



Michigan Avenue



Parcel Inventory

Address	Type	Condition	Comments	Recommendations
1140 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	privately owned, desire path	
1141/1145 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	City of Buffalo, aligns vacant 160/162 Best	
1144 Michigan	Commercial	Fair	auto repair shop	
1148 Michigan	Commercial	Fair	Don Hole Material Handling	
1149 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	City of Buffalo, aligns vacant 1145 Michigan	potential yard for 1157
1152 Michigan	VACANT	Poor	City of Buffalo	
1157 Michigan	Double	Fair	character house	
1164 Michigan	VACANT	Poor	privately owned	
1165 Michigan	VACANT	Good	privately owned	
1167 Michigan	Double	Fair		
1170 Michigan	Double	Good		
1171 Michigan	Institutional	Excellent	Homespace Corporation, under construction	
1172 Michigan	Double	Poor/Fair		
1174 Michigan	Double	Good		
1176 Michigan	VACANT	Good	privately owned yard for 1174	
1178 Michigan	Mixed use	Fair	ABANDONED, brick 2-story, 2 storefront	preservation of retail opportunity essential
1188 Michigan	Mixed-use	Fair	ABANDONED, converted storefront	preservation of retail opportunity essential
1199 Michigan	VACANT	Fair/Good	privately owned	
1200/1202/1206 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	City of Buffalo	
1201/1207 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	City of Buffalo	
1208 Michigan	Single	Poor	some character present	
1210/1212 Michigan	VACANT	Fair/Good	City of Buffalo	potential yard for 1214
1213/1215/1217 Michigan	Church	Good	St James' House of Prayer, including two vacant lots	
1214 Michigan	Single	Good		mixed use infill
1218 Michigan	Single	Fair		
1220 Michigan	Single	Good		
1232 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	privately owned	
1233 Michigan	Retail	Good	Young's Texas Red Hats	
1236 Michigan	Single	Poor/Fair		
1237 Michigan	Double	Fair	gas cut off	possible rehab
1238 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	privately owned	
1239 Michigan	Single	Good		
1241 Michigan	Double	Fair		
1242 Michigan	Single	Fair		
1244 Michigan	Double	Fair/Good	unusual two-door double	
1243 Michigan	Single	Good/Excellent	new suburban style, deep setback	
1249 Michigan	VACANT	Good	City of Buffalo	residential infill
1255 Michigan	Single	Good/Excellent	new suburban style, deep setback	



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Address	Type	Condition	Comments	Recommendations
1260 Michigan	VACANT	Good	privately owned	
1261 Michigan	Single	Good	new, wide lot	
1264 Michigan	Single	Excellent	design appropriate, setbacks and lot widths not	
1268 Michigan	Single	Excellent	design appropriate, setbacks and lot widths not	
1269 Michigan	Double	Poor/Fair	ABANDONED	demolition
1273/1275 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	City of Buffalo	
1274 Michigan	Single	Excellent	design appropriate, setbacks and lot widths not	
1279 Michigan	Double	Poor/Fair		demolition
1280 Michigan	VACANT	Good	owned by 1284	
1283 Michigan	Single	Excellent	design appropriate, setbacks and lot widths not	
1284 Michigan	Single	Good		
1288 Michigan	Single	Poor/Fair	ABANDONED, key part of remaining fabric	housing rehab
1292 Michigan	Single	Poor/Fair	ABANDONED, key part of remaining fabric	housing rehab
1296 Michigan	Single	Good		
1297 Michigan	Single	Good	suburban	
1298 Michigan	Single	Good	may be same developer as Coe Pl	
1302 Michigan	Single	Fair/Good	character structure	
1304 Michigan	Double	Fair	maintains lot north of prop?	
1305 Michigan	Single	Fair	ABANDONED, salvageable	housing rehab
1307 Michigan	Single	Good/Excellent	single-story suburban	
1308 Michigan	VACANT	Poor	privately owned, aligns vacant 1312	
1312 Michigan	VACANT	Poor	City of Buffalo	residential infill
1314 Michigan	Double	Good		
1317 Michigan	Single	Good/Excellent	single-story suburban	
1319 Michigan	Single	Good/Excellent	new suburban	
1325 Michigan	Mixed use	Fair	brick Italianate commercial structure	renovation crucial
1331 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	privately owned, aligns vacant 1335	
1335 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	privately owned, aligns vacant 108 Riley	
1363 Michigan	VACANT	Good	privately owned	
1364 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	City of Buffalo	potential yard for 1366
1365 Michigan	Single	Poor		demolish for new housing
1366 Michigan	Single	Fair/Good		
1367 Michigan	Single	Good	new suburban	
1368 Michigan	VACANT	Fair	City of Buffalo	
1370 Michigan	Single	Fair/Good		
1372 Michigan	Single	Fair/Good		
1373 Michigan	Single	Good/Excellent	new suburban	
1375/1377 Michigan	VACANT	Good	privately owned	

Michigan Avenue

Observations, Conditions, Opportunities

Michigan Avenue is like so many mixed-use corridors in the East Side, connected to struggling but viable residential areas but itself a monument to a deluge of suburban sprawl and planned shrinkage, with its legacy of abandoned lots where a cohesive built fabric has been reduced to rubble. Perhaps more affected by them than any other street in Midtown, Michigan Avenue is overwhelmed by vacant parcels, each once occupied with thriving neighborhood stores or viable residential properties. In some instances, entire blocks, like the expanse of Michigan between Riley and Laurel, have not a single building left on them.

Now dubbed Harriet Tubman Way to recognize the city's importance as a key stop on the Underground Railroad, Michigan Avenue falls short on reflecting the importance of its contribution to history, and in only a few, incredibly vital instances are opportunities remaining for adaptive reuse projects capable of elevating the prospects of the neighborhood. Still a key corridor for automobile traffic, also a secondary corridor for bus traffic represented by the #111 line, Michigan is a meeting point for Midtown, its one true prospect in pulling investment further inward from Main Street and the West Side. Its importance is paramount.

Michigan Avenue visually signifies a 75-year process of decline precipitated by the scattering of its German residents beginning in the 1920s, and more dramatically in the 1960s. Michigan is not only a product of white, predominantly German flight, now a distant memory, but African American flight as well. Residents document a more recent abandonment of residences that had been the homes of middle class black families in some cases for fifty years or more, many leaving in increasing stages to

neighborhoods more distant from downtown. The upper Michigan Avenue corridor had been a choice neighborhood of relocation for middle class, often well-established African American families in the 1950s and 60s, in many cases moving from the city's Ellicott District following its demolition in the 1960s. Michigan Avenue was advantaged by the presence of dedicated homeowners and committed tenants who kept the street going for many years. Only in the early 1990s did Michigan Avenue begin to seriously unravel.

For reasons similar to other areas of the city, abandonment has been accelerated in commercial corridors where neighborhood stores have been unable to compete, have gone out of business, and have had their former buildings demolished, contributing to a climate of disinvestment that has affected every nearby property. The image of decline on Michigan Avenue thus speaks more to the vulnerability of neighborhood retail than to the general health of Midtown's residential streets, many of which display remarkable resilience. Michigan Avenue, with its short blocks and resultant proximity to residents along Midtown's sidestreets, represents the possibility of planting new amenities that can invigorate the residential base. It is a vital sinew in the organism of the neighborhood.

In its current state, however, Michigan Avenue can only be a visage of things to come for areas nearby. The worst case scenario is that it continue to become a venue for suburban tract housing; the best is that it is reclaimed for development consistent with the block's historic purpose of bringing people together in the sphere of public life. Only an urban design formula embracing mixed uses and compact, intimate development can resurrect Michigan Avenue as a meeting place.

In only a superficial way, recent rebuilding efforts on Michigan Avenue have improved the street's appearance, if nothing else.



However ephemeral these improvements may be, the suburban-style residential development built on Michigan since the early-1990s have given the street a fresher appearance than some other commercial corridors of the East Side. The trend speaks more to the convenience of building on large lots than it does a sensible planning policy that reinforces densities and a walkable scale.

Certainly, some of the housing blocks represent praiseworthy attempts at following the predominant design of historic homes in Midtown -- 1254, 1268 and 1274 Michigan are examples -- but they still fall short on so many other things. As is plainly obvious by the addresses of the three aforementioned houses, they are separated from each other by great distances, located on huge lots that could have held as many as ten houses, not merely three. The surrender of the urban fabric to new, sometimes well designed, houses on massive yards signifies a policy that has basically given up hope on the neighborhood's resurrection as an urban place. It confirms an unstated belief, despite the nearby existence of a major transit corridor, that Midtown cannot sustain urban densities and thus urban vitalities and liveliness. 1254, 1268 and 1274 are epitaphs, not merely addresses, signifying the assisted suicide of the old urban fabric.

This is not to say that all the urban fabric of Michigan Avenue has disappeared or been replaced. Vital remnants of Michigan Avenue's historic streetscape remain, some in very good states of upkeep but mostly in a state of jeopardy, its future existence uncertain. Two key groupings of commercial structures represent the finest opportunities for neighborhood retail creation in all of Midtown. Both are currently vacant and at risk for demolition. 1178 Michigan contains two storefronts in a solid brick masonry structure, ostensibly vacant though under the stewardship of the Beulah Church and Home of Christ's Saints. 1188 Michigan, next door, is particularly interesting as an innovation in the urban environment, a converted house with a very narrow attached

retail space, perhaps no more than seven feet wide, perfect for a beauty salon or microenterprise. The two buildings hold together a corner (with Dodge) in a troubled part of Midtown, their survival paramount in efforts not only to shore up these areas but to provide venues for local entrepreneurship in low-rent spaces. The other grouping at 1325 Michigan, on the corner with Riley, is a fabulous Italianate commercial structure with the potential to hold as many as three ground-floor businesses in addition to office or residential spaces above. 1325 has been abandoned for a decade or more, as residents report that one of the interior brick walls is collapsing. The building, however, is hardly unsalvageable. As a structure of probably 1880s vintage, it is certainly as important historically as it is important for potential entrepreneurship and community interaction. It also concludes a vital stretch of Riley Street from Main Street, a star line-up that includes St. Vincent's Convent, the Packard Building, 65 Riley and a number of character houses. Its potential as a magnet, drawing pedestrian traffic further inward, is considerable.

There is one instance between Best and East Utica streets that provides evidence of the ability of homegrown businesses to sprout and thrive on such an undervalued street: Young's Texas Red Hots on 1233 Michigan. In a simple cinder-block structure, it represents how small, inexpensively built retail spaces can create lasting opportunities for entrepreneurship. Buildings like these are laboratories for experimenting with new business ideas, allowing people with a dollar and a dream the opportunity to start out in an inexpensive space. If more of these structures could be built in places like Midtown, with their low capitalization costs and affordable rents, neighborhoods would have an enhanced ability to foster vibrant local economies. In fact, it is questionable whether small business growth is even possible in cities without cheap incubation spaces like these.

The ability of enterprises like Young's Texas Red Hots to thrive, however, is still hampered by a policy that discourages residential

densities and thus would reduce the number of potential customers that are within short enough walking distance to patronize the establishment. A long list of planning studies from around the country have documented that most people, even under the most ideal circumstances, are rarely willing to walk more than 800 feet to visit a corner store on a regular basis. If one does the math, this would add up to an extremely small number of potential customers where suburban land use formulas continue. The possibility of having more walkable retail businesses in Midtown would vanish entirely if that does in fact occur, especially in an area where car ownership is not terribly prevalent. Reclaiming Michigan Avenue as an urban, not a suburban, milieu will strengthen its ability to support neighborhood retail enterprises such as Young's Texas Red Hots, and would allow a few more like them to be established as well.

The remaining residential blocks of Michigan Avenue's historic environment include some residences of very good character and distinction. Probably the best of all of these is the block between Eaton and Riley, particularly on the west side of the street where a complete row of Queen Anne houses of mixed-upkeep remains. These houses, in particular, are interesting because they may actually be the only other houses in Buffalo developed by George Chadeayne, whose houses on Coe Place are singular throughout the city. (A few of the homes around the corner on Riley are also part of this collection.) Houses in this stretch like 1292 Michigan, which has an Order to Vacate Notice located on its front door, are vital elements of an intriguing urbanscape. Allowing even one of them to be sacrificed for demolition will undermine the value of the block as a unified whole.

Recommendations, Strategies, Suggested Improvements

Stabilize historic housing stock

The double and single family homes of Michigan Avenue between Best and East Utica streets represent a body of residential structures of mixed upkeep whose restoration could rescue this vital stretch from creeping suburbanization. Despite what seems to have been an aggressive housing construction effort since the early 1990s, more than half of the houses on the block are still part of the original built landscape. It would be unwise, except in only a few rare circumstances, to allow any more of them to be demolished. Especially along those special stretches, such as between Eaton and Riley streets, where almost a complete streetwall is preserved, it will be vital to provide:

- Modest public assistance to encourage renovation efforts and prove to residents the city's commitment to protect the original neighborhood
- Home improvement loans and grants to stabilize key blocks and establish a framework for the rehabilitation of nearby side streets

Repair damaged streetscape

The sidewalk conditions of Michigan Avenue are a study in contrasts. In front of new suburban homes, perfectly maintained sidewalks lead into completely unwalkable, virtually nonexistent sidewalks fronting abandoned lots. Rendering the perfectly maintained sidewalks useless, merely a form of decor for the lawns of new tract houses, this dramatic ebb and flow in sidewalk upkeep ignores their fundamental purpose of allowing pedestrian traffic to flow smoothly down an entire street. On Michigan Avenue the sidewalk has become merely a private amenity, making new houses look neat and clean compared to their neighbors, and they have lost their public, shared quality. The sidewalks must be:

- Repaired, their function resurrected as a conduit for pedestrian traffic, not mere lawn beautification

Commit to new planting initiative

Michigan Avenue's green infrastructure is sorely lacking. Providing the enclosure of a tree canopy will be crucial not only in calming traffic and providing beauty, but to mitigate against the visual impact of the wide expanse of vacant lots on the street. As long as the vacant lot problem persists for many more years, a likely scenario, the planting initiative would serve short-term, interim needs in addition to the more obvious long-term ones. From Best to East Utica streets:

- At least 59 new plantings will be required
- A consistent row of trees of the same species should be incorporated to be more visually appealing and orderly since Michigan Avenue is important as an automotive corridor

Purchase and renovate key commercial structures for new small business development

Michigan Avenue is most important as a place for bringing people in the neighborhood together in everyday activities, like visiting the corner grocery, that strengthen the spirit of the neighborhood as a distinctive and worthwhile place. Walkable, locally owned stores do more than anything else in establishing a neighborhood's sense of place and identity. On Michigan Avenue, three structures represent the possibility of reestablishing a portion of the former collection of retail businesses that once helped define the spirit of this community. 1325 Michigan is the most important of the three, existing along a key pedestrian corridor with Riley. It was long the home of Joseph Denzel's Tavern, a prime watering hole of the old German neighborhood. 1184 and 1188 are less architecturally distinctive but equally important for anchoring new businesses on the other portion of Michigan to the south. Both groupings of commercial structures are not likely to be revitalized without immediate, hands-on

involvement from the City. This plan urges the City's redevelopment agencies to consider:

- A direct purchase and renovation of the structures to foster small business growth on Michigan Avenue, following a model that was successful in the city's Theatre District
- Seeking responsible private investors for these properties, most long abandoned, so that the City is not the only hope for these buildings' revitalization

Install comfortable benches at bus stops

As part of a policy that encourages transit use as well as enhances the streetscape:

- Bus stops at the corners of Michigan Avenue with East Utica, Riley and Best streets should be complemented with comfortable, attractive benches.

Plant key landscape improvements along vacant corner lots

What is most noticeable along the many vacant lots of Michigan Avenue is how some have become de facto public spaces already, serving as informal pedestrian passageways from streets leading onto Michigan Avenue. These lots, many City owned, can become:

- Formalized pedestrian linkages via a demonstration on a City-owned corner lot, like 1200 Michigan at the intersection with Dodge, where an existing desire path can be paved with decorative stonework and surrounded by a few basic tree plantings
- A vital corner reclaimed in conjunction with a renewal effort at the retail properties of 1184 and 1188 Michigan