ENGAGING A LIVING HISTORY:
A CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR EAST GRACE STREET
DOWNTOWN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA
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DOWNTOWN RICHMOND, VA

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The City of Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The East Grace Street corridor from 9th Street to Foushee Street in downtown Richmond is one of the most historic corridors in the Commonwealth of Virginia. From its beginning as a residential street, home to the landed gentry of Richmond in the 1800s, to its reinvention as the “Fifth Avenue of Richmond” at the turn of the last century, Grace Street has always had an important place in Richmond’s rich fabric of culture, commerce and history.

After losing many of its large retail anchors in the 1970s and 1980s to closure or to suburban locations, East Grace Street struggled with its identity as an upscale shopping destination. Stylish shops became vacant storefronts and today, nearly 250 years since the corridor became part of the City, there are as many vacancies on the street as there are viable businesses with over 60% of commercial space unoccupied. However, life is beginning to return to this beautiful street. The re-use of old commercial buildings into trendy downtown living spaces and a growing student population from surrounding universities have contributed to the nearly 50% increase in residents in the downtown area over the past ten years, more than half of whom are under 25 years of age. Significant public investment has improved the look and feel of downtown and helped drive major private investments such as the redevelopment of Miller & Rhoads and the Carpenter Theater. Long-time business anchors are being joined by new restaurateurs and small professional firms, filling vacant storefronts and bringing activity to the street.

There is real market demand in this area for convenience goods such as household goods, personal services and specialty grocery. Serving the diverse market of residents, visitors from across the country, downtown employees and college students, East Grace Street is well poised to take advantage of its central location, pedestrian scale and growing population. With its wide sidewalks, lovely street trees, minimal traffic and gentle slope, East Grace Street can become the street of choice for those travelling to and from the State Capitol, VCU’s two campuses, the Fan or downtown neighborhoods.

To take advantage of the unique strengths of East Grace Street, this plan lays out a short term, achievable roadmap for the next three to five years that builds on the efforts of many of the public and private partners already invested in East Grace Street and the downtown area. Organized under four broad themes of 1) Developing the Market; 2) Amending the Built Environment; 3) Leveraging Assets; and 4) Nourishing Meaningful Connections, this plan addresses the unique challenges and opportunities in bringing vitality to this historic corridor.

DEVELOPING THE MARKET

This section focuses on building support for existing businesses, strengthening financial tools, removing barriers to the productive use of vacant properties and guiding the development of a mix of office, residential and entertainment options that support the overall vitality of the district.
AMENDING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

This section includes recommendations that improve the overall look, feel and comfort of the district, focusing on forming a corridor that is clean, safe and sustainable. This includes building off the existing infrastructure to establish and promote East Grace Street as an alternative transportation district/route in downtown Richmond as well as creating a safe, welcoming and comfortable environment along East Grace Street for all users of the corridor.

LEVERAGING ASSETS

Developing unique elements of character and culture drive economic growth and makes for authentic, interesting experiences that people want to visit again and again. This section centers on leveraging East Grace Street’s rich history, interesting mix of historic architecture, urban feel, mix of restaurants, arts and entertainment and local cultural identity. Promoting East Grace as a center of arts and entertainment, recognizing and acknowledging the impact of the LGBT community and business owners, celebrating the corridor’s unique and rich history and developing its identity are the central goals of this section.

NOURISHING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

No plan for returning vitality to a corridor can be completed by one organization alone. Partnerships, collaboration and mutually beneficial relationships are key to sustaining revitalization. This section identifies strategic connections for East Grace Street and presents recommendations for strengthening existing partnerships and forging new relationships for long-term support on East Grace Street.

Figure 1: Center Stage. Source: Author

Figure 2: East Grace at 9th Street, looking West. Source: Author
OVERVIEW

East Grace Street is a historically significant corridor in the center of downtown Richmond that has yet to reach its full potential. Many opportunities for revitalization exist within the local community, which for one reason or another have yet to be realized. This plan focuses on identifying and mobilizing the unique assets and resources embedded in the local institutions, organizations and individuals invested in East Grace Street to bring vitality to the area based on the strengths existing today.

Figure 3: Loews Theater looking southeast at 7th & E. Grace.
Source: Rarely Seen Richmond

This plan serves as a guide to developing an authentic, unique and community-driven identity for East Grace Street that not only addresses the issues of today but builds capacity for creatively solving the problems of tomorrow through the development of networks among businesses, residents, property owners, community organizations and local and state government agencies.

Using the analytical tools of a market analysis and an asset inventory to paint an accurate picture of East Grace Street today, this plan makes achievable policy and community recommendations for bringing vitality to the East Grace Street corridor.

THE CLIENT ORGANIZATION

The East Grace Street corridor plan was requested by the Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review and also fulfills the requirements of the Master of Urban & Regional Planning program in the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. The client, the Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review, guides building and development in the City. The Department is responsible for overseeing all building, permitting and inspections, compliance with the property maintenance code, current and long-range planning, enforcement of the zoning ordinance and historic preservation. Within the Department these responsibilities are split among a number of boards and commissions, including the Commission of Architecture Review, Board of Zoning Appeals, Planning Commission, Public Art Commission, Urban Design Committee and the Urban Forestry Commission (City of Richmond 2011).

The stated mission of the Department is to create and maintain the best quality of life for Richmond's citizens, businesses and visitors through planning and enforcement services that enhance the built and natural environments of the city (City of Richmond 2011). This corridor improvement
plan, which will provide targeted planning and policy recommendations for East Grace Street, directly relates to the Department’s mission and responsibilities to serve the people of the city.

**PLAN PURPOSE**

The East Grace Street corridor from Ninth Street to Foushee Street is an area in transition (Map 1). The U.S. National Park Service recognizes a majority of this corridor as The Grace Street Commercial Historic District. Once the downtown retail hub of Richmond, it is now home to as many vacant storefronts as viable businesses. However, activity is beginning to return to this historic area as new residents, businesses and City leadership are investing in the corridor. This plan will examine the East Grace Street corridor and develop realistic, implementable strategies for improving the vitality of the corridor based in its many existing assets.

Over the past ten years, the East Grace Street corridor has been experiencing considerable changes in population - growing significantly in total population (55%), dropping in median age from 33 years to 25 years, and growing in non-family households (24% change). These changes reflect underlying trends in the corridor that are influenced by recent policy and land use decisions, namely the conversion of many historic commercial, industrial and office buildings to residential lofts and luxury condominiums. In 2010 alone, over 1,300 new apartment units were added in the downtown area (Venture Richmond 2010).

![Map 1: Buildings surrounding the East Grace Street corridor from 9th to Foushee Street.](image-url)
Like many urban commercial corridors, East Grace Street has struggled with disinvestment, absentee property owners, perceptions of safety, and economic competition in the surrounding area (City of Richmond 2007). The neighboring residential areas of the corridor have some engaged leaders, but struggle with a lack of cohesive involvement in the happenings of the commercial district they inhabit.

The development of urban condominiums, lofts and apartments on Grace Street and within the downtown central business district have brought many potential new customers to the area but also challenges to the identity of the district. The corridor straddles two City Council districts, Districts 2 and 6, making coordination for a cohesive corridor difficult.

However, the great possibility of this street is recognized in the community. Engaged business, civic and other community leaders are investing in this area, where they see great potential. The activities around East Grace Street offer a rich foundation for building a vibrant corridor.

Two major national chain hotels, Marriott® and Hilton®, bring visitors from across the globe into the shadow of East Grace Street, as do hundreds of events each year at the Greater Richmond Convention Center. The recently renovated Carpenter Center at Richmond Center Stage also draws people from across the region to the corridor. Other unique attractions along Broad Street, which runs parallel to Grace Street one block north, include the Library of Virginia and The National Theater which both attract hundreds to the area on a daily basis.

Three historic churches along the corridor, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, St. Peter’s Catholic Church and Centenary United Methodist Church, have active congregations who reach out to the surrounding community through their programming. These churches also participate in a coordinated downtown feeding program offering hot meals to the city’s homeless population every day during the week on a rotating schedule. During winter months these churches open their facilities as cold weather shelters in partnership with CARITAS, a Richmond nonprofit providing homelessness support programs.

Anchored on the east by the State Capitol complex, thousands of state, city and MCV/VCU employees are within easy walking distance daily. Additionally, at the beginning of

![Figure 4: Vacancies on the 500 block of East Grace Street](Source: Author)
each year, for 45 or 60 days the Virginia General Assembly is in session bringing legislators, lobbyists and staffers from across the Commonwealth to the doorstep of East Grace Street.

Yet, as stated in the *City of Richmond Downtown Plan*, “Grace Street suffers from a high vacancy rate and a lack of street-level activity” (p. 12). The *Downtown Plan*, which is the roadmap for development, identifies a need for “higher level retail centers and businesses in the area”, and sees upper-level residential development as key to increasing retail growth.

To address these concerns and capitalize on the many existing assets in the community, this corridor improvement plan will examine how planning, policy and community efforts can be used to revitalize a nationally recognized historic commercial district located in the heart of downtown Richmond.

Building off of the adopted *City of Richmond Downtown Plan*, this plan will pay special attention to the significant public efforts focused in this area, seek to identify current roadblocks and provide innovative recommendations for moving revitalization forward.

This historic corridor is undergoing new changes as we speak, with two new restaurants opening in recent months. New and engaged business owners and merchants are showing an interest in investing in this historic corridor. Involving these diverse stakeholders in the process is key to the future of East Grace Street. The recommendations put forth will not be possible without support from community members, businesses and property owners.

**Figure 5**: Activity is returning to Grace Street with new businesses, like the restaurant Pasture pictured above, opening up along the corridor.

*Source: Author*
This plan is grounded in an extensive review of the literature on urban commercial revitalization. The literature identifies two primary themes of focus for urban commercial revitalization: one based on urban economic geography or spatial economics, and the other based on theories of organization and social capital (Kim 2008; Mitchell 2006). Both are integral for understanding and building sustainable urban vitality. To do this, the asset-based corridor development paradigm of the Main Street Approach® will be used.

The Main Street Approach® requires the definition and analysis of the market through qualitative and quantitative methods; the engagement of diverse stakeholders and an assessment of organizational capacity; examination of the built environment; and an inventory of surrounding influences and assets that can be built upon for sustained vitality (Blair, Endres and Fichtenbaum 1990; Thisse 2010; Blakely and Green Leigh 2010 National Trust Main Street Center 2011).

The Main Street Model®, developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the late 1970s, presents a balanced approach based on the “Four Points” of organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring.

Organization centers on building cooperation and collaboration among various stakeholders under a stable structure; Promotion guides the district in developing a positive, coordinated and unique image; Design addresses the physical improvements to façades, buildings and streetscapes to attract visitors, investors and new businesses as well as the creation and maintenance of a safe and clean district; Economic Restructuring focuses on business retention and recruitment, highlighting the unique opportunities for entrepreneurs and small businesses in a commercial district (National Trust Main Street Center 2009).

This approach is recognized as the most comprehensive framework to revitalization, and has been shown to be widely successful in thousands of communities across the country (Robertson 2004). The Main Street Approach® provides a proven methodology for comprehensively identifying and leveraging the unique economic, social and cultural assets of an historic commercial district.

Public engagement is an important piece of this process. Cross-sector partnerships, networks and linkages have been shown to be an essential part of mobilizing a successful revitalization initiative (Seidman 2005; Robertson 2007; Bennett and Glasmeier 1997). This approach facilitates buy-in from the diverse groups that have a stake in the revitalization of the district, including property owners, investors, merchants, residents of surrounding neighborhoods, community organizations and institutions, local and state governments and others.
RELEVANT PLANS

Two Quality of Life plans and one Neighborhood Economic Development Strategy offer examples from the fields of both neighborhood and commercial revitalization that inform this plan.

The South Chicago and Washington Park Quality of Life Plans provide examples of an asset-based approach focusing on people-based strategies and specifically integrates leadership development in its process and implementation, which is central to developing community capacity through a participatory process.

The Portland Neighborhood Economic Development Strategy is an innovative plan from a municipal government that looks specifically at strategies for small business development at a neighborhood level. This plan provides guidance on possible policy tools and informs the economic side of this corridor improvement plan.

RICHMOND CONTEXT

Urban revitalization is shaped by multiple economic, political and social factors at multiple scales, but is ultimately based in local realities (Seidman 2005). In order to see what specific strategies and methods have been used successfully in other Richmond area corridors, recent plans have been examined that have employed a collaborative model for corridor revitalization. The Westover Hills Plan completed by the URSP 666 class in the fall of 2011 is used as a model for performing the market and stakeholder analysis and utilizing a balanced approach to revitalization based in the Main Street® Four Points.

In addition to this, the Highland Park Quality of Life Plan completed by the URSP 761 class of 2011 is used as a model for the engagement of diverse stakeholders in a collaborative process. This plan provides a template for the integration of an intensive participation process with the development of plan goals, objectives and implementation partners. The Ashland Arts and Culture Study completed by the 2009 URSP 666 class is used as a model for examining alternative development strategies.

Finally, the scope of this plan and its recommendations is informed by the Downtown Master Plan completed in 2007 by the City of Richmond.

Figure 6: The 2007 Downtown Plan includes design guidelines for East Grace Street as developed through a charrette process. Source: Richmond Downtown Master Plan, 2009.
The literature identifies the questions that must be asked in order to make intelligent plan recommendations: the definition and analysis of the market through qualitative and quantitative methods; the engagement of diverse stakeholders and an assessment of organizational capacity; examination of the built environment; and an inventory of surrounding influences and assets that can be built upon for sustained vitality. This information can be categorized into history, major players or stakeholders, economic conditions and the built environment. The chart below provides further detail on the specific information required in each of these categories.

**QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED**

**CATEGORY** | **QUESTIONS** | **SOURCES**
--- | --- | ---
**History of the Area** | Broadly, what is the history of development in this corridor, nearby and similar corridors? What has been the evolution of uses? Recently, what has been done in this area? What plans, public and private investment, business development and recruitment efforts have occurred? Who has been a leader or otherwise significantly invested in these efforts? Have there been previous efforts at revitalization and why and how they have succeeded or failed? | Library of Virginia; Valentine History Center; interviews and semi-structured discussion with long-term residents and other stakeholders; City of Richmond documents; PDR documents, interviews with City of Richmond staff primarily in the ECD and PDR departments. |
**Major Players, Stakeholders and Influences** | Who are the major stakeholders (i.e., businesses, property owners, institutions, renters/residents, developers, merchants) in the area? What are their interests? What are the surrounding influences? What are the assets (individual, institutional and organizational) that can be leveraged? | Interviews with City of Richmond staff primarily in the ECD and PDR departments, renters/residents, property owners, institutions, developers, merchants; directories; direct inventory of resources |
**Economic Conditions** | What is the market for this area? What opportunities exist for business expansion and recruitment? Where are the residential and commercial vacancies, and how many are there? Are there future plans of development or business permits being processed? What are the barriers to development? | Census 2010 Demographic information; Dollars & Cents of Shopping centers; Consumer Expenditure Survey; City of Richmond documents and records; interviews surveys observation/inventory |
**Built Environment** | What is the current zoning and land use? Are there historic properties? What is the accessibility of the area in terms of multi-modal transportation, circulation and parking? What is the physical design of the area? Are there any underutilized spaces, how many and where? What is the condition of public safety in the area? | City of Richmond Property Tax Records; City of Richmond GIS data; City of Richmond Crime Data; City of Richmond Police Department Headquarters; surveys, interviews and direct observation/inventory |

*Figure 7: Information to be gathered; broken down by category, specific question and information source.*
METHODOLOGY

Technical analyses and tools are used in combination with qualitative methods and participatory processes to understand the social, economic, political and historical influences along the East Grace Street corridor.

An analysis of the commercial and residential market, mapping of demographic and economic data, surveys, oral histories, visioning sessions and the establishment of a stakeholder committee to be a partner in the process and implementation are used to inform the plan recommendations. The data and findings from each of these different analyses are synthesized using a Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results (SOAR) analysis.

Based on the framework of a collaborative and asset-based model, the SOAR approach to strategic planning begins with an exploration of strengths and opportunities which are then used to develop a shared vision of aspirations for the future and create feedback mechanisms that both measure and reward progress toward strategic goals.

Figure 8: Process flow diagram showing the information to be gathered by category, the analyses that will be used, and the sources of input data.
The plan is organized into two main sections: East Grace Street as it is today and East Grace Street as it could be in the future. The first section describes the current state of East Grace Street, beginning with the history that shaped it. Told in part through interviews with those who have lived near, worked on or otherwise enjoyed East Grace Street through the years, this section provides the context for where Grace Street is today. This section also includes a review of past plans for the corridor and what impact those have had on the development of the community.

Next, a snapshot of the community surrounding East Grace Street is provided using descriptive demographic characteristics; interviews from residents, merchants, property owners and others; indicators of public safety; and attributes of the built environment. This information begins to paint a picture of East Grace Street. It sets a baseline of current activity and tells us who is using the corridor, what is successful about the area and what could be improved.

This feeds into two analyses that are used to inform the plan recommendations: the asset inventory and the market analysis. The asset inventory documents the rich historical, cultural, institutional, individual, community and other resources that exist on East Grace Street. This information is needed to start to build connections, collaborations and an authentic identity for the corridor. To guide how these assets are mobilized, a market analysis shows the economic possibilities along the corridor. This analysis takes into account the housing, retail and office market using qualitative and quantitative information. This section concludes with a synthesis of all the data and community input in the form of a Strengths Opportunities Aspirations and Results (SOAR) strategic analysis. The action plan and recommended strategies are derived from the SOAR analysis.

The second section of the plan focuses on the future of East Grace Street based in what exists there today, and puts forth a vision, mission and achievable action steps to get there. Beginning with a vision crafted by the community, this section is grounded in the information that is covered in the first section of the plan. The final piece of the document is a detailed three to five year action plan that is organized into the Main Street Five Points with strategies and implementable projects for Organization, Promotion, Design, Business Development and Safety. Each project includes a who, what, when, why and how for implementation. A timeline, potential partners and resources needed are all included in the action plan.

This plan is a practical guide to building a vibrant future for East Grace Street based in the assets that exist there today. The following pages provide an overview of the history, present and future of this unique corridor in the heart of downtown Richmond.
HISTORY OF EAST GRACE STREET

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

East Grace Street, from the State Capitol west to Foushee Street, is one of the most historic streets in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It tells the urban story of a shift from primarily residential uses in the early 1800s to primarily commercial uses by the 1960s to expanding mixed-use residential and commercial uses today. A majority of this corridor is recognized by the U.S. National Park Service as The Grace Street Commercial Historic District.

Three of Richmond’s most historic churches – Centenary United Methodist Church, St. Peter’s Catholic Church and St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, are found along the East Grace Street corridor. Whether serving as hospitals during the Civil War, hosting Confederate Generals and US Presidents for worship, or being the first of their denomination to exist in the City of Richmond, each of these churches has a storied past. In fact, the corridor, originally called “G” Street, became known as “Grace” Street due to the cluster of churches.

The corridor was also home to Virginia’s elite. Although few examples of these estates remain today, Grace Street was the residential neighborhood of choice for the landed gentry of the south.

Map 2: Grace Street Commercial Historic District Boundaries. Information Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Figure 10: Murphy’s Hotel. Source: VCU Digital Collections
RETAIL BOOM

As the enormous homes that once housed Virginia’s elite were demolished to make way for commercial development after the Civil War, East Grace Street took on a new aura as a thriving commercial district and retail center. The Hotel Richmond and Murphy’s Hotel were built to house visitors from across the state, helping to spur growth in entertainment and retail in the city center. These hotels, along with the John Marshall Hotel on 5th Street, were the center of social life in the city.

In 1911, the Thalhimers office building became the first large commercial space built along the East Grace Street Corridor. Dubbed “Richmond’s Fifth Avenue”, Grace Street became the site of more than 70 new retail shops and office buildings between 1920 and 1930.

The iconic Thalhimers and Miller and Rhoads department stores came to symbolize this new era for downtown Richmond. For decades each of these stores served as anchors to a thriving downtown retail destination district along Broad and Grace Streets.

URBAN DECLINE AND URBAN RENEWAL

As suburbanization took hold and urban disinvestment reached its peak in the early 1980s, East Grace Street felt the effects. Some properties began to deteriorate, vacancies increased and perceptions of the district as an unsafe place grew.

In response, the City of Richmond and long standing property owners hired developer James W. Rouse to envision and design the 6th Street Marketplace. This $24.5 million dollar project closed 6th Street to traffic between Grace and Marshall and constructed a 5-story “crystal palace” that spanned Broad Street.

Hailed initially as a great success, this project ended in failure, was vacated and completely razed by July of 2007 at the cost of some $60 million for demolition and returning the street to traffic (Times Dispatch 2003).

A LIVING HISTORY

The Richmond-Times Dispatch, the Richmond Free Press and Media General all have their current offices along or near the East Grace Street Corridor, stabilizing the center of the district and provide reliable lunchtime business for many local restaurants.

Figure 11: Grace Street looking west from 7th Street - 1926. Source: Richmond Then and Now.
Residential use along the corridor, in the form of apartments and condominiums, is at its highest level since the early history of East Grace Street. The residential population in the area has increased more than 50% in just the last 10 years. The Miller and Rhoads building has been adaptively re-used for residential and lodging with 133 apartment units and a Hilton® Garden Inn. The Richmond Marriott® and Greater Richmond Convention Center on Broad Street attract visitors from across the region, as do the iconic Jefferson Hotel and the Linden Row Inn located just south of the Corridor on Franklin Street.

The Hotel John Marshall has recently reopened as yet another residential option on the doorstep of this corridor with 110 of its 238 one- and two-bedroom units already leased (John Marshall Leasing Office 2012). The re-imagined Carpenter Center at Richmond Center Stage and the National Theatre draw visitors from throughout the region for entertainment. The Library of Virginia and the Virginia General Assembly draw in crowds of visitors interested in history and civic life.

East Grace Street is also a cultural and entertainment outlet for Richmond’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) community. The first “gay hangout” in the city of Richmond dates back to 1947 on Grace and 9th at Marroni’s Restaurant in the basement of The Hotel Richmond. Through the years East Grace Street has been home to many gay-owned bars and restaurants, and still today has the highest concentration of gay nightlife options in the city.

East Grace Street is a transitioning mixture of apartments, nightclubs and restaurants, churches and hotels, services and media, and arts and entertainment. Newer iterations of old ideas and reinvestment in historic and iconic structures find East Grace Street on the verge of blossoming back into a full-blown retail, restaurant, service, residential and entertainment center for the City of Richmond – a combination of all of its previous iterations.
The City of Richmond Downtown Master Plan, 2009

Begun in 2007, the Downtown Master Plan was adopted by City Council in 2008 and amended in 2009. A number of partners were involved in the plan development, including two different Mayors, City Council, the Planning Commission, the Richmond Community Development Department (now Planning and Development Review), Dover, Kohl & Partners, Hall Planning & Engineering, Rhodeside & Harwell, Urban Advantage, ZHA and Zimmerman/Volk Associates (City of Richmond 2007). The planning process also included citizen participation and involvement in the form of public meetings, study tours, and a design charrette.

Study Area

The plan looks at six distinct character areas in Downtown Richmond. The East Grace Street corridor falls mainly in the City Center district, with some overflow into the VCU & Downtown Neighborhoods district to the west. These areas were studied as individual neighborhoods that fit into a larger downtown picture.

Grace Street

The plan presents a brief history of the downtown area, followed by detailed research and analysis of each of the districts. The City Center district is characterized by the “concentration of tourism and entertainment venues,” with a need for higher-level retail to generate year-round traffic (p.12). Grace Street is noted as having “a concentration of fine, early twentieth-century architecture” and possessing “a strong, pedestrian-scaled character” (p. 12). The plan states that the street “suffers from a high vacancy rate,” but expects recent upper-level residential development and improvements in the surrounding area to bring activity to empty storefronts.

The plan presents seven foundations for guiding future development in downtown Richmond: Variety & Choice; Traditional City; Green; River; Urban Architecture; History;
and Mixed Income. The recommendations for Grace Street specifically are to reintroduce on-street parking, convert the street to two-way traffic, and require all new development to incorporate street-level retail. The plan emphasizes the unique urban character and scale of the street to have great potential for the development of pedestrian-oriented shopping and commercial activities.

REVITALIZATION ON EAST GRACE STREET

East Grace Street has been a focus of much of the downtown revitalization efforts of recent years. Two significant players in these efforts are the Broad Street Community Development Authority and the downtown economic development organization, Venture Richmond.

BROAD STREET COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

In 2003, the City began a concerted effort to remove blight in downtown Richmond. A significant piece of this strategy was the creation of the Broad Street Community Development Authority (BSCDA). Lead by a group of five individuals appointed by City Council, BSCDA was governed by a mix of developers, property owners and economic development experts.

The first urban community development authority in Virginia, BSCDA issued $67 million in bonds to fund redevelopment efforts in the central city area. Its projects included the demolition of Sixth Street Marketplace, installation of way finding signage, infrastructure and streetscaping upgrades, the demolition of buildings at Sixth and Grace and Fifth and Broad Streets for surface parking, and the purchase and renovation of two downtown parking decks (Venture Richmond 2012). The revenue from the parking decks, special real estate assessments in the thirteen-block district and an initial $650,000 from the City were intended to support the $6 million per year debt service (Style Weekly 2010).

The BSCDA was criticized as being non-transparent, favoring private developers and generally having too much power over the redevelopment of downtown. In 2010 the BSCDA was dissolved due to a shortcoming in predicted revenues (Times Dispatch 2011). The City recognized the BSCDA as “not financially viable”, assumed its capital assets and restructured its debt (City of Richmond 2010).

VENTURE RICHMOND

Formed in 2006 as a merger of four downtown revitalization organizations, Venture Richmond is involved in the “promotion of downtown Richmond through marketing, advocacy, festival and events” (Venture Richmond 2012). Venture Richmond provides some services in the downtown area, including canal operation and the administration of the “Clean & Safe” program involving enhanced street cleaning, landscaping and Safety Ambassadors. Organized as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit, the group is governed by a mix of business and community leaders.
Zoning refers to the certain set of standards or regulations that have been adopted for a specific area. Each zone district in the city includes information on the types of uses that will be allowed and what regulations will accompany them, such as setback requirements, height restrictions, etc.

The East Grace Street corridor and many of the surrounding blocks of the downtown area are zoned B-4, or Central Business District (see Map 3). This zone district allows for a wide range of retail goods and services, office uses, parking, religious uses, and mixed-use residential development. Restricted uses in this district include drive-up services and gas stations.
While zoning refers to the set of regulations in a certain area, land use refers to the physical use of a property, usually in a broad category such as residential, commercial or industrial.

The land use of the corridor is very mixed, with a variety of commercial, mixed-use residential (apartments above commercial space), religious uses, institutional uses, parking and a hotel.

Although residential and parking uses account for the greatest percentage of corridor square footage (28% and 24% respectively), the character of the area is largely shaped by the plethora of small storefronts.

Map 4: Land Use along East Grace Street. Information Source: City of Richmond
There are multiple significant historic properties on East Grace Street, with a majority of the corridor a part of the “Grace Street Commercial Historic District,” (National Park Service) which is roughly bounded by Adams, Broad, 8th and Franklin Streets (Figure 14).

**HISTORIC PROPERTIES ALONG EAST GRACE STREET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Built</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>Centenary United Methodist Church</td>
<td>Gothic Revival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-1892</td>
<td>Multiple, 200 Block of East Grace</td>
<td>Queen Anne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Grace Street Addition to Miller and Rhoads</td>
<td>Designed by Starrett &amp; Van Vleck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Carpenter Theater</td>
<td>Spanish Mission Palazzo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Berry Burke</td>
<td>Italian Palazzo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Administration and Equipment Building</td>
<td>Art Deco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 14: East Grace Street Historic Commercial District Boundary.*
Many surface parking lots and parking decks exist along or near the East Grace Street Corridor and can be seen by the parking map below.

Two bus lines currently run west down the Grace Street Corridor. The parking lot on Grace between 7th and 6th streets is currently under consideration by the City of Richmond as a potential location for the proposed new GRTC transfer station.

Both residents and businesses along the corridor are not keen on this location for numerous reasons: all of the streets surrounding this parcel are one way; the noise, fumes and increased traffic in the area would deter visitors and decrease ambience of the newly revived Center Stage and Miller and Rhoads locations; the transfer station would take away needed parking and deter visitors from coming to the area.

Figure 15: Public Parking in Downtown. Source: GRTC Ridefinders
Two one-way travel lanes heading west make up the travel lanes with street parking along both the north and south side of the street for five of the eight blocks. Street parking is limited to two hours and is not meter-controlled. Importantly, the street is under consideration for conversion to two-way traffic which could connect the corridor with the VCU campus and the one of the densest neighborhoods in Richmond, the Fan.

The entirety of the East Grace Street Corridor is walkable with wide sidewalks and predominantly human scale environment. The 600, 500 and 400 blocks of East Grace are highly touted by visitors for their design, wide sidewalks, street furniture, landscaping and scale - though a majority of storefronts along these blocks are vacant. Streetscape improvements are planned for the remainder of the blocks. No designated bike lanes currently exist on Grace Street but cyclists use Grace Street more than any street downtown to travel west due to its lesser volume of traffic than Broad and Main Streets and its more level slope than all other streets leaving the City center.
PUBLIC SAFETY IN THE AREA

Overall, this area has seen an 8% increase in total crimes from 2009 to 2011. During this same time period, the crime rate across the entire city dropped by 7% (Chart 1). However, the increase in crime in the downtown area occurred mainly in the neighborhoods of Jackson Ward (22% increase) and Shockoe Slip (35% increase). The Capitol District saw a slight increase of 4%, while all other downtown neighborhoods experienced a decrease in total crimes. The areas of City Center and Monroe Ward, which account for more than 50% of the criminal activity in downtown, have seen a 12% drop in total crimes.

The downtown area has a lower rate of homicides, sex offenses, robberies, assaults, burglaries and vehicle theft than the city as a whole. Although rates of vice, theft and other crimes are slightly higher than the city’s rates (1%, 2%, and 5% higher respectively), overall these types of crimes are declining in the district.

The largest percentage of criminal activity on the corridor falls in the "other" category of crimes, which include non-violent crimes, such as drunkenness and vandalism. In 2011, the most common offense was City code violations (18%), followed by destruction of property (16%) and alcohol-related offenses (15%).

Criminal activity appears to be most heavily concentrated in the 100 - 300 blocks of East Grace Street (62% of all crimes in 2011), while the 500 – 800 blocks saw the least crime at 9% of total crimes in 2011.
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The history of East Grace Street tells a story of constant evolution, from residential to retail to arts and entertainment. To understand the opportunities that exist for the future of East Grace Street, the conditions of today must be examined. An analysis of the retail, office and residential market were performed to provide a realistic picture of the economic factors influencing the development of East Grace Street.

DOWNTOWN STUDY AREA

To calculate the buyer demand in the area around East Grace Street, a market area of one-quarter mile, radiating from either end of the corridor, was delineated. This delineation captures the immediate, walkable market around the corridor and is very similar in scope to the market area analyzed in the 2007 Downtown Master Plan, which allows for a historical comparison of findings. This area includes eight downtown neighborhoods: Monroe Ward, City Center, Gambles Hill, Biotech/MCV District, Capitol District, Central Office, Shockoe Slip and Jackson Ward.
DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding the population characteristics of surrounding neighborhoods is critical to accurately assessing the retail market potential for East Grace Street. Factors such as annual household income, age distribution and population trends all impact the potential demand in the market area.

Using information from the 2000 and 2010 Census and the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, the community around East Grace Street was analyzed. The East Grace Street market area falls within two census tracts, numbers 302 and 305. Over the past ten years, this area has seen significant changes in demographic make-up, growing in total population (55%), dropping in median age (30 to 25), decreasing in total poverty (-7%) and increasing in median household income (41%).

TOTAL POPULATION AND GROWTH TRENDS

In 2010 the total population in the market area was 6,084, an increase of 55% from the 2000 population of 3,926. The southern portion of the market area (tract 305) grew by more than 74%. This significant growth over the past ten years reflects changes in planning and policy decisions that encouraged the conversion of older commercial and industrial buildings into luxury lofts and condominiums. Between 2010 and 2011 alone, more than 1,300 apartment units were added to the downtown area (Venture Richmond 2011). The trend of downtown residential development is likely to continue, as the residential market analysis shows, bringing a growing market to downtown Richmond.

AGE

The growth in residential development has also brought changes to the overall age distribution of the downtown population, showing a growing concentration of individuals in the 20 to 34 age range. From 2000 to 2010 the median age for the area dropped significantly from about 30 years of age to 25 years of age. The population in this area is considerably younger than the citywide average, with over half (51%) of the market area population being under 25, compared with 37% under 25 across the city. Notably, the largest age cohort for the study area is those ages 20 to 24, accounting for nearly 40% of the population. For the city as a whole, this age group only represents 13% of the total population. Conversely, the population 65 years of age and over has decreased in the market area, from 9% in 2000 to only 3% in 2010.

Figure 19: Percent of Population: City of Richmond and Market Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Market Area</th>
<th>Richmond</th>
<th>MSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 19 years</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the growth in the downtown population is overwhelmingly young, while the older population has remained stable or moved out of the area.

**Household Income**
Along with a growth in total population and drop in median age, the median household income for the area has increased dramatically from 2000 to 2010, from $21,615 to $30,482. In the northern portion of the market area (tract 302), the median household income increased by more than 69%, from $23,556 to $39,722. Over this same time period the median household income for the City of Richmond increased by 28%, from about $33,000 to $42,000. The median household income for the market area is slightly lower than the average for the city, at approximately 75% of the citywide median income.

**Race and Ethnicity**
From 2000 to 2010 the market area saw a decrease in the percentage of Black or African American residents (-20%) and a growth in White or Caucasian residents (10%) and Asian residents (8%).

The area has also seen an increase in persons of Hispanic or Latino Origin, growing from 2% of the population to more than 4%. Overall the area is increasing in diversity with the growth in Hispanic and Asian populations.
East Grace Street has a rich history as a mixed-use district, with a variety of uses including retail, office, religious, residential and lodging. To provide a baseline for the current market activity on East Grace, a building inventory and vacancy analysis was performed.

In total, the corridor has 1.7 million square feet of building space and 530,000 square feet of parking space. Of this total, nearly 400,000 square feet of building space is vacant (17%) and 150,000 square feet of land is vacant.

The majority (41%) of vacant space is commercial, with 14 of 47 total commercial establishments being vacant. Breaking this down further into specific use, the balance of vacant spaces is for retail uses, accounting for more than 75% of commercial vacancies.

Office uses have the next highest vacancy rate at 37%. Unlike vacant commercial spaces which have a smaller total square footage but a more significant visual impact, vacant office space has a greater impact in square feet (85,498) than in total number (1).

Residential uses have the lowest rate of vacancy at 1%, and are the largest use in the district by square foot (28% of total district space). This suggests that the residential market is growing despite a high level of vacancies at the street level. Grace Street has a number of smaller dwelling spaces (13 units or less), mixed with larger residential anchors such as Grace Place apartments and Miller & Rhoads. These larger establishments are powerful anchors.
on the corridor and are an important piece of the growing market demand in the Grace Street area.

**RETAIL MARKET ANALYSIS**

**DOWNTOWN IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT**

The retail market for East Grace Street must be viewed in a regional context. On a regional level, the Richmond Metro Area is greatly overstored, with more than 67 square feet of retail space per capita, compared to the national average is about 21 square feet per capita (ZHA, Inc. 2007). The bulk of this retail space is located in the surrounding counties, but recent national trends show a decrease in suburban retail productivity, which analysts suggest points to a rebound in the urban market (Piperato 2011). In Richmond, significant downtown projects that incorporate mixed-uses of retail, residential and office space have brought a growth in downtown retail space.

Although the supply of downtown retail space is increasing, the new and renovated spaces are significantly smaller than retail projects in the counties. For example, the conversion of the historic Miller & Rhoads building into luxury apartments and a Hilton Garden Inn added 25,000 square feet of street-level retail to downtown. By comparison, the West Broad Village project in Henrico County created 600,000 square feet of retail space. This pattern of development provides the context of downtown retail development.

Although there is renewed interest and growth in downtown retail spaces, it is important to be open to the different types of businesses that can be incorporated in a vibrant downtown. Currently, many “big box” retailers require spaces much larger than what is available in the downtown area, but these smaller spaces are perfect for start-up businesses, boutique retailers or local restaurants. The market for downtown retail is certainly viable, but will look very different from the suburban retail market.

**RETAIL MARKET POTENTIAL**

To calculate the current demand in the downtown market, an analysis of the current supply (sales of businesses in the market area) and the potential demand (resident and visitor spending) was performed. Within the one-quarter mile market area, the total potential expenditures on retail goods and services was estimated. In other words, this is how much money could be spent in the district if the market area population did all their shopping there. This provides the maximum demand that could be expected for East Grace Street, even though in a major metro area it is unlikely that all of a household’s retail expenditures will be spent in one place.

There is a total dollar value of $250,975,952 in potential expenditures in the market area. Existing retail in the Metro Richmond area satisfies much of this demand, but previous market studies suggest that the downtown area is under served in certain categories of convenience goods. Convenience goods are described as items that shoppers do not price-compare or spend a lot of time researching before purchasing. This category of goods includes everyday items like grocery, gasoline, personal care, laundry and fast food. Shoppers goods, or “drive retail” are goods for which
consumers do compare price, quality and brand. These are more significant purchases like automobiles, furniture, sporting equipment, gifts or appliances and electronics. The graph below shows the unmet demand by retail category in the market area around East Grace Street. The demand is shown here in supportable square feet, so, for example, given the supply and demand characteristics of the district, about 8,000 square feet of retail space providing household products is warranted.

Chart 4: Existing and Supportable Square Feet in the Downtown Market Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>New Units</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
<th>Unmet Demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience Goods</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>86,838</td>
<td>$16,942,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoppers Goods</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30,846</td>
<td>$4,742,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating/drinking</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>$378,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>118,667</strong></td>
<td><strong>$22,063,448</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In particular, there is a demand for convenience goods including small grocery and specialty foods, household goods, personal services and gasoline. Current zoning allows for all of these uses other than gasoline.

Although some shopper’s goods are also warranted, the main market is for convenience goods and services. Again, this finding is supported by previous market studies that have shown Richmond has a proportionally smaller share of the convenience goods market than surrounding areas. Real estate experts in the area have also corroborated these findings, noting that there is not a market for shopper’s goods in the downtown area. As residential growth continues, the retail market will expand to reach industry thresholds for development of shopper’s goods.

This provides an idea of the market potential for East Grace Street, but the retail market is just one piece of a thriving downtown. Other uses like housing, arts and entertainment, office and lodging also play a critical role in the downtown economy.
DOWNTOWN OFFICE MARKET ANALYSIS

The central downtown area has a concentration of office uses, mainly for state and local government purposes. Although new construction has been occurring, the net absorption of new office space has been limited. Regional trends show new growth mainly in the southwestern portions of the metro area (particularly the counties of Chesterfield, Goochland and western Henrico) with activity in the downtown area generally being from existing tenants moving offices and not new tenants locating downtown. This trend of lateral movement has not significantly improved the office vacancy rate downtown.

On East Grace Street the market for office space is limited. The overall vacancy rate is greater than 60%, and the building stock is aging. The average office building on the corridor was built in 1935, meaning an average building age of more than 70 years, presenting costly challenges for installing modern infrastructure. The average leasable space is 1,200 square feet, compared with the average leasable space in nearby Shockoe Bottom of 8,000 square feet and 3,700 square feet in the central office district along East Main and Franklin Streets.

The available office space on East Grace Street is all graded as Class B, which is generally defined as a good or fair standard, a step below the highest quality of Class A office space. Adequately maintained, these spaces represent affordable options for smaller professional businesses or nonprofit organizations.

Current market trends show that absorption of space has mainly been from the expansion of existing tenants, and in particular from government, local businesses, corporations and institutions. From 2010 to 2011 over 400,000 square feet of office space was added to the downtown area, with most of this occurring along the river in Shockoe Bottom. With well over 30,000 square feet of Class A office space available, the Shockoe Bottom area is poised to attract larger corporate tenants. However, for the central office area around Grace Street it can be expected that the bulk of office users continue to be local and state government agencies. This is a significant and stabilizing asset that can be leveraged to fill vacant space with local businesses that have a connection to government services.

RESIDENTIAL MARKET ANALYSIS

The downtown residential market is thriving. Compared to grim vacancy rates for retail (41%) and office (37%), the residential vacancy rate is less than 2%. There are currently 7,000 apartment units and 500 condo units in the downtown area, with more than 1,500 units planned or under construction by 2014. Additionally, there are 1,000 privately owned student-housing units. The total residential population is expected to increase by nearly 2,000 in the next three years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Price per Square Foot for Office Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shockoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Loopnet.com
Overwhelmingly, this growth is being driven by young individuals in the 20 to 34 age range. Although previous analysis predicted a growth in residential population from the baby boomer population, this has not materialized. In fact, the 55 and older age group have decreased as a total share in downtown population. Discussions with residential market experts suggest that this trend will continue. While some Baby Boomers are moving into downtown, the vast majority of that cohort is choosing to remain in the suburbs. Preliminary research suggests this is due to lingering poor perceptions of downtown, limited accommodations for accessibility and perhaps most importantly, a lack of attractive residential options for older residents. Understanding the perceptions, attitudes and needs of this demographic is essential for bolstering the long term sustainability of downtown housing, and should be an area of further exploration.

Additionally, much of the growth has been from in-migration of individuals outside of the metro area. Northern Virginia and the D.C. area account for a portion of the growth (2.5%), but the bulk of new residents (27.7%) are being drawn from a national pool (ZHA 2009).

Despite the housing market turmoil on a national scale, the outlook for the downtown residential market looks promising. With more than 86% renter-occupied units, the downtown housing market is actually growing while other areas in the city suffer from destabilizing foreclosures. It is expected that between 300 and 500 new units will be added each year as the growth and development of mixed-use buildings, loft conversions and new construction continue to bring residents to the downtown area.

**MAJOR PLAYERS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

**MERCHANTS**

Many businesses along the corridor have been operating for more than 20 years, keeping their doors open through a turbulent time on East Grace when its large retail anchors were closing shop. Some merchants would like to see more retail open up along the street, noting that big box chains would attract people from all over the region. Other merchants discussed wanting to keep the corridor filled with small local businesses instead citing that the street could definitely use and support a coffee shop, a dry cleaners and a store for employees and residents to by daily necessities such as a small grocer or pharmacy.

Opinions vary among merchants about what could be done to improve the corridor, but all note that things are trending in a positive direction: streets are cleaner due to the City’s Clean and Safe contract with Venture Richmond; more residents put more eyes on the street throughout the day and dog-walking, jogging and general foot traffic along the corridor have increased; while one popular restaurant has had to close its doors due to the recession, two new ones have opened their doors with two more on the way.

Many merchants discuss the large homeless population that exists in and around downtown Richmond and talk about both the positives and negatives of the services provided along the corridor. As one merchant noted, for years this section of the city was where many neighborhoods and districts pushed their homeless populations, and, in response the downtown churches and other non-profits
stepped up to provide services and warm meals to these many Richmonders. The presence of a large homeless population is a point of concern and contention among some businesses and the local churches but efforts are underway to mitigate these differences and come up with amenable solutions to increasing the perception of safety, while at the same time, serving the needs of Richmond’s homeless population.

Finally, many merchants would like, once again, to be involved with Richmond’s First Friday Art Walk and have the path and planning of the monthly event include East Grace Street as well. Initially, Center Stage and St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, as well as restaurants and bars along East Grace, were venues included in the art walk but lacking representative leadership from the corridor the Art Walk slowly died off on East Grace.

PROPERTY OWNERS AND PROPERTY MANAGERS

Discussions with property managers, real estate agents and property owners along East Grace again highlight the transitional nature of the corridor. Property managers and real estate agents are working to reinvigorate the corridor. One property manager, who handles most of the vacant storefronts along two blocks of East Grace Street, highlighted a number of reasons for the slow resurgence, first among them being the recent recession.

Property owners report seeing an increase in inquiries into their vacant properties, but have not yet secured tenants. Owners feel the inactive street life, lack of on-site parking and perceptions of safety in the area are the main challenges to leasing their properties. There is a strong interest in developing a collaborative marketing effort for the corridor, as owners believe promotion is the number one activity that the City must do to enhance the vitality of the area.

Around half of the structures and space along East Grace are owned by people or companies from outside of Richmond, meaning that these property owners may not be aware of all of the movement currently underway in downtown Richmond. Building working relationships with property owners will be key to implementation of many of the following recommendations.

RESIDENTS

Most residents along East Grace Street are under the age of 35, with over 40% under the age of 24. With the uptick in loft, condo and apartment units throughout downtown, many young professionals and students have decided to make this part of the city their home. With the number of available units increasing drastically over the past decade, residential use and occupancy has outpaced that of retail and commercial development and unmet local demand for convenience good and services is high. Residents report the need for a small grocery store or pharmacy so that they do not have to get in their cars to access everyday items. The property manager at the residential facility with the most occupants discussed how many of her tenants moved to Richmond from other mid-size East Coast cities and were surprised and disappointed about the lack of even basic convenience services and amenities available in the city center.
SHOPPERS AND VISITORS

The most responsive group of individuals thus far has been those who visit the district to shop, dine, or enjoy entertainment options. Visitors from across the region make their way to downtown Richmond on a daily basis and of those who visit East Grace Street, many cite the restaurants and entertainment options as their key destinations.

Most (86%) report that parking availability is at or above average, while more than 90% of merchants and property owners feel parking is a serious concern. Similarly, visitors report that they generally feel safe in the district (36% feel safe or very safe) though they think the visual appeal of the district could be improved. As is the case for residents, many of these visitors would like to see a coffee shop and or a small grocer along the corridor. Many of these shoppers and visitors work in downtown or attend VCU and would appreciate the opportunity to have a walkable place to purchase convenience necessities.

Restaurants along the corridor and Richmond CenterStage receive much praise while vacant storefronts and dilapidated buildings are most often mentioned as negatives (see Appendix for full survey results).

SURROUNDING ASSETS AND INFLUENCES

HISTORIC CHURCHES

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, St. Peter’s Catholic Church and Centenary United Methodist Church are the reason Grace Street has its name. They are long-standing partners of the city and have served the corridor through all of its iterations and transitions for the past 200 years. Each of these places has not only a storied past but a lively future and each seek to actively engage residents and visitors to their home along East Grace.

All of these churches are partners in the Downtown Community Ministry Walk-In Feeding Program, which provides a hot meal, Monday thru Friday to between 150 and 300 homeless and or hungry Richmonders. This program’s long-standing success has not come without its critics who claim that this program deters visitors and decreases the perceptions of safety along East Grace Street. Efforts are underway to for business leaders and leaders at each of these churches to meet to discuss how they can best work together to both provide a needed service in downtown Richmond while at the same time promoting a safe and welcoming environment to visitors.
THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Each year, for 45 or 60 days starting the second Wednesday of January, the Virginia General Assembly convenes to handle the business of the Commonwealth. During the General Assembly Session, lawmakers, their staff, visitors, advocates, lobbyists, and citizens from across Virginia make their way to Richmond and the edge of the East Grace Street Corridor. Legislators, advocates and lobbyists utilize the corridor in many ways and have many opinions of what could be done to make the corridor more amenable to their use while in Richmond.

Many groups of advocates utilize the spaces at the three corridor churches, Richmond Center Stage, the Richmond Marriot and the Greater Richmond convention center to convene before their annual “lobby days.” Having welcoming locations willing to provide meeting space drastically increases awareness of the corridor’s other amenities.

Many legislators and their staff also either rent apartments or condos in downtown Richmond or stay at one of the area hotels during their time in the city. Of those legislators, staff, advocates and lobbyists not from the Richmond area many are curious as to why so few retail and grocery options exist in close proximity to Capitol Square - noting that if more options were available by foot, they would definitely be utilized.

VCU, MCV AND UR DOWNTOWN

The East Grace Street Corridor is situated between the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Monroe Park Campus and Medical College of Virginia (MCV) campus. Students from both campuses make up a large portion of the residents who live along East Grace. The recent addition of University of Richmond (UR) Downtown on Broad Street adjacent to the corridor also brings students from the West End campus downtown on a daily basis.

DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION AND JACKSON WARD NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

The Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) has been involved in improving the downtown area since its founding in 1996. The DNA is very interested in continuing to support the development of downtown, particularly arts and culture related businesses. The Jackson Ward Neighborhood Association is going through a change in leadership but is supportive of the effort.

FUTURE PLANS OF DEVELOPMENT

East Grace is a corridor that is constantly changing, adapting and reinventing itself. Even as this plan is being written, developments that will shape the future of East Grace Street are happening. Projects of note on the horizon include the proposed downtown Arts and Cultural District, the development of artist live-work units on East Grace and the promise of new restaurants and retailers filling some significant vacant spaces.
ARTS AND CULTURE DISTRICT

Still in development, Mayor Dwight Jones has proposed an arts and cultural district for the downtown area that is designed to spur investment and redevelopment through the use of special financial incentives, loan programs and technical assistance. Although the boundaries have not yet been finalized, the Arts and Cultural District could stretch east from Belvidere to 12th Street, as far south as Canal Street and as far north as Leigh Street to encompass much of the downtown area.

ARTIST LIVE-WORK SPACE

In April of 2011 a project to renovate 213 East Broad Street and 214 East Grace Street was announced. Financed in part by $250,000 from the City’s new revolving loan fund, this project will create 13 new apartment units as well as artists live-work space and street level retail. Its expected timeframe for completion is the summer of 2012 (City of Richmond 2011).

INTERESTED RESTAURANTS AND RETAILERS

The excitement on East Grace Street is palpable as investors and entrepreneurs from Richmond to New York are looking seriously at East Grace Street. With the recent opening of Pasture on the 400 block, the soon to open 525 Restaurant on the 500 block and the completion of the Residences at John Marshall just south of these two blocks, real estate experts believe East Grace Street to be just on the tipping point of attracting significant investment.

BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT

With so many new projects, exciting developments and incredible assets on East Grace Street, it is easy to wonder what is holding the corridor back from filling its fifteen vacant properties. The market around East Grace Street is complex, and is ultimately influenced by many economic and non-economic factors, making a short answer to this question difficult. According to research conducted by the author as well as market experts, the primary reasons for delayed prosperity include unrealistic expectations of property value, a mismatch between the wants and needs of potential investors and property owners, inadequate parking, and perceptions of a lack of safety in the downtown area.

PROPERTY VALUES

Possibly the most significant barrier to reinvestment on East Grace Street are the unrealistic expectations of property values. Many of the currently vacant properties have been unoccupied for over two decades with no improvements.
made during that time (There/Here 2012). Real estate experts on the corridor report that property owners are reluctant to invest in their properties yet are asking $20/square foot, while the average rate for central downtown is $14/square foot. The majority of owners did not buy their properties, but rather own them outright, making it financially feasible to continue to wait out investors hoping for a higher price.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

The current economic climate has caused a freeze in lending, and small businesses have been particularly hard hit. Developers, property managers and merchants report a lack of available financing for business start-up or expansion to be an obstacle to the development of East Grace Street.

PERCEIVED LACK OF ADEQUATE PARKING

Although there are more than 4,500 parking spaces within walking distance of the corridor, merchants, property owners and potential investors all cite a lack of convenient parking as a major deterrent to reinvestment. Although preliminary findings suggest that shoppers do not find parking to be an issue, over 77% of survey respondents do travel to the district by car.

CONCERNS OF SAFETY

An issue of concern in the downtown area is the perception of safety and visitors’ level of comfort with urban elements such as homelessness and public transit. Although the crime rate for the area is lower than the citywide average in nearly every category, there is a sentiment among downtown stakeholders that the appearance of the area undermines investor confidence.

FOOT TRAFFIC & POPULATION

The inactive street scene has been cited as a major obstacle for securing retail tenants. Retailers want to see thriving foot traffic that, at this point, is very minimal along East Grace. Additionally, although it is growing steadily, the population base in the area has not yet reached the threshold that investors are looking for.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

ARTS/ENTERTAINMENT, BARS AND DINING

East Grace Street has a number of restaurants and bars throughout the corridor. Some, such as Perly’s and The Red Door function primarily as breakfast and lunch spots while others such as Aurora and Barcode are predominantly bars. There are 9 restaurants/bars along the corridor with three potential additions currently under consideration. Just beyond the corridor, scores of other dining options exist with at least 15 options along Broad Street and another 10 between Franklin and Main Streets. Beyond the options for food and beverages, clubs dot the corridor as well. On the weekends, three separate clubs open their doors to patrons along the corridor with six others operating in the near vicinity. Nightlife is, for the first time in generations, expanding along East Grace Street.
Assisting in this re-emergence of restaurants and bars along the corridor are two national chain hotels, The Hilton® Garden Inn and the Richmond Marriott® whose guests add to potential business. The locally-owned Jefferson Hotel and Linden Row Inn also encourage guests to dine and walk through parts of historic downtown. Guests, though, are not the real driving force behind the uptick in food and beverage options, the drastic increase in downtown residents helps these restaurants and bars keep their lights on, as do loyal patrons from other parts of the city.

Entertainment has many faces along the Grace Street Corridor and in Downtown Richmond as a whole. Richmond Centerstage and the National Theatre draw hundreds to thousands of visitors downtown each week to experience live music and the performing arts. Plans underway at Kenn-Tico Cuban Bar and Grill hope to offer salsa-dancing lessons to the general public and expanded space for enjoying the Cuban vibe. Godfrey’s hosts Richmond’s famous Drag Brunch every Sunday attracting visitors from all over the region.

**MEDIA BUSINESSES**

Media General’s Virginia Headquarters, the Richmond Times Dispatch, The Richmond Free Press and Richmond.Com among others in print and online media call the East Grace Street Corridor and surrounding streets home.

**LGBT BUSINESSES**

East Grace holds a place in LGBT history in Richmond as well. Not only was the first “gay hangout” established, underground of course, in what used to be the basement of the Hotel Richmond, at least six different gay bars and restaurants have served patrons on the corridor for more than six decades. Today, two gay bars and a gay owned restaurant attract visitors from around the region and provide entertainment for LGBT travelers looking for a friendly environment when they visit downtown Richmond. Also, Centenary United Methodist Church is now the first “United Methodist Reconciling Congregation” - extending hospitality and encouraging full participation of all, regardless of age, race, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, educational or economic background, and physical or mental ability.

The economic benefits associated with the emergence and growth of an LGBT “cultural district” are well-documented (Lauria & Knopp 1985; Collins 2004; Ruting 2008). By both embracing its history and welcoming its future, the western portion of East Grace Street could emerge as point of attraction for many members of Richmond and Virginia’s LGBT community as acceptance of this minority community becomes more mainstream.
SECTION 2:

EAST GRACE STREET TOMORROW
A VISION FOR EAST GRACE STREET

Visitors stroll out of Capitol Square past the old Hotel Richmond, St. Paul’s and St. Peter’s and are greeted by an elegant sign welcoming them to the “East Grace Street Historic Commercial District.” As they approach the sign they notice a free walking tour map, pick one up, and decide to spend another hour in downtown Richmond exploring the unique architecture and historic sites along East Grace Street.

Once vacant storefronts now house local small businesses, art studios, nonprofits, patio cafés, and specialty food stores. For those who chose to make East Grace Street their home, the full potential they once saw is now becoming a reality. They only have a few blocks to travel to do their grocery shopping, drop off their dry cleaning, stop by the bank and walk to their downtown office.

Other residents hop on their bikes and ride over to VCU for classes. The first fully functioning bike lane couplet in downtown Richmond has increased the activity level along both East Grace and Franklin Streets so much that the city has installed bike racks on each block of East Grace Street and an urban bicycle shop has opened its doors along the corridor.

The increase in cyclists has helped in subsiding parking worries as has the agreement between city, state and local private partners to standardize downtown parking lots into an easily managed and accessible computerized parking system.

Long-term property owners have been targeted with code enforcement and zoning measures that have made it more profitable for them to keep up their properties than to let them fall into disrepair. The City’s sustained partnership with the Valentine Richmond History Center has vacant storefront windows filled with historic photographs of the same address to maintain the historic value and feel of the corridor while new tenants are sought.

New LGBT businesses have opened along the corridor, attracted to the area by the city’s acknowledgement and recruitment efforts, and the western portion of East Grace Street has become a destination for LGBT visitors and residents.

The wide sidewalks are being used to their full potential as long-standing and new restaurants expand patios, bringing life to the street. The energy created by the vibrancy and

Figure 23: A scene from downtown Fresno, CA. Source: Downtownfresno.org
diversity of street life draws increasing numbers of lunchtime diners from all parts of downtown. In the evenings the bustle of Richmond foodies and visitors to multiple entertainment venues fills the street.

Guests and conventioneers at downtown hotels have so many dining and entertainment options within safe walking distance that they are compelled to return to try out all the things just one visit would not allow.

Arts and Culture District incentives have spurred a creative rethinking of East Grace Street as artists flock to the affordable live/work spaces available throughout downtown Richmond. A new identity for RVA is developing organically from the city center and expanding in full embrace of both diversity and history.

Local businesses begin working together and seasonal street festivals are created on East Grace Street, giving people from all walks of life yet another reason to come back and stay downtown. East Grace Street has recreated itself yet again in the heart of Downtown Richmond – the latest iteration of past incarnations highlights an alternative, walkable, sustainable living history.


Figure 24: An indoor temporary “pop up” park in New York. Source: Downtownmagazinenyc.org.
The following section provides a five year action plan for improving the vitality of East Grace Street. The corridor is complex, and successful revitalization requires patience, persistence and comprehensive strategies that address all dimensions of commerce and community. The goals and objectives are organized under four broad themes of: 1) Developing the Market; 2) Amending the Built Environment; 3) Leveraging Assets; and 4) Nourishing Meaningful Connections. Although these are presented as different elements, they are interrelated and mutually beneficial, with each theme carrying equal importance for bringing vitality to East Grace Street.

**MARKET DEVELOPMENT**

The commercial market in downtown Richmond is in transition. Demand for office space and residential development has shifted as businesses and residents have more choices for where to shop, dine, live, work and play. Indeed, "choice" is the definitive word in developing the East Grace Street market. The collective choices of individuals to invest in downtown, whether by shopping at local establishments or starting their own small business, will shape the future of downtown. By placing an emphasis on the strengths of East Grace Street, the development of the downtown market can be a complement rather than a competitor to suburban growth, providing a unique experience only available in a historic urban center of commerce.

**GOAL 1: PROMOTE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

East Grace Street is home to many long-standing businesses with devoted customers, such as Perly's and Uniform City, operating for more than 25 years and keeping their doors open even as major anchors in the area closed or relocated. Recently, these businesses have been joined by new entrepreneurs, such as Pasture, Kenn-Tico and the Hilton® Garden Inn, who see the potential of the growing downtown market. Employing a comprehensive strategy of business retention, expansion and recruitment that builds on the existing strengths and capitalizes on the growing demand in downtown can bring greater vitality and vibrancy to this corridor.

**OBJECTIVE1.1: CONNECT BUSINESSES TO CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

**WHY:** Over 40 businesses operate on East Grace Street. These businesses form the foundation of the district and bring customers to the area on a daily basis. Support for existing businesses is critical in maintaining and expanding the activity on East Grace Street. Because their time and resources are limited, business owners may not be up to date on best management practices. Connecting businesses to existing programs for business development could help merchants meet and exceed the unique challenges they face.

**WHAT:** Support and foster the continued growth and development of businesses through technical assistance,
business development workshops and networking opportunities.

**WHO:** Planning and Development Review, Economic and Community Development, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, Business First Richmond, i.e.* Initiative, Retail Merchants Association, Office of Minority Business Development, Downtown Neighborhood Association.

**HOW:** Coordinate with the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce’s Small Business Development Center, the i.e.* Initiative, and the Office of Minority Business Development to develop and deliver targeted workshops in the district. Work with service providers to encourage participation in workshops, events and seminars by offering group rates for East Grace Street businesses. Require businesses receiving financial assistance from the City to attend topical business development seminars and workshops. Publicize upcoming business development workshops happening in Richmond on the CityWeHave website (See Objective 10.1 for information on maintaining this site). Develop an inventory of technical assistance providers and make that information available online and in print.

**SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:** 30% of East Grace Street merchants participate in a business development program or networking event by 2013. At least one workshop is held in the district by 2014, with a goal of a 50% participation rate.

**COST:** Seminars and workshops can range from $35/person - $200/person. The City, Chamber of Commerce or Retail Merchants Association could consider subsidizing costs for participation.

**OBJECTIVE 1.2: IMPROVE FINANCIAL TOOLS AVAILABLE FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

**WHY:** Available financing for business start-up or expansion is an obstacle to the development of East Grace Street. The current economic climate has caused a freeze in lending, and small businesses have been particularly hard hit. Community banks that formerly served small business needs are now pulled to serve the needs of larger businesses that historically accessed traditional sources, leaving a large gap in capital available for small businesses.

**WHAT:** Develop partnerships with community banks and traditional financial institutions to improve and expand existing City loan and incentive programs that make capital available to small businesses, developers and property owners.

**WHO:** Economic & Community Development, Virginia Community Capital, REDC Community Capital Group, Wells Fargo, Sun Trust, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce.

**HOW:** Utilize the Citywide Revolving Loan Fund, Enterprise Zone Initiative, the Tax Abatement Incentive Program, Façades program and Historic Tax Credits to seed investment and create specialized financing and technical assistance packages for small businesses, developers and property owners. Partner with community lenders and traditional banks to develop joint ventures, such as the recent investment at 213 East Broad and 214 East Grace.
Work with these partners to develop alternative ways to evaluate risk when making lending decisions that are more responsive to the unique situations of small businesses in urban environments.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: One to five new small businesses opening on East Grace Street because of this increased access to capital by 2015.

COST: Dedicated city staff person for 20 hours per week for two years - $26,000/year.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: DEVELOP THE RETAIL MARKET THROUGH RECRUITMENT OF BUSINESSES IDENTIFIED IN THE MARKET ANALYSIS.

WHY: The more than 50% increase in residential population in the last 10 years has created a demand for retail goods in downtown that is currently unmet. Qualitative and quantitative research shows support for convenience goods including household products, laundry services, cleaning supplies, personal services and specialty grocery and specialty retail.

WHAT: Target local and national businesses that fall in these categories and have a target customer market that matches with the downtown demographics - a predominantly young residential population, large base of daytime employees in professional occupations, and over 3 million annual visitors. Crossover businesses that serve a range of customers and provide a mix of services, such as the Urban Farmhouse, a crossover of specialty grocery and cafe, will thrive in this area.


HOW:
- Target larger vacant properties to bring in a few core tenants. Work with property managers on the 400 and 500 block of East Grace Street to fill key vacancies, such as those on the first floor of Miller & Rhoads, to establish anchors of activity.
- Develop relationships with local entrepreneurs - host business networking events in the district at existing establishments. For example, the monthly meeting of the Richmond Retail Merchants Association was recently held at the Hilton® Garden Inn, providing an opportunity for retailers across the region to experience the changes happening in downtown. Encourage other Richmond-based trade groups to do the same.
- Collaborate with Venture Richmond and the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce to expand the promotion efforts for East Grace Street as part of the Arts and Cultural District (See Goal 9 for more information). Interest in downtown is growing as efforts along Broad Street take hold, but the role of East Grace as a complement to this development has been undervalued. East Grace Street is an important connector, linking VCU's two campuses and the dense residential population of the Fan neighborhood to downtown. The development of East Grace as a human scale and pedestrian-oriented complement to the efforts along Broad fits in with a larger downtown strategy.
SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: At least one anchor business established in a larger, currently vacant retail space by the year 2014. Coordinated promotional efforts commence immediately.

COST: Two to three hours of Economic and Community Development Staff time per week to build on work already occurring in the private community - $4,000/year.

GOAL 2: REMOVE BARRIERS TO THE PRODUCTIVE USE OF VACANT PROPERTIES

OBJECTIVE 2.1: ESTABLISH A VACANT PROPERTY RE-USE COORDINATOR AND RESOURCE TEAM.

WHY: There are more than 20 vacant properties on East Grace Street, representing nearly 400,000 square feet of unused space. A majority of these properties have sat vacant for well over 10 years. A combination of market factors, absentee ownership, difficulty accessing capital and investor perceptions contribute to the lack of growth along the corridor. These persistent vacancies have a significant negative impact on the appearance of the district, the perception of safety along the corridor and revitalization efforts in downtown Richmond.

WHAT: A targeted strategy pairing property managers and owners with support services to encourage investment, keep owners aware of trends in the district and connect them with City incentive programs and financial resources. Developed by the City of San Diego in 1996, this strategy has helped creatively resolve the city’s more complex and sensitive vacant property challenges.

WHO: Planning and Development Review, property owners, property management companies, developers, Economic and Community Development, Richmond Police Department, Finance Department, Storefront for Community Design, Better Housing Coalition.

HOW: Establish a cross-department vacant property resource team and a lead Vacant Property Re-use Coordinator position inside the Property Maintenance/Code Enforcement Division to facilitate abatement and rehabilitation of vacant properties. The Coordinator should assist property owners in renovating, selling or leasing their vacant properties. The Coordinator should be tasked with connecting property owners to financial resources, real estate and contractor guidance, assistance in the navigation of legal processes, referrals to pro bono attorneys for title and probate assistance and volunteer rehabilitation expertise. The coordinator could also establish and update a name bank of individuals who have expressed interest in investing in vacant properties to capture the opportunity cost of vacant properties in downtown Richmond.

The vacant property resource team should include no more than 7 representatives from the public and private sector that can provide the expertise needed to expedite or assist in the above listed processes. The Department of Planning and Development Review should be the lead coordinator of the team, additional partners could include:
### Potential Partner | Expertise
---|---
**Economic & Community Development** | Financial resources, incentives for rehabilitation, connect to potential investors
**Finance Department** | Tax delinquent properties, available real estate tax exemptions
**Police Department** | Dangerous conditions, vandalism, safety
**Better Housing Coalition** | Historic preservation, affordable housing development, neighborhood stabilization strategies
**Property Management companies** | Knowledge of the market, connect to potential investors
**Storefront for Community Design** | Architecture & design assistance on a sliding price scale

**SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:** The establishment of a vacant property resource team by the end of 2013 and the budgeting for and hiring of a coordinator by the end of 2014. Until funding is established consider the leadership of this team as an internship opportunity in cooperation with VCU (see Objective 12.1 for possible partnerships).

**COST:** Hiring a Vacant Property Re-Use Coordinator $35,000 - $60,000

**OBJECTIVE 2.2: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INVESTOR GROUP TO FACILITATE THE TRANSFER OF LARGE PROPERTIES.**

**WHY:** Absentee property owners may not be seeing the excitement and potential of the area as they are not in the district on a day-to-day basis. Owners have limited understanding of local market conditions and potential investors have cited exorbitant costs as a major barrier to the lease or purchase of long-standing vacant properties. A consortium of investors could pool their capital, share the risk of the investment and potentially meet the price point that property owners are asking.

**WHAT:** A group of individuals and/or organizations interested in downtown revitalization.

**WHO:** Venture Richmond, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, Planning and Development Review, property owners, developers, The Downtown Neighborhood Association.

**HOW:** Work with Venture Richmond to foment a group of private investors, developers and/or organizations that is focused on reviving vacant properties in the downtown area. Venture Richmond should be the leader of this effort as they can pull on partners past and present with a proven track record that would be reliable in this process. Subsidize or buy outright vacant properties with a particular focus on contiguous vacant buildings. Encourage the participation of property owners by allowing their property to be their equity in the company.

**SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:** The formation or courtship of an investor group by 2014, the purchase of at least one long-standing vacant property by 2015.

**COST:** Staff time and use of existing funds for leveraging private investment.
OBJECTIVE 2.3: USE CODE ENFORCEMENT TOOLS TO IMPROVE THE CONDITION OF LONG-STANDING VACANT BUILDINGS

WHY: The more than 20 vacant properties along East Grace Street present a threat to the health and safety of corridor residents and businesses and represent a real economic cost to the City of Richmond. Current policies do not aggressively address the negative impact that long-standing vacant properties have on the economic vitality and quality of life of the downtown community.

WHAT: Enforcement of existing regulations and development of new policies that mitigate the negative consequences of vacant buildings and encourage a return to productive use by establishing a high standard for the maintenance of vacant properties.

WHO: Planning and Development Review, property owners, Vacant Property Re-use Coordinator (see Objective 2.1 for description of this position)

HOW: Explore the creation of a vacant property abatement ordinance similar to those in Philadelphia, San Diego and Louisville. This would require property owners to obtain a vacant property license and provide a statement of intent and timeline within 30 days of the property being vacated. Owners must post a bond to cover the City’s potential cost of correcting code violations or addressing unsafe conditions. Specific maintenance standards for properties that are vacant for a prolonged period, which could be defined as 5 years or more, should be included.

Conduct routine building inspections of vacant properties and require, at least, that no debris, trash or other refuse be visible through street-fronting windows. Glass windows and/or doors that allow views into and out of the interior space cannot be boarded up with wood or other non-transparent materials. The name and contact information of the owner or property management company must be clearly displayed along with the date of last occupancy.

Provide incentives for the reuse of vacant properties, such as allowing floor area bonuses for the development of properties that have been vacant for 5 years or more, and work with the Vacant Property Reuse Coordinator (see Objective 2.1 for a description of this position) to connect owners with available financial incentives and other resources for rehabilitation.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Routine building inspections and code enforcement currently allowed in the city code should commence before 2013. Establishment of new enforcement options and incentives should be initiated and adopted by 2015.

COST: See Objective 2.1 for staffing description and cost.

GOAL 3: ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MIX OF OFFICE, RESIDENTIAL AND ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS THAT SUPPORT THE OVERALL VITALITY OF THE DISTRICT.

OBJECTIVE 3.1: RECRUIT SMALL PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS AND NONPROFIT TENANTS FOR SMALLER VACANT OFFICE SPACES
WHY: The downtown office market is soft, but daytime uses promote the overall vibrancy of the district as downtown employees have a significant economic impact. With the majority of Class A office space located along the river (ZVA 2007), the City Center District is not in a competitive position to attract corporate tenants. Currently, most vacancies are filled by relocation or expansion of existing tenants, not new growth. However, East Grace Street’s strategic location next to the State Capitol complex and City Hall can be leveraged to attract smaller professional businesses and nonprofit organizations that contract with state and local government agencies but need affordable space.

WHAT: A collaborative recruitment strategy between the City Department of Economic and Community Development and property managers that includes: a promotional packet targeted at small professional businesses and nonprofit organizations that provides information on the benefits of locating on East Grace Street. An open house event in coordination with property managers and real estate agents where interested businesses can tour available properties. Possible establishment of incentives for tenants that sign a long-term lease (3 years or more).

WHO: Property management companies, Planning and Development Review, Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, ConnectRichmond, Economic and Community Development and real estate agents.

HOW: Work with property management companies and real estate agents in the district to develop a coordinated packet that includes information on all available properties, specific benefits of locating along the corridor and any incentives that are available. Make this packet available online and link to the document on any online property listing. Coordinate with the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce, ConnectRichmond and property managers and real estate agents to hold an open house event with small businesses and local nonprofit organizations. Send invitations through these networks and the CityWeHave website (see Goal 10). Host the event in a space currently for lease and plan a tour of all available spaces. Approach a local restaurant to provide light fare and refreshments. Collect business cards at the door and follow-up with attendees within two weeks of the event.

Consider establishing small incentives for new office tenants, such as a 10% discount on City provided utilities, or a lease assistance program that partially subsidizes the first year of a long term lease (at least 3 years). Meet with property management companies and potential tenants to determine what types of incentives or other support would be most valuable to the typical tenant.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Packet compiled and available in print and online by 2013. At least one open house event held with a goal of 50 attendees by the end of 2013. Establishment of small, targeted incentives for attracting tenants that can commit to a few years in the district by 2015.
COST: $500 - $2,000 for promotional packet and events, up to $15,000 for developing potential incentives.

**OBJECTIVE 3.2: EXPLORE A RANGE OF HOUSING OPTIONS THAT SUPPORT EXISTING RESIDENTS AND ATTRACT NEW ONES**

**WHY:** The residential market in downtown is growing rapidly, with more than 1,500 units planned or under construction by 2014. The majority of this growth has been absorbed by a booming student and young professional population, which has been a great asset to downtown Richmond. To help shape the development of a sustainable downtown community that does not rely solely on one target demographic, a mix of housing unit and tenure types should be available. Although beyond the scope of this plan, the development of inclusionary policies that encourage the development of affordable housing, promote a mix of renters and owners and support the growth of a mixed-income district in downtown should be further explored.

**WHAT:** Work with VCU and other community housing partners to conduct an in-depth residential market and affordability analysis to fully assess housing demand and accessibility in downtown Richmond.

**WHO:** Planning and Development Review, VCU (See Objective 12.1 for explanation of possible partnerships) Better Housing Coalition, HOME, Economic and Community Development, Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority

**HOW:** Work in cooperation with VCU (see Objective 12.1 for explanation of possible partnerships).

**SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:** A completed residential market and affordability analysis completed by 2014.

**COST:** Free if pursued as part of a class project with VCU.

**OBJECTIVE 3.3: SUPPORT ARTS, CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT ALONG EAST GRACE STREET.**

**WHY:** The potential demand for retail downtown is growing but there is still an excess of supply. The high commercial vacancy rates in downtown are expected to decrease as the population continues to grow, as more visitors are drawn to downtown and employees see a reason to stay longer after work, however, the traditional retail market is not the only
option for filling vacant storefronts. Downtown Richmond is positioning itself as a center of arts, culture and entertainment, with East Grace Street perfectly positioned to take advantage of this trend. Along with retail uses that support a growing residential population, there is a strong interest from shoppers and visitors to expand the arts and cultural options along East Grace. The arts community has expressed an interest in East Grace Street for its affordability, intimate feel and unmatched collection of historic architecture.

WHAT: A short- and long-term strategy to encourage the development of arts, entertainment and cultural businesses, live/work spaces where appropriate, and galleries and performance spaces along East Grace Street.

WHO: Planning and Development Review, First Friday, local artists, VMFA, Valentine Richmond History Center, property owners, Curated Culture, Downtown Neighborhood Association

HOW: Engage artists directly in the development and design of the district. With its many unimproved vacant spaces, East Grace Street is an excellent canvas for artistic exploration and design. In the short-term these spaces are perfect opportunities for “pop-ups”- temporary storefronts, galleries, installations, performance spaces or any combination thereof. The Vacant Property Re-use Coordinator (see Objective 2.1 for explanation of this position) should work with artists to get the necessary approval from property owners and any needed permits. Pop-ups and other “guerilla urbanism” techniques like murals, which are currently underway on Broad Street, are an excellent intervention strategy that can build excitement and recognition of the district; they should be paired with a longer-term strategy that supports the specialized needs of artists. Build off of the financial tools and incentives that will be available in the Arts and Culture District and develop a specialized permitting process for artist studios, galleries and performance spaces. Work with VCU Graduate programs (see Objective 12.1 for possible partnerships).

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Two pop-up art spaces by 2014 and full inclusion of East Grace Street under incentives established in final version of Arts & Culture District.

COST: Staff time of the Vacant Property Re-use Coordinator (see Objective 2.1 for explanation of this position)

Figure 27: A mural at 7 West Grace Street, part of the G40 exhibition. Source: The Washington Post.
AMENDING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

GOAL 4: ESTABLISH AND PROMOTE EAST GRACE STREET AS AN ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT/ROUTE IN DOWNTOWN RICHMOND

OBJECTIVE 4.1: ESTABLISH EAST GRACE STREET AND EAST FRANKLIN STREET AS THE PRIMARY COMMUTER BIKE ROUTE COUPLET IN DOWNTOWN RICHMOND.

WHY: East Grace Street and East Franklin Street are a couplet (two parallel one-way streets that function as a travel pair) that the City Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trails Coordinator has established as a viable bike route. East Grace Street’s gentle slope, connection between the two VCU campuses, lower traffic volume and one-way designation make it ideal for this designation. Establishing this primary commuter bike route could assist in the recruitment and establishment of service and bike-friendly businesses along East Grace Street. As East Grace Street is scheduled to be one of the last streets downtown streets converted to two-way traffic, there are two options presented for achieving this objective.

WHAT:
OPTION 1 Establish a designated bike lane along the left hand side of both the Franklin and Grace Street couplet from 9th Street to Foushee Street.
OPTION 2 Paint “sharrows” along the East Grace Street and East Franklin Street couplet to raise awareness of cyclists.

WHO: City Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trails Coordinator; Department of Planning and Development Review; Public Works; Virginia Department of Transportation

HOW:
OPTION 1 Remove the peak hour parking restrictions from the left hand side of the street so that a bike lane would be viable. Space for a full time parking lane is less than that needed for a travel lane and the street is wide enough to fit a bike lane along the left hand side according to the City Bicycle Pedestrian and Trails Coordinator. The maintenance revenue lost from VDOT on this would be less than two miles worth of peak travel lanes would be minimal and money could potentially be saved due to reduction in crashes. Peak travel lanes along East Grace rarely meet their traffic flow potential as towing is sporadic and drivers are accustomed to using the center two lanes. The left hand lane is ideal for a bike lane for four main reasons: 1) the return bike route or couplet is accessed by making a left hand turn, 2) door zone issues are mitigated as it is less likely that a person will be exiting a parked vehicle from the passenger side, 3) no bus stops exist along the left hand side of the street, and 4) cyclists will be on the same side of the road as the vehicle drivers which will increase awareness and visibility.
OPTION 2 Paint one to two “sharrows” along the right hand travel lane of each block on the East Grace and East Franklin couplet.
SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

OPTION 1 The first fully functioning bike lane couplet in Downtown Richmond is painted and functioning before the 2015 World Cycling Championships.

OPTION 2 Increased visibility of cyclists along East Grace and more usage of the corridor as a commuter bike route and campus connector bike route by the end of 2013.

COST: Capital improvement plan funding for bicycle infrastructure and road painting received in 2012. Make efforts to continue securing this funding in future capital improvement budgets.

OBJECTIVE 4.2: INSTALL ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS AT THE CITY-OWNED AND SUPPORTED PARKING DECKS ON EAST GRACE STREET

WHY: Current data and projections regarding electric vehicle (EV) support, financing, production and consumer behavior suggests the viability of this alternative to gas-powered vehicles is a reality. Taking the lead in alternative energy vehicles is a priority of the federal and state government. Nissan, General Motors, Toyota, Ford and Volkswagen have all selected Virginia as an initial launch site and test market for their 2012/2013 EV Fleets (Virginia Clean Cities, 2011). A recent survey shows that 78% of U.S. Consumers would consider buying an EV if fuel prices reach $5.00 per gallon (Petry, 2011). Dominion Virginia Power estimates 86,000 EVs in their service area by 2020 and more than 500,000 by 2035 (Barker, 2011).

WHAT: Install electric vehicle charging stations at the city-owned parking deck from 603-609 East Grace Street and the Richmond Metropolitan Authority (RMA) parking deck at 201 E. Grace Street.

WHO: City of Richmond Parking Department; Sustainable Transportation Initiative of Richmond (STIR); Richmond Electric Vehicle Initiative; Virginia Clean Cities

HOW: Work through Richmond STIR and the Richmond Electric Vehicle Initiative working groups to secure funding and installation of recommended level 2 charging stations in parking decks.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: One EV Charging Station on East Grace Street by 2013 - At least five by 2015.

COST: Level 2 charging station purchase and installation costs range from $1500 to $5000 per station. Federal grants and incentives and bulk pricing are available to offset costs. Consider including charging stations in next capital improvement budget.
**Objective 4.3: Establish a Parking Inventory Management System**

**Why:** Potential investors, property owners, developers and property managers have all noted parking availability as a major challenge on East Grace Street and downtown Richmond. Although there are over 7,500 parking spaces available within 10 blocks of East Grace Street, the lack of coordination leads to uncertainty for businesses and visitors to area about the availability of parking. Parking revenues from public decks were expected to pay for downtown improvements, but this revenue has not met expected levels due partly to an underutilization of space. A centralized inventory and management system would allow for increased awareness of available parking during peak traffic events, potentially increase efficiency and revenues, and lower the tangible and intangible costs of parking for customers and businesses.

![Figure 28: Example of an electronic display system in West Berkshire, England. Source: Siemens.co.uk.](image)

**What:** A coordinated effort between the City, state and Richmond Metropolitan Authority to standardize fee structures in public parking decks and develop a central computer parking monitoring system, universal swipe card, and a “space bank”.  

**How:** Ideally the City, State, RMA and private parking facilities in Downtown Richmond could all coordinate under a new Parking Inventory Management System, but to start City of Richmond Parking Facilities, RMA facilities and State Facilities should be included in this process. Hire a consultant or work with the VCU Graduate School to create a computerized system similar to what is in use at the Richmond International Airport that shows the number of spaces available on each floor on an electronic sign before cars enter the deck. This should be managed from a central online system that includes an inventory of all spaces in all publicly owned decks. Standardize fee structures across decks and institute a universal swipe card system, similar to the GRTC “Go Card” system, where users can pay in advance and have parking costs deducted from their balance. Integrate this online system with the new Ridefinders website so that customers can locate open decks before travelling downtown. For purchasers of monthly parking, create a “space bank” application as part of the online system that allows individuals to rent out their monthly space when it is not in use by them. Establish a

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2 Nashville, TN has instituted a similar system, “ParkIt! Downtown”, where visitors can locate available parking online, search a database for monthly parking options, or sign up for the downtown employee park and ride program.
uniform policy in all decks that reserves lower floors of parking for hourly use and places monthly spaces on upper levels.

The Greater Richmond Transit Authority (GRTC) should be approached as the lead coordinator of this effort, as the existing services provided by the GRTC support this process. Integrating this service with the new Ridefinders initiative would establish the GRTC as the central hub for all transportation information and services. Other hosts of this service could be City Parking, the RMA, Virginia Department of General Services, or an outside private consultant.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: A centralized Parking Inventory Management System is established across all public parking facilities by 2016.

COST: $3,000,000 - $5,000,000

GOAL 5: CREATE A SAFE, WELCOMING AND COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT ALONG EAST GRACE STREET

OBJECTIVE 5.1: REALISTICALLY ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS PRESENCE ON CORRIDOR THROUGH A SERIES OF THIRD PARTY MODERATED COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS.

WHY: Many merchants, property owners and residents site the presence of perceived homeless individuals along the East Grace Street Corridor as deterrent to business and a threat to safety. The downtown churches’ long-standing community walk-in feeding program is part of the mission of each of these different faith communities and a collective effort to provide for those who have the least. Individuals who participate in these programs congregate along certain blocks of East Grace Street each day during the week before and after the free meal. Disagreements and tensions exist between some merchants, developers, visitors and residents and the churches as to the best way to continue to serve the homeless population. A series of realistic conversations to bring people together for a discussion about homelessness, the services the churches provide, the perception of safety and a collaborative future path that fits the needs of all parties involved is necessary.

WHAT: A series of action-oriented discussions on homelessness in Downtown Richmond that aim to achieve a shared vision for the future of East Grace Street in a collaborative manner.

WHO: All stakeholders along East Grace Street with opinions about the issue of homelessness’ impact on the corridor. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, St. Peter’s Catholic Church, Centenary United Methodist Church, 2nd Presbyterian Church, Third Bethel AME Church, Downtown Neighborhood Association, corridor businesses, property owners, developers, residents, visitors, city staff, Storefront For Community Design, Homeward, Caritas, VCU School of Social Work, VCU Sustainable Communities Institute, City of Richmond Police Department

HOW: Approach Storefront for Community Design, Homeward, VCU School of Social Work, VCU Sustainable Communities Institute and/or other third party consultants (See Goal 12 for possible partnerships) to facilitate a series
of at least three action-oriented community discussions about homelessness in downtown Richmond and the future of the East Grace Street Corridor. Invite all interested parties from the East Grace Street Corridor and make sure to have representation from the churches that participate in the walk-in feeding program. Have third party facilitator design discussions to be inclusive and open to the opinions of all in the room understanding the differing needs, missions, and goals of the diverse businesses and organizations that call East Grace Street home. Brainstorm recommendations for adequately addressing the concerns of merchants, residents, property managers, property owners and visitors while respecting the mission and calling of the religious institutions and their long-standing traditions. Seek consensus on at least three recommendations and move forward with implementation.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Less tension and more collaboration among those invested in East Grace Street and movement toward realistic and achievable solutions for addressing the concerns of residents, property owners and merchants while respecting the mission of the downtown walk-in feeding program.

COST: $0-$5,000 for facilitation of community discussions.

Objective 5.2: Utilize targeted zoning and code enforcement tools to improve the built environment

WHY: The zoning code is a powerful tool for the revitalization of downtown Richmond. The zoning code establishes the form and location of redevelopment, and can be used to help promote an active and vibrant downtown.

WHAT: Review and revise the regulations for the B-4 district to encourage increased foot traffic, active uses along the street and attractive storefronts.

WHO: PDR, Grace Street stakeholders, VCU MURP program

HOW: Work with VCU’s Master of Urban & Regional Planning Department to perform a comprehensive review of zoning regulations and develop realistic recommendations for improving the zoning ordinance as a tool for driving revitalization. Meet with area stakeholders to discuss any current obstacles and gauge the level of support for potential new policies, including: establishing the area as City Old & Historic District; developing design guidelines for new construction or rehabilitation projects that receive City incentives; requiring projects that propose demolition to be completely funded before permits are issued; prohibiting parking decks and surface lots on street fronting lots; and encouraging uses that will promote street life, such as outdoor dining, by expediting applications that propose balconies or other extensions.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Revisions to Zoning Ordinance are adopted by 2015.

COST: Cost of staff time to review ordinance and meet with stakeholders. Free if part of a VCU project.
LEVERAGING ASSETS

GOAL 6: PROMOTE EAST GRACE STREET AS A THRIVING CENTER OF ART AND ENTERTAINMENT

OBJECTIVE 6.1: DEVELOP A PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY THAT CONNECTS ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES ALONG EAST GRACE STREET WITH SURROUNDING EVENTS, VENUES AND BUSINESSES

WHY: The downtown area is repositioning itself as a destination for arts, culture and entertainment. East Grace Street is a strategic connector between the growing activity on East Broad Street and Shockoe Bottom. The Carpenter Theater, CenterStage, numerous bars and restaurants, Capitol Square and rich examples of historic architecture are just a few of the existing assets located on the corridor that are already attracting visitors to the area. Developing these assets could bring more visitors, shoppers, businesses and overall activity to the corridor.

WHAT: Develop a promotional strategy that connects arts, entertainment and cultural activities in the district with surrounding events, venues and businesses.

WHO: First Fridays, CenterStage, Chez Foushee, Perly’s, Red Door, Godfrey’s, Barcode, Hilton® Garden Inn, St. Paul’s, St. Peter’s, Centenary, Pasture, 525 (when open)

HOW: Work with First Fridays to bring the Art Walk back down East Grace Street again, Develop cross promotional materials between arts/entertainment venues, bars and restaurants. Use social media tools like Groupon to promote area businesses, provide customers with an arts/entertainment package - for example a ticket to a performance at the Carpenter Theater is bundled with a free appetizer at Pasture or a night at the Hilton is paired with a tour of the State Capitol and the three historic churches.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: First Friday Art Walk includes East Grace Street, at least one joint Groupon is developed between businesses.

COST: Printing and Materials $1,500 - $5,000

Figure 29: An example of an arts promotional strategy from the Short North Arts District in Columbus, OH. Source: Sevell.com
GOAL 7: ENHANCE THE PERCEPTION AND PROMOTION OF EAST GRACE STREET AS AN LGBT CULTURAL DESTINATION

OBJECTIVE 7.1: ADD VALUE TO THE CORRIDOR BY ACKNOWLEDGING AND RECOGNIZING IMPACT OF THE LGBT COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS OWNERS

WHY: Numerous studies suggest that LGBT “cultural districts” serve as a harbinger of future investment and increased property values.

As the site of Richmond’s first underground ‘gay hangout’ in the early 1940s, East Grace Street has continually been home to LGBT businesses. Twice in the early 1990s Richmond’s Pride Festival was held on East Grace Street and Centenary United Methodist Church is Virginia’s only “United Methodist Reconciling Congregation” extending open doors to the LGBT community. Currently two gay bars and a gay-owned restaurant are located along the western portion of East Grace Street marking the highest single concentration of gay dining and entertainment options in Downtown Richmond.

Publicly acknowledging and promoting East Grace Street as a place for potential investment for LGBT-owned businesses and entertainment options could assist in filling vacant storefronts, increase investment in the district and draw attention to the western portion of the East Grace Street corridor for LGBT travelers and business people looking for entertainment options. Acknowledgement will also increase the standing of the City of Richmond from the perspective of the LGBT community. An example of this is the Jamaica Plain neighborhood in Boston, MA.

WHAT: Acknowledge and promote the western portion of East Grace Street as a LGBT cultural district under the umbrella of the coming Arts and Cultural District

WHO: Planning and Development Review, Valentine Richmond History Center, VCU Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies; VCU History Department; Chez Foushee, Barcode, Godfrey’s

HOW: Specifically acknowledge the LGBT business and residential community along East Grace Street (and throughout Richmond) in the next update to the Downtown Richmond Master Plan and use inclusive language in describing the coming Arts and Cultural District. Work with the Valentine Richmond History Center, the VCU History Department and the VCU Department of Gender, Sexuality
and Women’s Studies (See Goal 12 for possible partnerships) to document, explore and celebrate LGBT cultural history as part of the fabric of East Grace Street.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Inclusion in the Downtown Master Plan, a growing cluster of LGBT businesses along the western section of the East Grace Street Corridor by 2015 and the inclusion of East Grace Street on the Valentine Richmond History Center’s Lesbian and Gay Richmond Bus Tour.

COST: Free

GOAL 8: CELEBRATE THE UNIQUE AND RICH HISTORY OF EAST GRACE STREET

OBJECTIVE 8.1: PROMOTE AND PUBLICLY RECOGNIZE EAST GRACE STREETS DESIGNATION ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES AS AN HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT.

WHY: A majority of East Grace Street is recognized by the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior as “East Grace Street Historic Commercial District.” (See Figure 29). Most merchants, residents, property owners and visitors I spoke with had no idea of this prestigious and marketable designation. Highlighting this already existent designation with strategically placed signage and the production a historic walking tour map of the corridor would notify residents and visitors of the historic asset and encourage more pedestrian use of the corridor.

WHAT: Strategically place “Grace Street Historic Commercial District” signs along East Grace Street and produce a basic walking tour map of the district to be distributed by merchants and local hotels.

WHO: Planning and Development Review; corridor merchants and area hotels

HOW: Investigate best placement options for four to five “Grace Street Historic Commercial District” signs. Design and install signs. Utilize Figure 31 (above) as a basis for creating a brief and simple walking tour map of the historic commercial district which highlights building construction dates, architectural types and interesting historical information. Seek partnerships/sponsorships for printing
cost from area hotels and East Grace Street Merchants if no budget funds are available for production. Distribute completed maps to area hotels and East Grace Street Merchants.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Site selection, design, and placement of four to five “East Grace Street Historic Commercial District” signs by 2014. Design, production and distribution of “East Grace Street Historic Commercial District Walking Tour” by 2014.

COST: Sign Cost - $5,000- $10,000. Walking tour brochure production and printing costs - $1,500.

**Objective 8.2:** Collaborate with Valentine History Center to place large historic photographs of East Grace Street in windows of vacant storefronts.

**WHY:** Currently there are as many vacant storefronts along East Grace Street as there are viable businesses. Grace Street was once the 5th Avenue of the South and the Valentine Richmond History Center has hundreds of images of this and other historic time frames of East Grace Street past. Placing large historic images of previous iterations of East Grace Street in vacant storefronts will give those using the corridor something more to look at, draw attention to the corridor, increase the awareness of vacant property and potentially attract new investors.

**WHAT:** Place historic photographs from the archives of the Valentine Richmond History Center in the windows of vacant storefronts or on stands in front of store fronts.

**WHO:** Valentine Richmond History Center; Grace Street Stakeholders - real estate agents, Property Managers, Property Owners; VCU

**HOW:** Access collection of images from East Grace Street from 9th Street to Foushee Street from the archives of the Valentine Richmond History Center (I have copies of all of the photos for private personal use currently). Match addresses of vacant storefronts with addresses of historic photographs and have Valentine Richmond History Center choose best quality photographs. Print large versions of photographs (5’x7’) to fill vacant storefront windows (Valentine Richmond History Center has agreed to allow VCU students to print large scale images for this purpose without special use fee - See Objective 12.1 for partnership opportunities). Approach property owners, managers and realtors of vacant properties and ask if they would allow access to their storefront windows for this project. If they are responsive and would like to participate, set date and time for project set up. If owners are non-responsive consider using a couple feet of city sidewalk space to display these pictures in front of vacant storefronts on wood project boards as part of public art display (See Objective 5.2 for related strategies).

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: At least ten vacant storefronts with large historic photographs in or in front of store windows by 2013.
COST: Printing $500- $1,000; mounting materials $500 - $1,000; Total $1,000-$2,000.

GOAL 9: CONTINUE TO DEVELOP AN AUTHENTIC Identity FOR EAST GRACE STREET

OBJECTIVE 9.1: WORK WITH VENTURE RICHMOND TO DEVELOP A TAGLINE FOR EAST GRACE STREET AS PART OF RVA DOWNTOWN THAT SPEAKS TO RESIDENTS, VISITORS, BUSINESSSES, STUDENTS AND DOWNTOWN EMPLOYEES.

WHY: Continuing to develop the RVA Downtown and Arts and Culture brand for East Grace Street will create a positive image of the corridor that people can connect to and establish the unique identity of the district. A well-developed brand can drive reinvestment by communicating the special characteristics, businesses, and activities in the district to shoppers, investors, potential business and property owners, and visitors.

WHAT: A slogan, image or other element to add to the RVA Downtown brand that paints a picture of East Grace Street. Use this brand on all promotional materials, at special events and any other marketing activities to promote a positive and authentic image of East Grace Street.

WHO: Venture Richmond, East Grace Street businesses, downtown community, VCU, Storefront for Community Design.

HOW: Hold a community meeting facilitated by a group from VCU or Storefront for Community Design to develop a tagline for East Grace Street as part of the larger RVA Downtown and Arts and Cultural District brand, such as the branding of the “Shockoe Design District.” Share the ideas and designs generated from the meeting online and solicit more submissions through the CityWeHave and RVACreates websites. Collaborate with the VCU Graphic Design Center to turn these ideas into a design that can be used on all promotional materials, banners and signage. Encourage all East Grace Street establishments to incorporate this design in their marketing materials. See Figure 30 for some examples.

![Examples of East Grace Street logos using the RVA Creates template.](image-url)
SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Adoption and or use of brand and tagline among East Grace Street businesses by 2014.

COST: $500 - $2,500

Objective 9.2: Continue to enhance the design of the district

WHY: East Grace Street has undergone some well-received streetscape improvements, and these should be continued. To complement these long-term improvements, a plan for short-term design additions (such as public art or temporary spaces) could further distinguish the corridor.

WHAT: A continuation of the streetscape improvements that have begun on the 700 and 600 blocks and a series of meetings to develop a plan for implementing short-term design projects.

WHO: Venture Richmond, Planning and Development Review, VCU, Storefront for Community Design, businesses, residents, property owners, downtown community.

HOW: Work with Venture Richmond, VCU and Storefront for Community Design to host a series of three meetings over a period of three weeks on East Grace Street. Approach a property owner about using a vacant storefront for these meetings and use a local restaurant to provide light refreshments. Advertise the meetings on the CityWeHave website and solicit input through the website for those who cannot attend the meetings. The first meeting should be brainstorming on the unique attributes of East Grace Street and the possibilities for inexpensive and immediate design improvements; the second meeting should report back on the input from the first meeting and develop a plan for creative design elements that can be implemented in the short term (i.e. not infrastructure); at the third meeting working teams should be developed around specific projects so that attendees can help implement their vision.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Three meetings are held on East Grace Street with at least 30 attendees. A plan is developed and at least one project is implemented by 2013.

COST: $1,000 - $2,500

Figure 33: An example of a temporary park in a parking space in Atlanta, GA. Source: Gatech.edu.
GOAL 10: CONTINUE THE CITYWEHAVE WEBSITE

The CityWeHave Website, accessed at http://citywehave.wordpress.com has been one of the most effective living outcomes of this plan as it is malleable to the ever changing realities of East Grace Street. As of March 18, 2012, less than three months since its inception, CityWeHave has logged 1,892 unique views. This virtual space has allowed people to share ideas and access up to date information about each of the corridor’s businesses, partners from across the city, market realities, and historic assets to name a few. Having up to date information available to potential investors, residents, business owners and visitors will increase the likelihood that this corridor continues on the path to harnessing its full potential.

OBJECTIVE 10.1: MAINTAIN AND UPDATE THE CITYWEHAVE WEBSITE AS A VIRTUAL SPACE WHERE IDEAS, RESEARCH, AND CORRIDOR OPPORTUNITIES CAN BE SHARED.

WHY: CityWeHave offers round the clock access to the assets and resources of the East Grace Street Corridor for current and potential investors and is flexible enough to include other parts of downtown if desired. Easily maintained through an intuitive Wordpress Blog format, CityWeHave is a living space for conversation, information and interaction that, if maintained, can assist in the development of organic bottom-up organizational capacity along the East Grace Street Corridor.

WHAT: Maintaining and updating CityWeHave.

WHO: City staff person, intern, VCU partner (See Objective 12.1) and/or a dedicated volunteer from the corridor.

HOW: Log into CityWeHave website and add new content by writing a blog post, updating the business listings, promoting a new business, sharing news stories, adding assets, sharing new research and/or any other information pertinent to the East Grace Street and Downtown community.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: 1-5 hours per week spent promoting East Grace Street through this platform. Maintaining a level of at least 500 views per month and increasing that by 100 views each month will show that online engagement is successful.

COST: $0 - $500/month. The $500 figure assumes a City staff person making $25/hr would spend 5 hours per week on this objective.
GOAL 11: CONNECT EAST GRACE STREET MORE FULLY TO THE DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

OBJECTIVE 11.1: ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES TO JOIN, ATTEND AND TAKE LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

WHY: Business owners from the East Grace Street Corridor helped to found the Downtown Neighborhood Association and have been involved in three previous iterations of merchant and/or neighborhood associations over the past three decades. Involvement by some Grace Street merchants and residents in the Downtown Neighborhood Association exists but is not currently at a level that will bring needed focus to the Grace Street Corridor as a place to host events, hold networking meetings, or promote in general. Having more involvement from Grace Street merchants, residents and property owners in the Downtown Neighborhood Association only serves to benefit the corridor.

WHAT: Increase the involvement of East Grace Street merchants, property owners and residents in the activities of the Downtown Neighborhood Association.

WHO: The Downtown Neighborhood Association; East Grace Street merchants, property owners and residents.

HOW: The Downtown Neighborhood Association should reach out to the business listed on the CityWeHave Website and invite them to join. East Grace Street merchants and residents already involved in the Downtown Neighborhood Association should take the lead in reaching out to their neighbors and asking for their involvement.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: Ten new East Grace Street members of the Downtown Neighborhood Association by 2013, twenty by 2014.

COST: Membership Fee for joining the Downtown Neighborhood Association - $50

GOAL 12: FOSTER A CONTINUED PARTNERSHIP WITH VCU GRADUATE DEPARTMENTS

Graduate school programs at VCU are known for their applied nature. By understanding, harnessing and shaping the reality (and future) of actual issues and opportunities facing the City of Richmond value is added to the educational experience for students and faculty.

The City of Richmond, Department of Planning and Development Review (and other departments), can benefit from quality exploration of issues and opportunities that shifting politics or budgets may not allow by accessing this free resource.

A collaborative effort between VCU and the Department of Planning and Development Review could be facilitated by the VCU Sustainable Communities Institute whose mission is to address social, physical, environmental, and economic issues of sustainability through planning, research and community engagement. This interdisciplinary institute could facilitate and coordinate efforts of continued
exploration for both VCU and the City of Richmond in a productive and collaborative manner. This partnership would help the continued stability and progress of East Grace Street while organic leadership from the corridor itself continues to emerge and organize.

The East Grace Street Corridor is an ideal interdisciplinary classroom because it is a microcosm of the many complex issues and opportunities facing Downtown Richmond and urban revitalization in general. East Grace Street also connects the Monroe Park and MCV campus through the heart of downtown Richmond and a majority of the growth in residential population along the corridor is in the 20-24 age range. Both the city and the university have a stake in the continued revitalization of this corridor.

**Objective 12.1:** Nourish a lasting partnership between the Department of Planning and Development Review and VCU for further work along the East Grace Street Corridor

**Why:** Both the City of Richmond and VCU have a stake in the continued revitalization of the East Grace Street Corridor and each brings a different set of tools, political realities, resources and ideas to the table that can be mutually beneficial if continued collaboration is established.

**What:** Continued partnership in the form of semester-long studio projects, on the ground research and data collection, prescriptive outcomes and policy recommendations formed from requests initiated by the Department of Planning and Development Review.

**Who:** Department of Planning and Development Review; VCU Sustainable Communities Institute. For examples and potential see Table 1 below.

**How:** Develop working relationship with VCU Sustainable Communities Institute and department chairs.

**Success looks like:** A mutually beneficial working relationship between VCU and the Department of Planning and Development Review.

**Cost:** Varies by VCU Graduate Department - Usually free.

Figure 34: VCU students work on a real-world project. *Source: Vcu.edu.*
Table 1: Guide to Potential VCU Partners, Projects and Contacts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VCU GRADUATE DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>POTENTIAL COLLABORATION</th>
<th>COMMUNITY PARTNERS</th>
<th>BENEFITS TO EAST GRACE STREET AND DOWNTOWN</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| VCU Sustainable Communities Institute | • Host of continued collaborative process  
• Resource for numerous goals  
*Goals 4, 5, 9, 11 & 12* | Storefront for Community Design; Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) | Continued presence of activity and research to enhance perception, identity, market, and human capital |
| Urban and Regional Planning | • Studio or Public Participation project to develop and enhance community connections  
• Zoning, permitting, and code enforcement assessments  
• GIS analysis projects  
*Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 & 12* | DECD; City Bicycle Pedestrian and Trails Coordinator; Venture Richmond | • Detailed credible research and planning free of charge  
• Continued development and updating of data  
• Ability to pursue plans that may seem politically or budget-airly infeasible |
| Social Work | • Realistic homelessness assessment  
• Assistance in developing authentic identity  
*Goals 5 (5.1) & 9* | Churches; Property Owners/managers; Merchants; Residents; Developers; Homeward; Storefront for Community Design; Caritas | Realistically address homelessness through thorough study, open conversation and dialogue with all parties involved |
| School of Business | • Continued market research  
• Real estate and urban land development initiatives  
• Marketing objectives/planning for corridor  
*Goals 1, 2, 3 (3.1) & 9 (9.1)* | Venture Richmond; Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce; Richmond Retail Merchants Association; Merchants; Residents; Property Owners; Realtors; Developers; Investors; DECD | • Small business development  
• Accounting, other services made available for small businesses  
• Development of alternative financial tools for small businesses |
| Criminal Justice | • Assessment and strategies to address specific issues  
• Criminal Justice politics and planning course  
*Goals 3 (3.2) & 5 (5.1)* | City of Richmond Police Department (RPD); Corridor Churches; Property Owners/managers | Realistic assessment of crime in the downtown area, the impact of various factors on public safety/development of strategies to improve safety |
| VCU Arts | • Architecture and design development  
• Art for vacant storefronts/public art  
• Collaboration with CenterStage  
• Growth of artist live/work space  
*Goals 3 (3.1), 6, 7, 8 (8.2) & 9* | Richmond CenterStage; National Theatre; Property Owners; Realtors; Merchants; DECD | • Continue to build Downtown as a center of arts and culture  
• Strengthen networks with arts students/faculty for continued growth of arts in Richmond |
<table>
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<th>BENEFITS TO EAST GRACE STREET AND DOWNTOWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Gender, Sexuality & Women’s Studies**  
Janet Hutchinson  
804-828-8041  
jhutch@vcu.edu | • Exploration of history of Richmond’s LGBT community  
• Inclusiveness initiatives  
*Goals 7, 8 & 9* | Office of Minority Business Development; DECD; Residents; Merchants; Barcode; Godfrey’s; Chez Foushee | Provide research the impact of the LGBT community in Richmond and strategies on how to promote inclusivity |
| **History**  
Timothy Thuber  
804-828-4760  
ththuber@vcu.edu | • Fully flesh out unique history  
• Develop meaningful ways to highlight historic sites  
• Development of Historic Walking Tour  
• Assistance in avoiding “false historicism”  
*Goals 7, 8 & 9* | National Park Service; Valentine Richmond History Center; Historic Richmond Foundation; Historic Churches; Properties on National Historic Register | • Detailed exploration of the rich history in the downtown area to continue to build the area as an attraction for historians and tourists  
• Build Richmond as a center of historical resources, information and experiences |
| **Environmental Studies**  
Gregory Garman  
804-828-7202  
gcgarma@vcu.edu | • Development and deployment of “green” initiatives along corridor  
• Research and planning for storm water and air quality initiatives  
*Goal 4* | Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trails Coordinator; Parking Services; Clean and Safe; Property Owners; Merchants; Residents | Detailed research and inventories that document the benefits of RVAGreen initiatives and help downtown move forward as a sustainable City |
| **Mass Communications – Public Relations**  
Yan Jin  
804-827-3764  
yjin@vcu.edu | • Image, messaging, branding, outreach assistance  
*Goals 6, 8, 9 & 10* | Media General; Richmond Free Press; Richmond Times Dispatch; Downtown Neighborhood Association; Jackson Ward Neighborhood Association | • World class marketing of the area  
• Create strong networks with creative professionals to build downtown as a center of arts and business |
| **Public Safety**  
Robyn Lacks  
804-828-2759  
rdlacks@vcu.edu | • Protocols, measures and research in creative techniques and applications of safety initiatives  
*Goals 5 (5.1) & 9 (9.2)* | RPD; Merchants; Residents; Property Managers; Downtown Neighborhood Association; Jackson Ward Neighborhood Association | • Evaluation of policies and strategies in improving public safety  
• Development/monitoring of community-based public safety initiatives |
CONCLUSION

There is great potential for the East Grace Street corridor to once again be a center of culture, commerce and community. After decades of decline, business and activity is starting to return to East Grace Street due in no small part to the tremendous efforts of many public and private organizations and individuals. If these steps are followed, the rich assets of East Grace Street can form a sustained strategy for enhancing this historic corridor, building the city we want by using the city we have.

Table 2: Summary timetable of all objectives.

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<td>Connect businesses to development opportunities</td>
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<td>Improve financial tools available</td>
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<td>Recruit retail businesses</td>
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<td>Establish a Vacant Property Re-use Coordinator</td>
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<td>Support development of an investor group</td>
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<td>Use code enforcement to improve vacant spaces</td>
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<td>Recruit small professional businesses</td>
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<td>Explore range of housing options</td>
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<td>Support arts, culture and entertainment</td>
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<th>Amending the Built Environment</th>
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<td>Establish corridor as primary bike route</td>
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<td>Install electric vehicle charging stations</td>
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<td>Establish parking inventory system</td>
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<td>Realistically address homelessness programs</td>
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<td>Zoning/code enforcement to improve environment</td>
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<td>Develop promotional strategy to connect businesses</td>
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<td>Acknowledge impact of LGBT businesses</td>
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<td>Promote historic corridor designation</td>
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<td>Place historic photos in vacant storefronts</td>
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<td>Continue branding efforts</td>
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<td>Plan short term design improvements</td>
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<td>Maintain CityWeHave website</td>
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<td>Encourage membership in DNA</td>
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<td>Foster a continued partnership with VCU</td>
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Published Sources


Unpublished Sources
