Western Avenue

Section 5.2

Vision for Western Avenue: Connecting Selby to University

As part of the Western Park Neighborhood Assessment, the Selby Avenue Community Development Corporation, Public Art Saint Paul, and Assembly of Architects sponsored a Western Avenue Visioning Charette in November, 2003.

This report gathers the perceptions and ideas of the people who live and work on and near Western Avenue. They envision a street that connects people to one another and the places of their everyday lives; a street that is safe, green, and amenable. They envision a street that evinces imagination and conveys positive messages about the residents; a street that builds community.

Western Avenue: A Vital Central City Connector

Western Avenue in Saint Paul is a vital north/south connector that extends from Summit Avenue to Maryland in the center of Saint Paul. A Municipal State Aid Route, it is paved with four lanes of traffic. Repairs were made in 1990 between Selby and I-94. North of the freeway, no improvements have been made since a pavement repair project of the early 1980's. The sidewalks are narrow with a thin strip of boulevard. The street is lit with bent-straw fixtures and lined with an unorganized pattern of tilting telephone poles and signs.

Western Avenue at I-94 looking north

Western from Selby to University: Bridging the Great Divide

For the Western Park Neighborhood, the stretch between University and Selby is the link over the great divide of I-94 to the neighborhood's sources of civic power: the Summit University Planning Council and Selby Avenue Community Development Corporation. For those on both sides of the freeway, it is the road to University and Selby Avenue businesses.

Located within neighborhoods north and south of I-94, Western Avenue is the pathway of everyday life, connecting children to parks, play areas, and schools. It leads to community and art centers such as the College of Visual Arts, YWCA, BoyScouts of America, Martin Luther King Center, and Ober Recreation Center. It fronts and serves housing developments such as Lonnie Adkins Homes, Hanover Townhomes, Ravoux Housing, Central Village, Liberty Plaza and the pending Aberdeen Condominiums. Religious institutions such as Mt. Olivet Baptist Church and Christ Household of Faith are on or adjacent to Western.

Western Avenue at Selby

From Marshall looking north, there is a grand roller coaster ride of a view over the treetops extending far into the distance. At St. Anthony looking south, there is a steep rise up the hill toward Selby.

(right) Mai Village at Western and University

Western Avenue toward I-94

Western at Aurora looking south

The context and experience of Western Avenue

The neighborhood along the Western Avenue spine contains new commercial developments and a large, increasingly diverse residential population with many kids.

There is a high population of elderly and people with disabilities in this area and wheelchair accessibility is essential in making the area functional and welcoming.

At either end of Western Avenue are major commercial corridors (University and Selby) that are metropolitan area destinations).

On either side of I-94, St. Anthony and Concordia service the freeway and are used by those entering and exiting at Marion. Western is used as the thoroughfare to these service roads from both north and south. This traffic is heavy and fast, particularly around rush hours.

Western is very very dangerous to cross, particularly for children.

The posted limit of 30 is largely ignored. The fact that it is a 4-lane street encourages speeding.

There are narrow sidewalks along Western and no directions to places within the neighborhood.

Twin Cities Housing Development Corporation is building a new community center in Liberty Plaza, with completion scheduled for 2004. (What are implications for pedestrian safety and for traffic on Western?)

There are bus stops/shelters on Western at Selby, Marshall and University

A new condominium development is underway at Marshall and Western. (Will it bring more kids and traffic?)

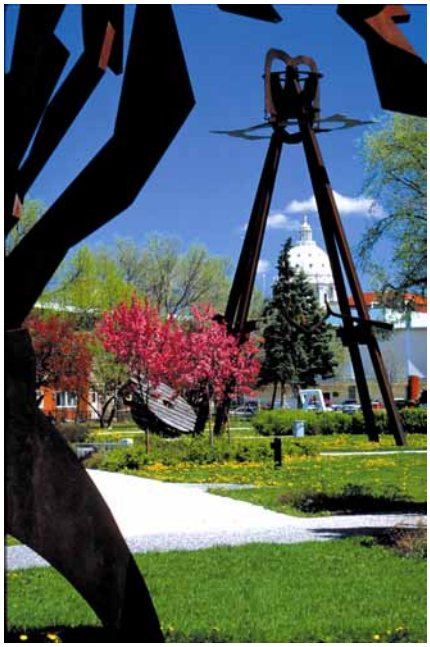
(right) Western Avenue at Aurora Avenue looking north to University Avenue

Liberty Plaza site

Development site, Western Avenue at Marshall Avenue looking south

Proposed Streetscape Improvements

- Western Avenue should be designed as a safe East/West crossing
- Connection along Western from Selby to University should be enhanced for pedestrian use. Western Avenue should function as something other than a speedway to the freeway.



Western Sculpture Park

Western at Central Village Yards

Important Sites

Improve Western Avenue's connection to neighborhood destinations

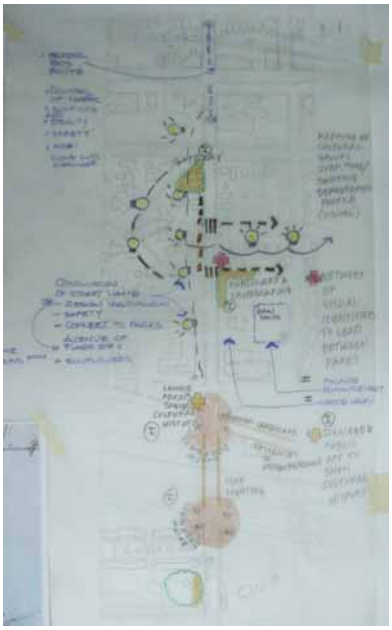
Many businesses, institutions and gathering places are destinations for neighborhood residents and visitors. Currently there is no clear recognition of their existence or how to find them. They include:

- Western Sculpture Park
- Central Village
- Central Village Park
- Ober Recreation Center
- Ober Playing Field (is this a community field? What is best use of this place?)
- Asian Market
- Churches in area: such as Mount Olivet, St. James, Hmong Lutheran
- Old Home (an historic building/institution)
- University Avenue businesses (Mai Village et al)
- Selby Avenue businesses (WA Frost et al)
- Schools: Rondo Education Center
- Old Rondo Avenue
- Blair Arcade
- Christ Household of Faith
- Ravoux high-rise
- Apartments/complexes: Liberty Plaza, Lonnie Adkins, Fuller, Capital, Hanover et al
- College of Visual Arts

Adkins Housing complex

Ober Recreation Center

Ravoux Housing complex with Western Sculpture Park in foreground

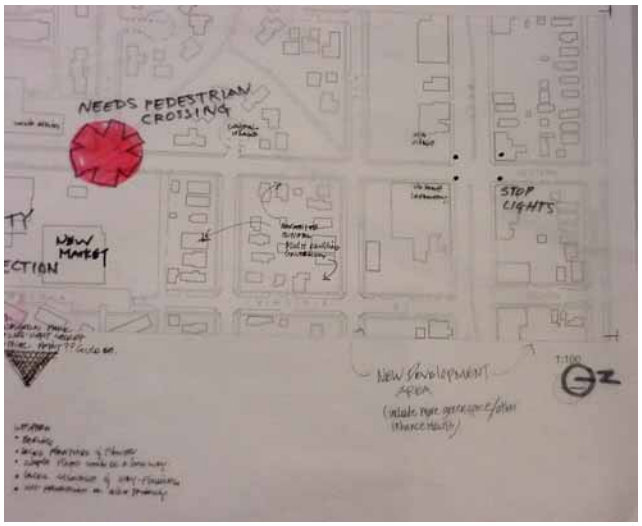


Development planning to include more greenspace and pedestrian crosswalk at Central Village

The Vision for Western Avenue: A Safe, Green and Amenable Pathway

The design and condition of Western Avenue make a difference in the quality of life for residents and businesses of the surrounding community. It can facilitate or thwart connection, it can promote or jeopardize public safety, it can manifest or contradict a positive community identity.

The vision for Western Avenue can be realized through public improvements to the street, landscape enhancements, way-finding and signage, and planning for use and maintenance.



Development ideas along the school bus route include a network of visual identifiers to lead between parks and signage for public art to show cultural history

Existing sidewalk

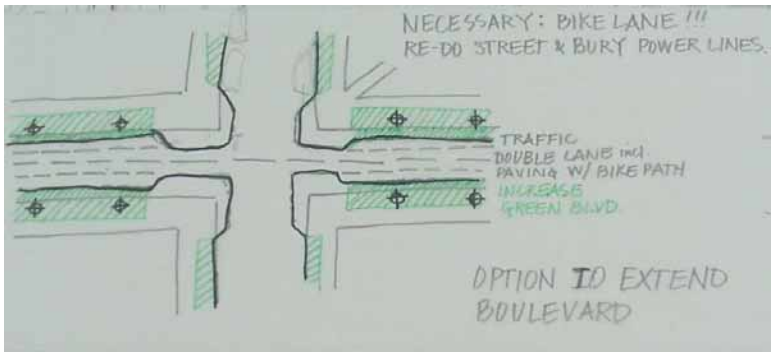
Existing sidewalk at Liberty

Proposed Public Improvements

Push back the danger zone
Work with a broad streetscape design pallet

The context of Western Avenue contains the capacity for basic yet creative improvements to increase public safety and pedestrian amenity.

- Reclaim space and promote safety for pedestrians by widening sidewalks (and narrowing/reducing traffic lanes).
- Slow traffic with bump-outs, while also considering issues of street maintenance and commercial deliveries
- Create a bike lane to connect with those already in place on Como and Summit—this lane could be a bump-out
- Create cross walks at critical points
- Create new curb cuts and drainage
- Repair the sidewalk!!
- Create a way-finding system using the universal language of plants to direct people to Western Park (which is a well kept secret) and other important areas of the neighborhood.
- Consider set-back standards on University Avenue. The new Mai Village is built right up to the sidewalk, creating a potential pedestrian safety issue there (and Old Home as well). What can be done to make it safe?



(left) Bicycle lanes are a necessity along Western Avenue, as well as the option to extend the boulevard to increase greenspace

Street Clutter

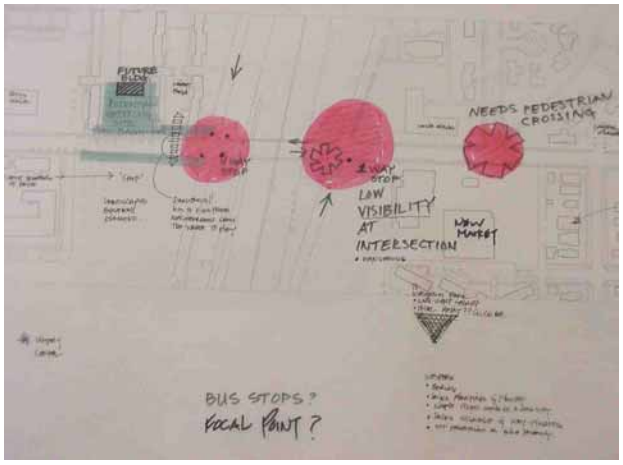
Alleyway behind Ober

Proposed Landscape Enhancements

Consider patterns of pedestrian use along and crossing Western

Enhance the safety & beauty of school bus routes for neighborhood children

- Create areas of interest, with landscape and amenities
- Increase green boulevard and add bike lane
- Install decorative lights at intersections and special pedestrian lighting along the way. Western is an arterial street and has a required light level. Consider a combination light fixture. Change character of the space by adding a lower level zone of light for pedestrians
- Characterize the I-94 Bridge abutments as gateways (instead of dividers) to Selby and University and the neighborhoods that surround them. Build on the bridge structure that is already there to support plantings and art.
- Use color and art the length of the Avenue
- Bury power lines when streets are redone

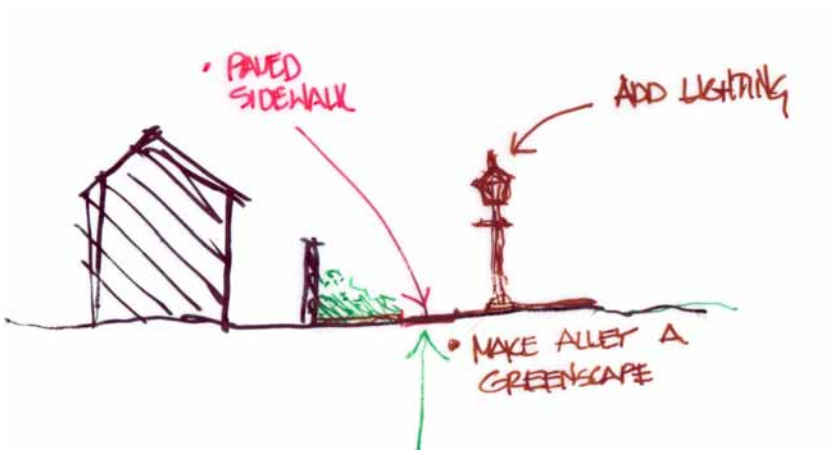


Dangerous intersections with low visibility along Western need pedestrian crossings

Proposed Landscape Enhancements (continued)

Asia Market at 400 Western

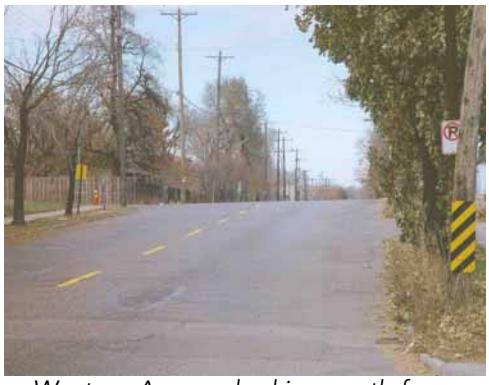
- Screen with green (at sites such as at the future Asian Market parking lot)
- Plant petunias and flower beds in the boulevard. Engage volunteers in creating a garden along length of Western. Focus on the ground rather than hanging baskets. This path of garden green would be visible from Como. Tie this in with the current "Blooming Boulevards" initiative. Work with neighborhood master gardeners
- Restore the alley behind the Ober Center as a connection that is GREEN AND WELL LIT. It is currently denoted as a mixed vehicular/ pedestrian space that attracts trash and problems.
- Create art fences at private properties
- Leverage private property improvements to also improve the experience of the street. Dan Vang's new Asian Market could set a model of partnership with public improvements and neighborhood initiatives
- Get the City to trim trees



Way Finding and Signage

Convey positive neighborhood identity and character and locate destinations

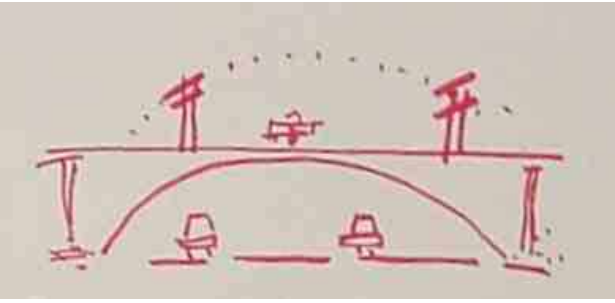
Existing Signage at Western and Central looking south



Western Avenue looking south from St. Anthony near Ober Center

- Denote places and spaces along the length of Western through use of plantings, lighting, amenities and signage
- Create pathways to parks. Use some clue for kids to follow that is *Playful*. References to the fact that Western Park was the terminus of the Ox Cart Trail may appeal to kids.
- Develop signage that:
  - Ties in with enhanced street lights that would provide greater sense of intimacy and pedestrian amenity.
  - Acknowledges that the Fuller Aurora neighborhood is different from the Selby neighborhood—it does not have Selby's historic character and is perhaps a little more open to forward-looking and diverse images, forms and colors. Signage should be consistent with the character of sub-neighborhoods from Summit to University
  - Tells social/cultural history of the neighborhoods
  - Directs people to destinations: Ober Center; Western Park; Church; Selby, etc.
  - Considers the area's international character
  - Considers the presence of the City's sculpture park and of residents who are artists
  - Introduces banners with themes related to flowers, art and names of sub-neighborhoods
- Use color to identify/distinguish sub-neighborhoods: Festive, life colors, not trendy but timeless, consider ethnic palette. Green letter (color to see at night) / White; Orange and Yellow look into the Western sunset;

(below) Proposed bridge amenities



Planning for Use and Maintenance

Coordinated planning for use and maintenance is essential to realize of the vision for Western Avenue.

- Establish a Task Force to oversee planning for and development of streetscape improvements
- Engage the City in proper maintenance of the street and sidewalks
- Provide trash receptacles and a process for their on-going maintenance
- Emphasize the Western streetscape in the current District 8 Weed and Seed initiative
- Engage the community in annual clean up and planting
- Consider roles and responsibilities in the maintenance of street plantings, amenities, signs/banners/artworks
- Involve District 8, the Selby Avenue Community Development Corporation, Metro Transit, Ramsey Hill Association, and University United in Western Avenue improvements and on-going streetscape program