detailed report of responses to a survey taken by attendees.

When asked what characteristics one likes about the neighborhood business district, respondents offered specific answers which can be categorized broadly as follows:

| Theme | # | Description |
|---------------------|----------|--|
| Specific buildings | 80 | Public or private institutions, neighborhood churches and schools |
| Character, history | 71 | Architecture, neighborhood feel |
| Environmental | 51 | Green space, trees, quiet |
| Specific businesses | 32 | Henke, Madcap Puppets, Bass Cellar, Vitor's, Diane's, Ken's, Bonhaus |

| | | |
|-----------------------|----|---|
| Businesses, generally | 25 | Opportunities, locally owned, business diversity, mixed use |
| People | 16 | Welcoming, cultural diversity, strong sense of community |
| Geography | 9 | Close to downtown, central business district |

Family-friendly is an overarching theme in this response, though not specifically identified. The characteristics listed here are assets to capitalize on and not to be diminished by development.

Asked what challenges face the neighborhood business district, respondents provided a clear Top Six list, in descending order:

- Parking
- Public safety
- A need for businesses more suited to the community’s preferences and needs
- Low business retention and vacant storefronts
- Limited places to “hang out” like restaurants, coffee shops, and pubs
- Traffic volume and speed.

Concerns emphasize aesthetics, as well: dilapidated buildings and homes, utility pole clutter, recessed storefronts, and visible trash and dumpsters. Another major category of concerns involves attitude: perceived negativity toward change and a desire for more productive community dialogue and a more positive community reputation. The top challenges noted here are issues to address directly through revitalization and related efforts, by design, code, development, and community engagement.

Next, attendees were asked to identify the places that they consider landmarks in the neighborhood business district. Eight responses received 196 nods from attendees, which suggest that these landmarks form the core of the business district:

- Westwood Town Hall
- Westwood School
- Westwood Library
- Madcap Puppets (The Bell Building)
- Firehouse
- Westwood United Methodist Church
- Henke Winery
- Churches, generally (WUMC, Grace Lutheran, WFPC)

Attendees were also asked to name the “Main St. & Main St.” intersection in the historic business district. This was described as the prominent intersection of two streets in the area. Most respondents did identify an intersection, though some named a single street or a length of street, not an intersection. Responses suggested that attendees identified with the business district as described, along Harrison Avenue, from Kling Avenue to the Cheviot line.

Main & Main is an important concept because it suggests the natural center of a business district and the area around which people, activities, and businesses are most likely to gravitate. Further, as people approach Main

& Main, activity is evident and suggests that the visitors slow down and enjoy the area. As the reader considers the data in the Appendix, consider that several of the named intersections are, in fact, the same intersection. Here, then, are the top responses:

1. Harrison & Urwiler & Epworth 31
2. Harrison & Montana 23
3. Harrison & Boudinot 8

The responses validate the earlier Westwood design workshop's identification of the Harrison/Urwiler/ Epworth intersection as primary, with Harrison & Montana and Harrison & Boudinot as gateways.

Next, attendees identified the neighborhoods that they envy to some extent. They were asked to consider those areas that seem vibrant in terms of business and community activity and where they spend time. This question generated several dozen responses but the following neighborhoods got the most mention, in descending order:

1. Hyde Park
2. Over the Rhine/Washington Park
3. Northside
4. Mount Lookout
5. Oakley
6. Clifton/Gaslight District

Qualities that these business districts have in common and that influenced attendees' responses include, for example,

- a walkable, attractive business district;
- retail stores that offer a variety of consumer products and services with some emphasis on regional or independent shops;
- a public or civic or green space;
- the availability of nearby parking; and,
- a number of options for casual and more elegant dining.

It is clear that Westwood residents want to celebrate and enhance that which is uniquely our neighborhood's, but there are conditions and incentives that can facilitate the development of the qualities listed here (without copying the specific interpretations of these qualities). These conditions should be identified and factored into planning and implementation for Westwood.

Finally, we asked attendees to follow up on the previous question as time permitted with neighborhoods where they spend their money. Since the responses mirrored so closely those from the neighborhood envy question, they are not repeated here.

Community Meeting, A Focus on the Form-Based Code, August 22

Westwood First Presbyterian Church served as the site for a presentation and dialogue centered on the form-based code. The meeting, publicized widely to residents and directly to those people who had attended earlier meetings, attracted approximately 85 attendees. The code, research and articles were posted on the Coalition's website in advance and promoted to potential attendees.

Senior city planner Cameron Ross offered a history of the consideration of the form-based code in Cincinnati, followed by a detailed description of the form-based code, including the characteristics of each type of building and the relationship of buildings to one another and to the street and neighborhood. He emphasized the role of the community in determining the particular application, or design vision, of the code to its own business district, the place-centered organizing framework of the code, and the value to a neighborhood of a pedestrian-friendly hub of economic and social activity, intentionally and predictably designed and developed in ways that are consistent with that neighborhood's character and needs.

Next, we provided each table of participants two maps: one of the current zoning for Westwood's historic business district and its adjacent streets and the other, a map of the business district with a suggested border for the form-based code as identified in earlier Westwood design charrettes. The task requested of attendees: familiarize oneself first with the map showing the existing code's designators for building types and then review the map showing the potential application of the form-based code with the purpose of validating or suggesting changes to its dimensions and particular standards. Participants were asked to draw and comment on the map to indicate agreement or to propose changes.

Analysis of all of the submitted maps shows significant agreement with and validation of the boundaries as proposed for the application of the form-based code, a designation of Harrison Avenue itself between Kling Avenue and the Cheviot line, including the areas immediately adjacent to Harrison Avenue. This is demonstrated in the overlay of maps in the Appendix. While one group suggested a vastly enlarged area for the application of the form-based codes (specifically, for the purpose of underscoring the desirability of and expanding the area designated single-family homes), most attendees favored the more narrow area with some adjustments to the designators or standards in small areas, along with the creation and preservation of green and civic space.

In other words, attendees expressed a desire to focus on the historic Main Street, or Main & Main, as a destination and for an emphasis on positive neighborhood-strengthening business district development, while preserving the largely single family home character of the adjacent neighborhood, consistent with the Westwood Strategic Plan (2010). Although Cincinnati's form-based code allows for taller buildings, participants demonstrated a clear preference for a maximum potential build-out of three stories in a narrowly defined area ("Main Street" itself), with its frontages and building types in line with the best of the historic business district and the character of Westwood, thus articulating a Westwood-specific modification to the code as it would apply here.

Recommendations

Based on 2013 public input that, in large part, validates and strengthens earlier planning done in 2012 by others in Westwood, and in recognition of the work that remains, the Westwood Coalition makes the following recommendations:

1. The Westwood Coalition recommends the adoption of the form-based code for the historic business district and the adjacent quarter mile walkshed.
 - a. Further, the Westwood Coalition recommends that it work with the city's Planning Department to further refine the application of the form-based code to fit Westwood's particular character and interests, as designed by the Planning Department, and to share its emerging refinement with the community.
2. The Westwood Coalition recommends that it work with the community to develop more specific proposals for the revitalization of the historic business district, apart from, but in harmony with the form-based code.
3. The Westwood Coalition recommends that it lead a community dialogue focused on economic factors and retail development as related to the historic business district.

We request a response from each of the four organizations represented by Coalition members within thirty days, or not later than October 24, 2013 so that we may consider all of the input received in a timely manner.

Respectfully submitted,

The Westwood Coalition



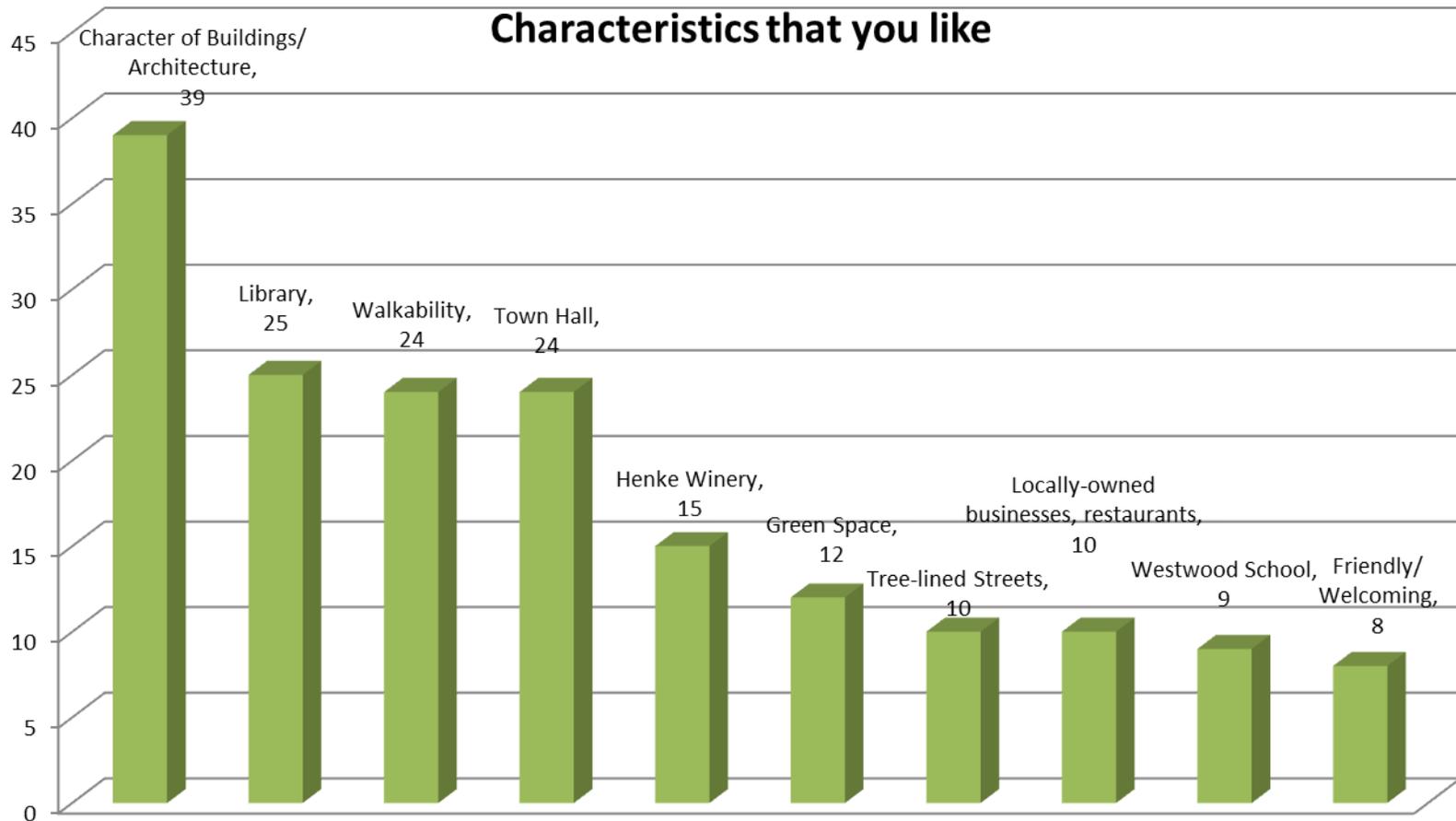
Survey Responses

Westwood Coalition Meeting

July 27, 2013

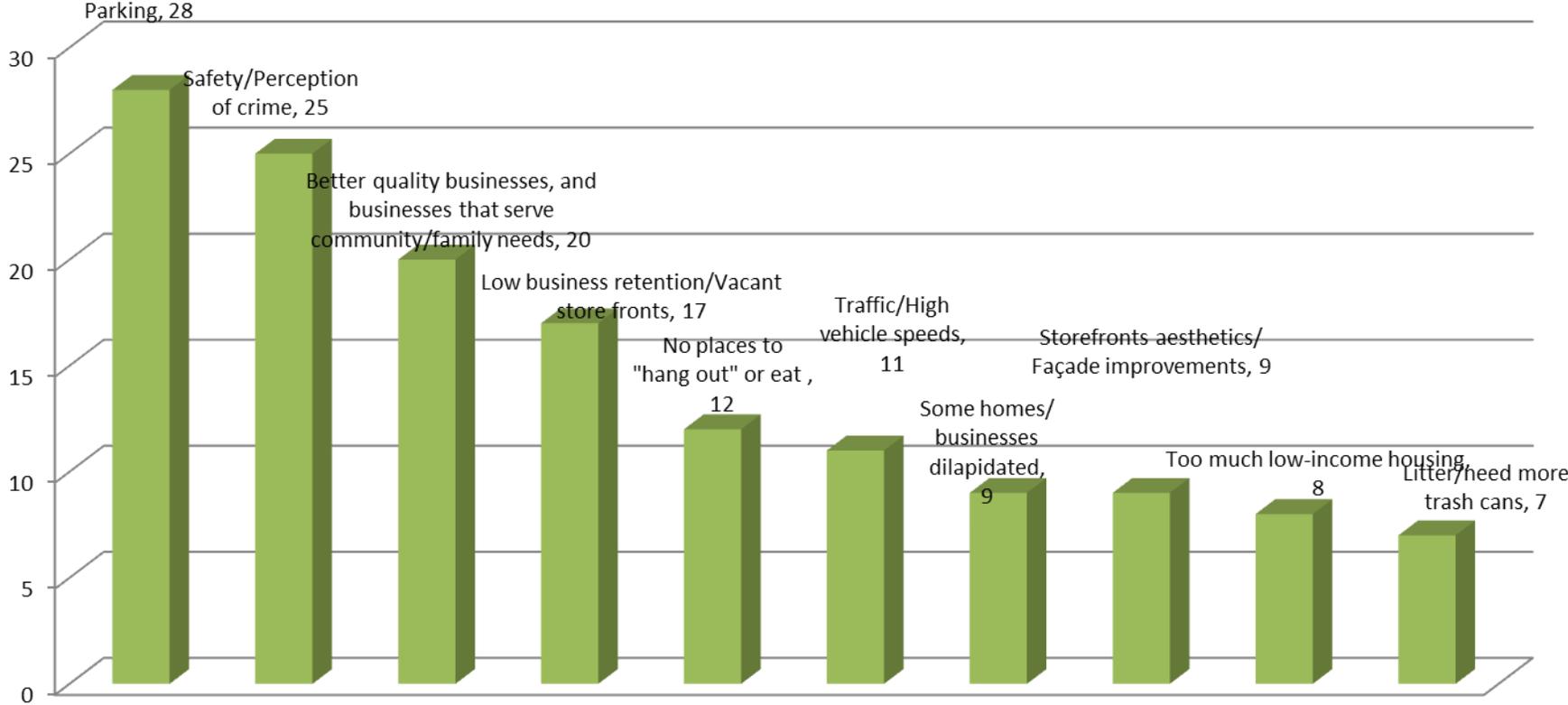
“neighborhood business district”
refers to Westwood’s historic business district along
Harrison Avenue from Kling Ave. to the Cheviot line

What are the characteristics that you like about this neighborhood business district?

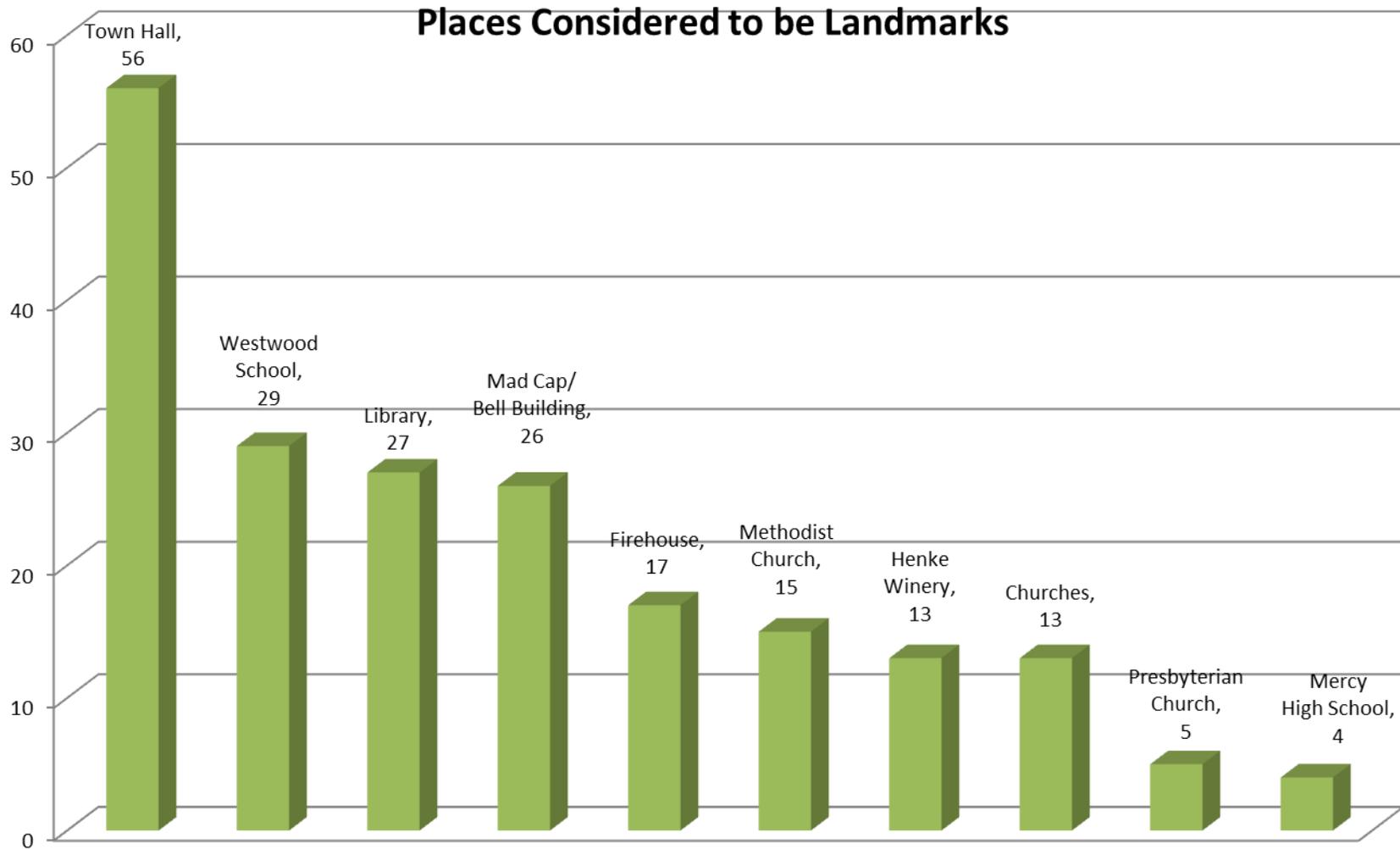


What are the challenges facing this neighborhood business district?

Challenges Facing Business District

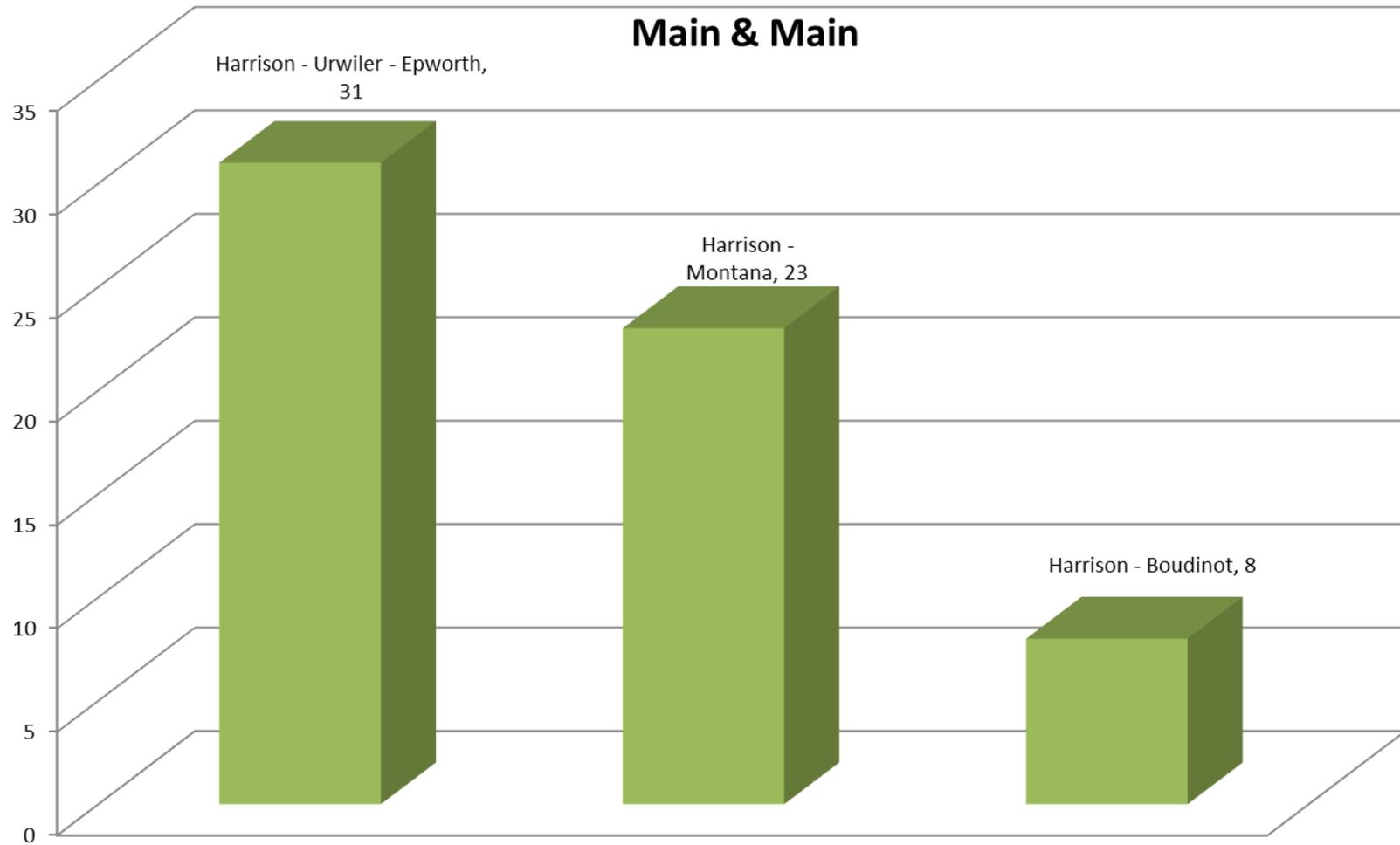


What do you consider to be the landmarks of the neighborhood business district?

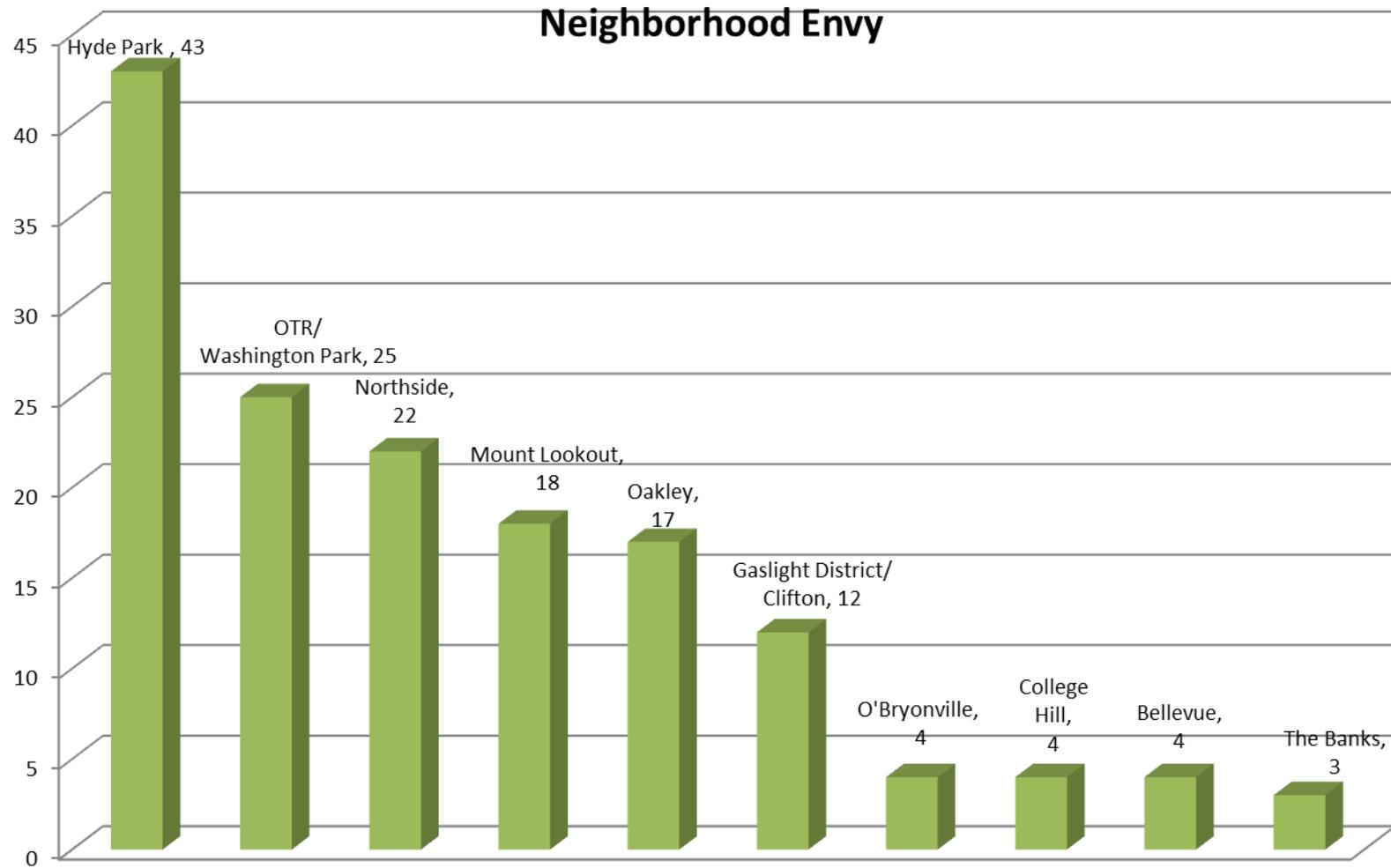


Westwood Coalition, July 27, 2013
Community Meeting

What is the Main St. & Main St. in this neighborhood business district?



Which neighborhoods do you envy?



Westwood Coalition, July 27, 2013
Community Meeting

Where do you spend your money outside of Westwood?

Neighborhoods listed earlier

Food trucks

Washington park

Newport on the Levee

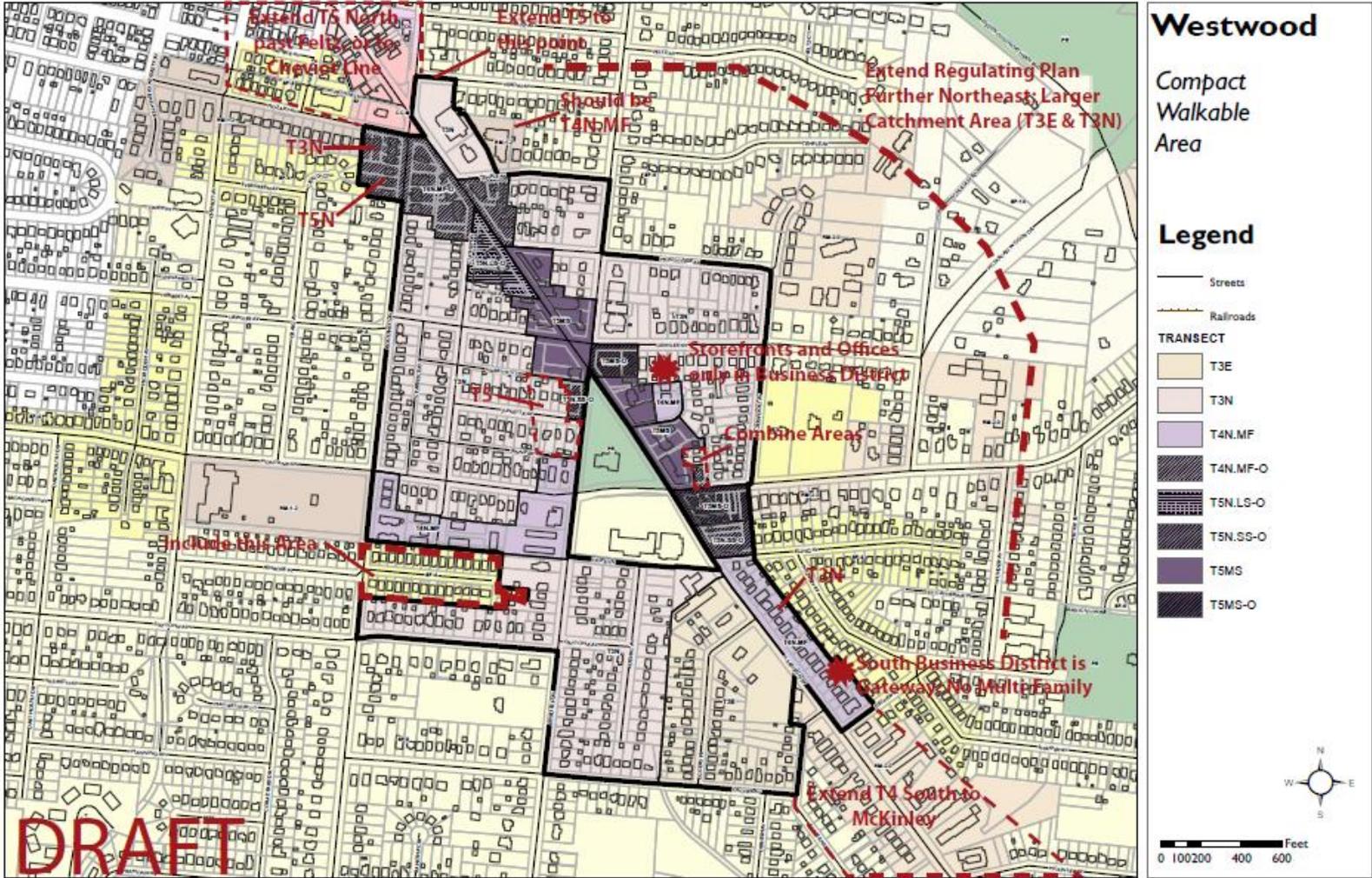
Glenway

Newport on the Levee

Colerain

OTR/Downtown

Findings from the August 22, 2013 community meeting:



Note: This map is an overlay of nine maps created by participants at the August 22, 2013 meeting. It is a compilation, transferred via trace paper to a singular map. It is a representation of community preferences and not a final proposal for the specific application of the form-based code.