

A photograph of a row of historic houses in a winter setting. The houses are covered in snow, and the ground is also covered in snow. The sky is blue with some clouds. The houses have various architectural styles, including gabled roofs and brickwork. The overall scene is peaceful and quiet.

STRONGER NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH STRATEGIC DECISIONS

ReLocal Pilot Project

Prepared for the City of Muncie
by *PlaceEconomics*

September 2013

About the authors

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Executive Summary

Like most cities, and particularly legacy cities, Muncie faces many challenges, with limited resources available to address them. Making strategic decisions about how to allocate those resources is essential for shaping neighborhoods that are more vibrant, stable, and sustainable—and creating a healthier city.

The ReLocal tool provides a data-based framework for tackling vacant and abandoned properties. Drawing on information from the parcel level to the citywide scale, ReLocal lays out sustainable long-range uses for neighborhoods and makes targeted, practical recommendations for how vacant buildings and empty lots can contribute to those long-range use plans.

Muncie was the site of ReLocal’s initial field test. The tool was applied to four residential neighborhoods with older building stock in a range of conditions: East Central, Industry, Old West End, and South Central. Westridge, a prosperous neighborhood next to Ball State University, was used as a benchmark.

ReLocal was used to quantify distinctive neighborhood strengths and challenges with 78 metrics across 8 categories. Every category measures a different neighborhood quality, using information

from municipal and county governments, federal and state databases, and field surveys. The resulting framework highlights existing assets such as walkability, quality building stock, and resident engagement, along with issues such as falling property values, unemployment, and crime. A community survey was used to gather residents’ priorities for their neighborhood and influence categories’ importance.

The results chart a course for each neighborhood that builds on local strengths and emphasizes long-range stability and sustainability. A neighborhood with committed residents, strong neighborhood character, and community amenities will likely be recommended for long-term residential use at current or increased densities. A neighborhood that is located in close proximity to natural features and affected by widespread vacancy and foreclosure may be recommended to return to natural habitat over the course of years or decades. Still other neighborhoods are appropriate for residential uses at lower densities.

Targeted reinvestment can happen in neighborhoods along the entire spectrum of sustainable uses. Yet resources should take different forms and have different goals in each neighborhood. Public funds should not go toward building new

<i>ReLocal category</i>	<i>What it measures</i>	East Central	Industry	Old West End	South Central	Westridge
<i>Real estate</i>	Past disinvestment and prospective reinvestment	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟢
<i>Stability</i>	Population trends and related quality-of-life issues	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟢
<i>Neighborhood character</i>	Sense of place through the built environment	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟢
<i>Walkability</i>	Proximity to community assets and condition of bike-ped infrastructure	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟡
<i>Fiscal</i>	Economic costs and contributions of neighborhood elements to City	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟢
<i>Economic opportunity</i>	Wealth-generating opportunities for residents	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟡
<i>Engagement</i>	Resident participation in neighborhood	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟡
<i>Environment</i>	Past land uses, natural resources, and current quality-of-life factors	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡

Neighborhood score: 🟢 Above average 🟡 Average 🟡 Below average

houses on vacant land when a range of data suggests that the neighborhood is trending away from residential use. And demolishing vacant houses that are in good condition in a neighborhood with stable population and strong community amenities is not an effective way to spend public dollars. Resources—money, time, and partnerships—are too scarce to use inefficiently.

In Muncie, the study neighborhoods fall along the spectrum of sustainable uses, each with specific opportunities and challenges.

East Central is a historic neighborhood east of downtown. Its stability, walkability, and character make it well suited for more dense residential use. Strong neighborhood associations and community development organizations are potential partners for attracting new homebuyers and helping to redevelop and repurpose a large amount of vacant land.

Old West End, an older neighborhood adjacent to downtown, has high architectural character, well-maintained buildings, community amenities, and an active neighborhood association. These highlight the opportunity to stabilize the neighborhood.

Industry is a historically working-class neighborhood notable for its committed residents and walkability, though population loss and declining property values make high-density residential

use unsustainable. Lower-density uses like home-steading would allow current residents to stay in place with expanded land holdings and help ensure that vacant properties are stewarded.

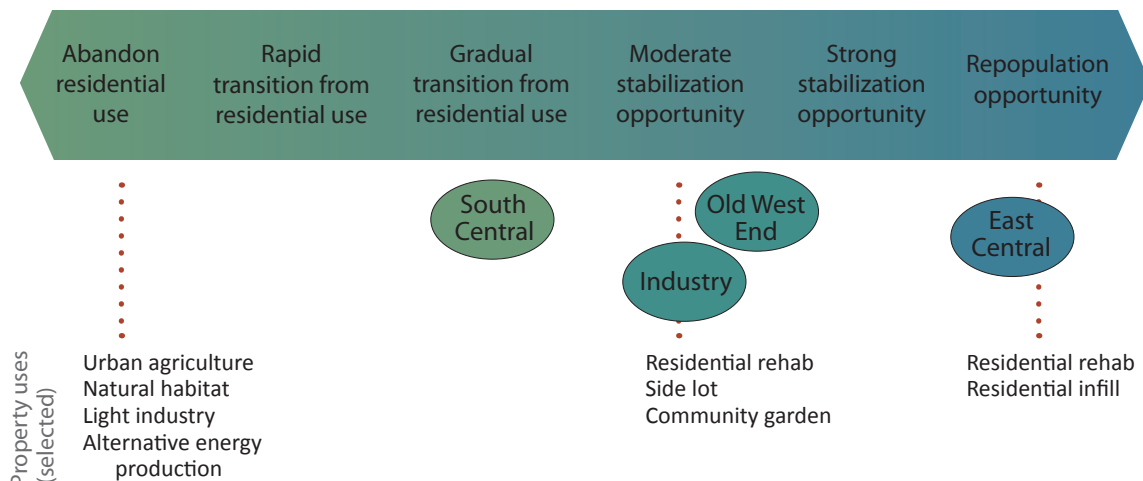
South Central is recommended for gradual transition away from residential use, due to a number of major challenges: population loss and high vacancy rates, few homeowners, high crime and fire rates, low-quality buildings, and widespread tax delinquency. South Central residents should be meaningfully engaged in planning the neighborhood's future, with particular attention to job-creating uses.

Westridge was not recommended for changes due to its benchmark role. It has a strong real estate market, stable community, and quality building stock. Though some limitations in walkability and economic opportunity stem from its exclusively residential use and homogenous building stock, these do not negatively impact the health of the neighborhood.

Strategies for vacant properties vary according to the surrounding neighborhood's long-range use. Construction quality, architectural character, and building condition inform specific recommendations at the property level.

For example, take a vacant building of average construction quality and medium architectural character that is in fair condition. In a neighbor-

▼ *Spectrum of sustainable neighborhood uses*





hood like East Central, the building would be recommended for stabilization or rehabilitation to support more residential density. In South Central, the same building would likely be recommended for demolition and replacement with a garden or natural habitat, to contribute to the neighborhood's gradual transition away from residential use. Strategies for the same building in Industry or Old West End would vary according to local priorities and plans for nearby properties.

In full application, ReLocal provides an array of strategic recommendations at the parcel level for every vacant property in the study neighborhoods. Local decisionmakers select specific strategies based on other plans and available funding. For the pilot study in Muncie, a sample range of strategies is offered.

These targeted recommendations lay the groundwork for coordinating multiple entities with differ-

▲
Clockwise Old West End, South Central, East Central, Industry

ent roles and priorities. In situations with complex challenges and limited resources, collaboration is key—and ReLocal provides a solid framework for effective partnerships. It recommends tools to capitalize on every neighborhood's strengths. It incorporates community priorities into long-range thinking about neighborhood uses. And it sets a course for every neighborhood to be more stable and sustainable through strategic decisions at the property level.

ReLocal is a flexible, forward-looking framework for making local decisions—not a static set of prescriptive orders. And it is based on local data and resident feedback, making it uniquely grounded in Muncie's current conditions and opportunities.

Introduction

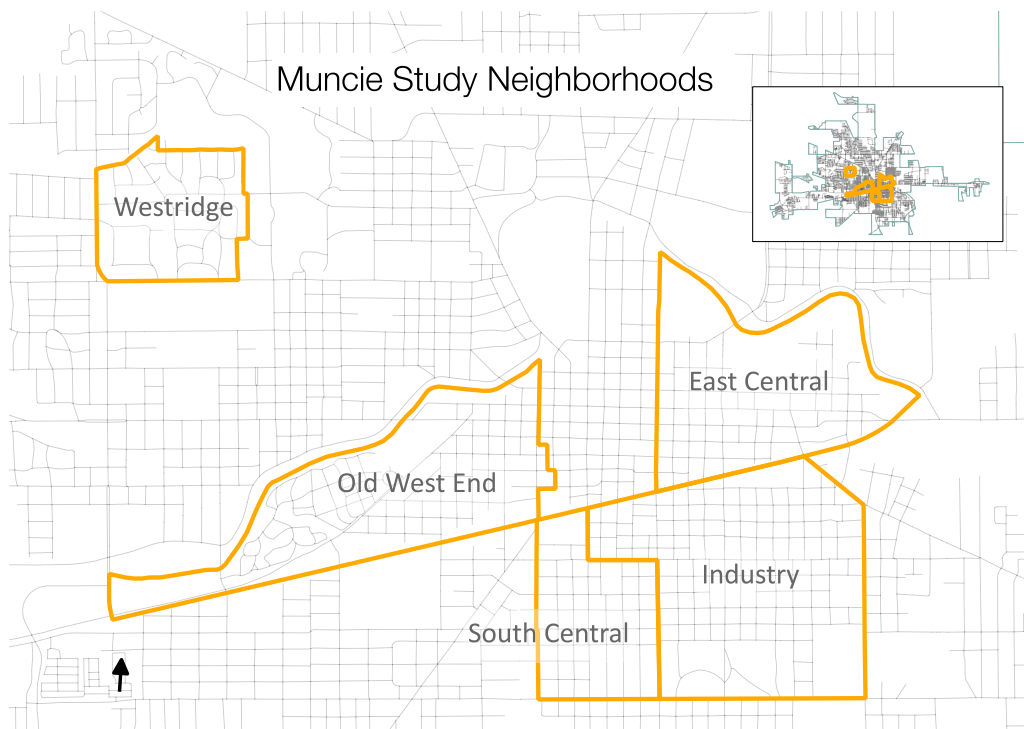
Muncie, Indiana, is a community northeast of Indianapolis. Though never a large city—population peaked at 76,000 in 1980—Muncie played an outsized role in regional and national manufacturing, education, and articulating an emerging national culture. The city was featured in a long-term social research project as “Middletown,” a typical American community in the middle of the 20th century. Muncie was home to the Ball Bros. manufacturing company for over a century, until headquarters moved to Colorado in 1998. Ball State University is still located in the city, serving more than 22,000 students.

The community-based Muncie Action Plan articulates a clear goal for the city: to create a prosperous and sustainable future that benefits the entire community. This future includes many community aspirations: an engaged community, more and better jobs, strong educational opportunities, conservation of the natural environment,

effective social services and healthcare, and others. Yet available time, energy, and money invariably fall short of the resources that are needed to accomplish these items. Meanwhile, public funding in Indiana and elsewhere continues to shrink.

How can scarce resources be directed to best meet local goals? Funding and incentives have considerably more impact if they are focused in geographic areas rather than spread across the entire city or spent on scattered ad hoc projects. However, communities typically lack a consistent, defensible way to make decisions about how to best use limited resources.

ReLocal responds to this need by helping to target resources for vacant properties based on local assets, long-term opportunities, and community priorities. The tool is grounded in extensive multi-variable data: 78 metrics across 8 categories establish the framework for a spectrum of



sustainable, long-range neighborhood-level uses. This neighborhood context informs strategies for treating individual vacant properties, with the goal of directing resources for the most significant long-term impact.

Muncie

The ReLocal pilot project was conducted in Muncie in early 2013. Muncie was an ideal laboratory, with challenges and opportunities common to many towns and cities dealing with population loss and working toward revitalization, as well as enthusiastic local partners who offered logistical support and on-the-ground assistance. The city itself was a workable size: with 27 square miles and just over 70,000 residents, it allowed field testing at a manageable scale and the ability to extrapolate lessons to smaller and larger communities.

We examined four study neighborhoods and one benchmark neighborhood selected by local partners: East Central, Industry, Old West End, South Central, and Westridge. Each neighborhood contains a different balance of population trends, physical and social resources, and economic patterns. Westridge, a neighborhood adjacent to Ball State University with negligible population loss, was chosen to serve as a local benchmark.

How to use this report

This report provides an overview of ReLocal and its field test in Muncie, Indiana. The report is structured in seven sections:

1. Executive summary
2. Introduction to the tool and Muncie
3. Overview of the ReLocal framework
4. Setting a course for neighborhoods
5. Strategies for vacant properties
6. Acknowledgments
7. Appendix

The *Overview of the ReLocal framework* provides a brief explanation of the tool's structure; more detail is available in the appendix. Readers interested in a specific neighborhood should reference the analysis in *Setting a course for neighborhoods*. This section, as well as the property-level strategies presented in the following section, will be of particular use to municipal staff, land bank officials, local politicians, and neighborhood and citywide organizations seeking to make the most effective decisions about vacant properties across a range of neighborhoods.

ReLocal Framework

The ReLocal tool includes eight categories that measure neighborhood vitality and sustainability as residential neighborhoods. The categories span market forces and opportunities, the built and natural environments, and social capital. Each category is comprised of 6 to 14 metrics from a variety of sources and scales that identify strengths and challenges at the neighborhood level. In total, there are 78 metrics, 64 of which were used in the Muncie field test. The remaining metrics were not used because the metric was not applicable, information was not available, or available data was not up-to-date.

Each metric identifies neighborhood performance for a specific element: foreclosures, architectural character, and the presence of neighborhood associations, to name a few. However, not every metric is of equal importance. For example, public art is of value, but less significant in evalu-

ating long-term neighborhood health than the condition of the local building stock. Nearby medical services are an asset, but less important at a neighborhood level given that most households own at least one car. Consequently, each metric was assigned a weight relative to other metrics in the same category. These weights reflect the importance of each metric in contributing to a healthy neighborhood, and are applied when aggregating metrics into categories.

Similarly, each category was assigned a weight to reflect its relative importance to long-term neighborhood health. Then, a community survey was used to gauge local priorities. Residents of the five neighborhoods were asked to rate the neighborhood elements that were most important to them in an online survey. The results were used to adjust each category's weight according to its relative importance to the community.

ReLocal Metrics

REAL ESTATE

Property value changes
Sales*
New construction
Renovation
Vacant land
Vacant buildings
Foreclosures
Tax delinquency
Affordability
Diversity of unit size
Community development corporation
Views*

STABILITY

Population change
Economic integration
Diversity*
Owner occupancy
Long-term residents
Signal population trends
Demolition permits
Crime
Fire calls

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Building quality
Architectural character
Building condition
National Register historic districts

Local historic districts
Design guidelines
Public art
Maintenance of public spaces

WALKABILITY

Street grid
Sidewalkability index
Sidewalk condition*
Public transportation
Bike routes
Walking trails
Traffic
Schools
Neighborhood business district
Proximity to downtown*
Public facilities
Medical services
Walk Score

FISCAL

Property value/acre
Property tax generation
Sales tax generation*
Density*
Density potential*
Value of public infrastructure*
Infrastructure depreciation*
Demolition to rehabilitation ratio
Availability of intervention tools
Use of intervention tools*

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Aggregate household income
Aggregate purchasing power
Purchasing power per acre
Employment centers
Neighborhood business district
Business association
At-home businesses*
Households with high-speed internet*
Immigrant in-migration*
Unemployment rate

ENGAGEMENT

Civic associations
Senior organizations
Youth organizations
Third places*
Voter registration*
Voter participation*

ENVIRONMENT

Neighborhood park
Topography*
Embodied energy*
Tree cover
Water
Floodplains
Brownfields*
Air/odor pollution
Noise
Graffiti

* This metric not used in Muncie field test.

Setting a Course for Neighborhoods

This section presents the results of the ReLocal tool for neighborhood context and direction. It highlights strengths, challenges, and opportunities for each neighborhood by category, then combines them in the ReLocal framework to recommend stable, sustainable uses for the study neighborhoods.




Residential neighborhoods facing widespread vacant and abandoned properties fall along a spectrum of long-range uses. Some neighborhoods have the potential to gain population and increase in density, while others may stabilize at current density levels. Some neighborhoods do not possess the qualities to sustain residential use over the long term. Still other neighborhoods fall between these points, with the potential to gain some residents but not return to peak density levels, or to lose some residents but stabilize at a lower density.

None of the Muncie study neighborhoods is recommended for immediate transition to non-residential use. Each neighborhood holds unique assets and committed residents. The challenge

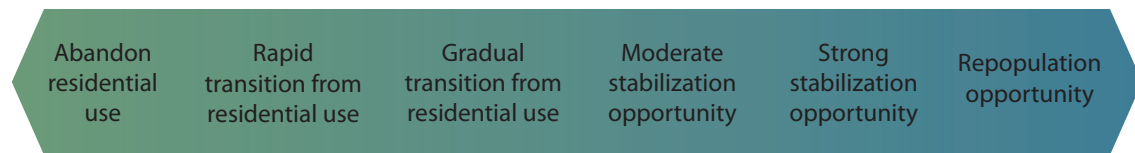
comes with making strategic choices that will make neighborhoods stronger and more stable—for some, as they gain population or stabilize with the current population; for others, as they gradually transition away from residential use.

This analysis of, and vision for, neighborhood context is a fundamental component of ReLocal. It enables decisions about individual properties to be part of a broader long-range strategy based on real data, not simply *ad hoc* decisions made parcel by parcel. Vacant and abandoned properties should be addressed differently in different neighborhoods, based on the most stable use for each neighborhood. And that neighborhood use must develop from credible data and community priorities within a strategic comprehensive framework.

Neighborhood Scores

-  Above average
-  Average
-  Below average

▼ Spectrum of sustainable neighborhood uses



East Central

The East Central neighborhood is located north-east of downtown Muncie and bounded by the White River to the north and east, railroad tracks to the south, and Madison to the west. It spans 301 acres and had a population of 1,196 residents in 2010. In the ReLocal community survey, residents valued neighborhood character the most, followed closely by the environment. They also felt that stability, community engagement, walkability, and real estate were important. Economic opportunity was rated as somewhat important.

REAL ESTATE

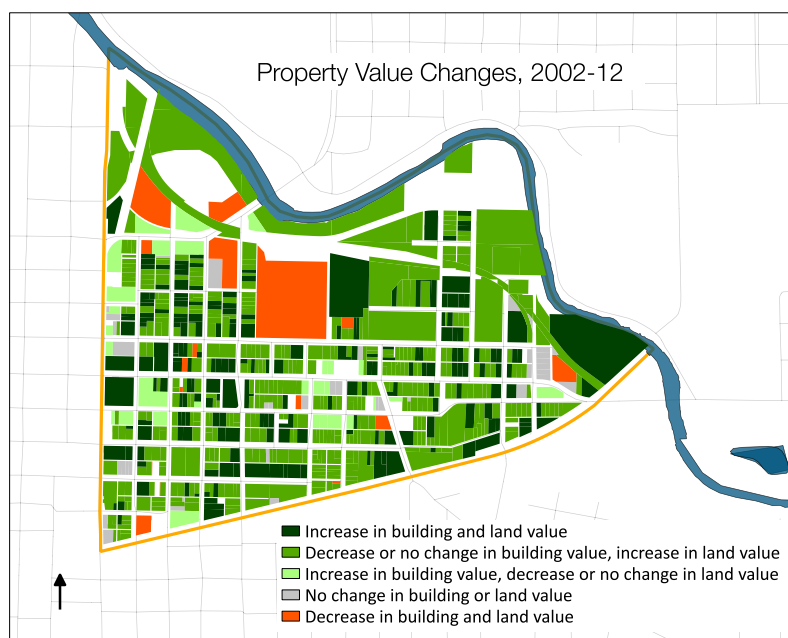
East Central has an average real estate score. The neighborhood's range of unit sizes makes it appropriate and affordable for a range of household types and incomes. Despite a high number of foreclosures in Muncie in the past five years (2008-2012), only one foreclosure occurred in East Central during the same period. An increasing college-age population suggests an expanding rental market for the neighborhood.

Signs of stagnancy are mitigated by other factors. The neighborhood has not seen any new construction recently, but some rehabilitation work

is occurring. Six percent of properties are tax-delinquent; however, these represent less than 1 percent of the total assessed value of the neighborhood. Nearly a quarter of the neighborhood's land is vacant. Properties in East Central gained value in the last ten years, but only by 4.2 percent overall. Meanwhile, the average assessed value of buildings fell by almost \$3,000, or 7.1 percent of the average building's value.

STABILITY

East Central has an average stability score, which indicates a fair climate for long-term investments in the neighborhood as a residential area. The neighborhood lost 16 percent of its population between 2000 and 2010, and more than 40 percent of building permits in the past two years have been issued for demolitions. Owner occupancy is lower than Muncie's average. However, half of all East Central residents have lived in the same house for more than 9 years, while nearly 20 percent have lived there for more than 14 years. People are committed to the neighborhood. And local economic integration is very high: the proportion of households in three out of four income quartiles is evenly distributed, pointing to a healthy range of incomes. (See appendix for further explanation of economic integration.)



↑ NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

East Central has the highest neighborhood character score among the five neighborhoods, which indicates a strong, distinctive sense of place. Its building stock is unique and well constructed: the neighborhood scores high in architectural character, building construction quality (as rated by the City of Muncie), and building condition. The Emily Kimbrough Local Historic District, the only locally designated district in Muncie, contains 16 percent of all buildings in the neighborhood and has associated design guidelines to protect the district's historic built character. Two National Register historic districts contain nearly 40 percent of neighborhood buildings. (One of these districts overlaps with the local historic district.) East Central also has a high public space score.

↑ WALKABILITY

East Central has the highest walkability score among the five neighborhoods and 80 percent of the possible maximum score. This indicates that the neighborhood has good pedestrian amenities, including a location in close proximity to necessary goods and services. Nearly every building in the neighborhood is within a half-mile of a school, neighborhood business district, walking trail or greenway, and other public facility (fire station, police station, library, museum, or park). More than half of the local streets are bicycle-friendly, and the neighborhood scores well above the city average for the density of street grid and linear feet of sidewalks.

➔ FISCAL

East Central has an average fiscal score, which indicates an uneasy balance between the density of built infrastructure (such as buildings) and a high amount of demolition that is removing that infrastructure. Property value per acre is high due to the high concentration of buildings. However, demolition overshadows new construction and rehabilitation activity: 42 percent of all building permits are issued for demolition work.

➔ ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

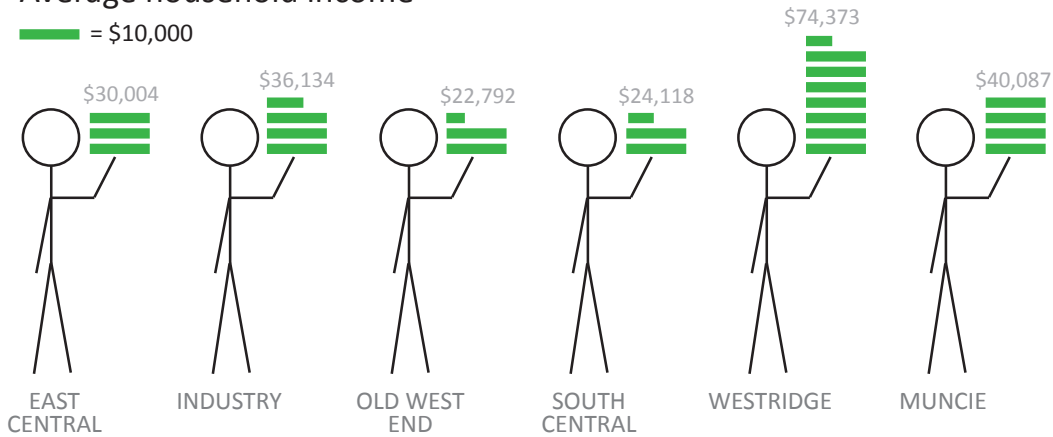
East Central has an average economic opportunity score, with a fair number of local job opportunities but individual employment and household incomes that are well below the citywide average. The neighborhood holds slightly less than one job for every two residents, above average for local employment. However, 15 percent of neighborhood residents over age 16 are unemployed—comprising 27.9 percent of the total labor force—while an additional 46.4 percent are not even in the labor force. This rate of non-participation in the labor force likely reflects a number of factors,

East Central residents rated neighborhood character as very important: 4.7 on a 5-point scale. This high value suggests that character plays a strong role in resident satisfaction—or at least in the satisfaction of the more engaged residents likely to take such a survey.



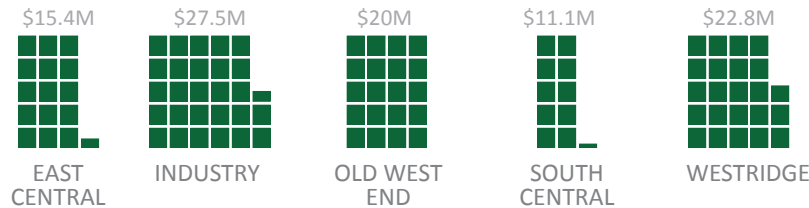
Average household income

■ = \$10,000

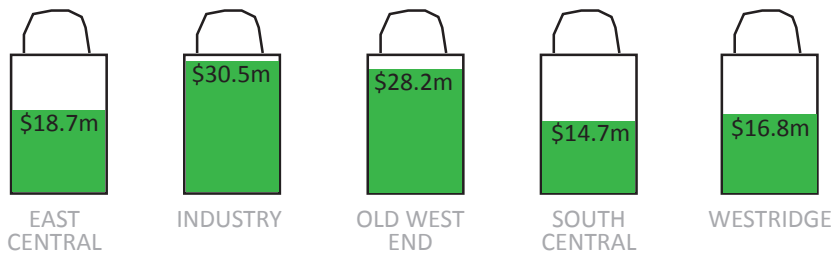


Aggregated neighborhood income

■ = \$1,000,000



Neighborhood purchasing power*



*Neighborhood purchasing power is calculated according to number of households and the proportion of income they spend.

including people who cannot work, do not work by choice, former jobseekers who have become discouraged, and potential workers who never enter the labor force due to actual or perceived market conditions. Additionally, 10 percent of East Central residents are over 65, many of whom are likely not in the labor force.

The neighborhood's median and mean household incomes are 25 to 30 percent below the city av-

erage. When household incomes are aggregated, the entire neighborhood's purchasing power is slightly below the average of the five neighborhoods.

↑ ENGAGEMENT

East Central has one of the top engagement scores, which indicates a high level of resident commitment and activity. The neighborhood contains two active resident associations, the East

Central Neighborhood Association and the Emily Kimbrough Neighborhood Redevelopment Committee; both have monthly board meetings. In addition to these opportunities for involvement, East Central has excellent access to resources for seniors and youth: three organizations serving seniors and three serving youth are located within a quarter-mile of the neighborhood.

ENVIRONMENT

East Central has an average environmental score, which reflects nearby natural resources but a high noise level. It has excellent access to water, with the White River to the north and east: nearly half of all properties are within a quarter-mile of the river, and 95 percent are within a half-mile. A notable portion of the neighborhood's land area (11 percent) does fall in a floodplain, but only 2.4 percent is developed land. This is primarily one large parcel with a small building on it. The average noise level in the neighborhood is 73 decibels, which falls in the "normally unacceptable" range for the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. When a HUD-funded project is proposed for a site with noise levels between 65 and 75 dB, special approvals and noise attenuation are required.

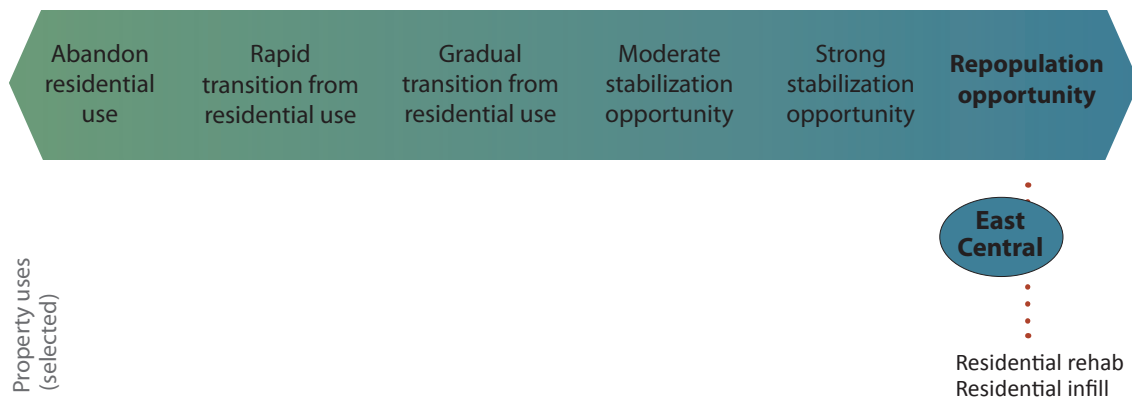
HUD Site Acceptability Standards for Noise	
Acceptable	< 65 dB
Normally unacceptable	65-75 dB
Unacceptable	> 75 dB

NEIGHBORHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS

East Central has significant assets, both now and looking to the future. The neighborhood is centrally located, with excellent access to downtown, the White River, and public amenities such as schools, libraries, museums, and organizations that serve youth and seniors. Trails, sidewalks, and bike-friendly streets make it possible for residents to walk or cycle to destinations within and nearby the neighborhood. Resident longevity underscores that East Central is a good place to live: half of residents have not moved in the past 9 years, and 20 percent have been in the same house for more than 14 years.

A distinctive built environment helps East Central to stand out—and to welcome a range of people in. The neighborhood contains one local historic district and two National Register historic districts, designated due to outstanding architectural and historical significance. Even outside the historic districts, buildings are unique, well built, and well maintained. A range of small, medium, and large housing units makes it possible for households and families with diverse incomes to live in the neighborhood. East Central had fewer foreclosures than other parts of Muncie.

The neighborhood has a large quantity of vacant land in both individual and adjacent parcels, which presents an opportunity for infill housing, urban gardens, pocket parks, and other creative uses of space. Though some rehabilitation work



is occurring, demolitions are gradually eroding the building stock that characterizes the neighborhood. While East Central's Emily Kimbrough National Register Historic District has a higher percentage of building permits than in the surrounding neighborhood, it also has more demolition permits.

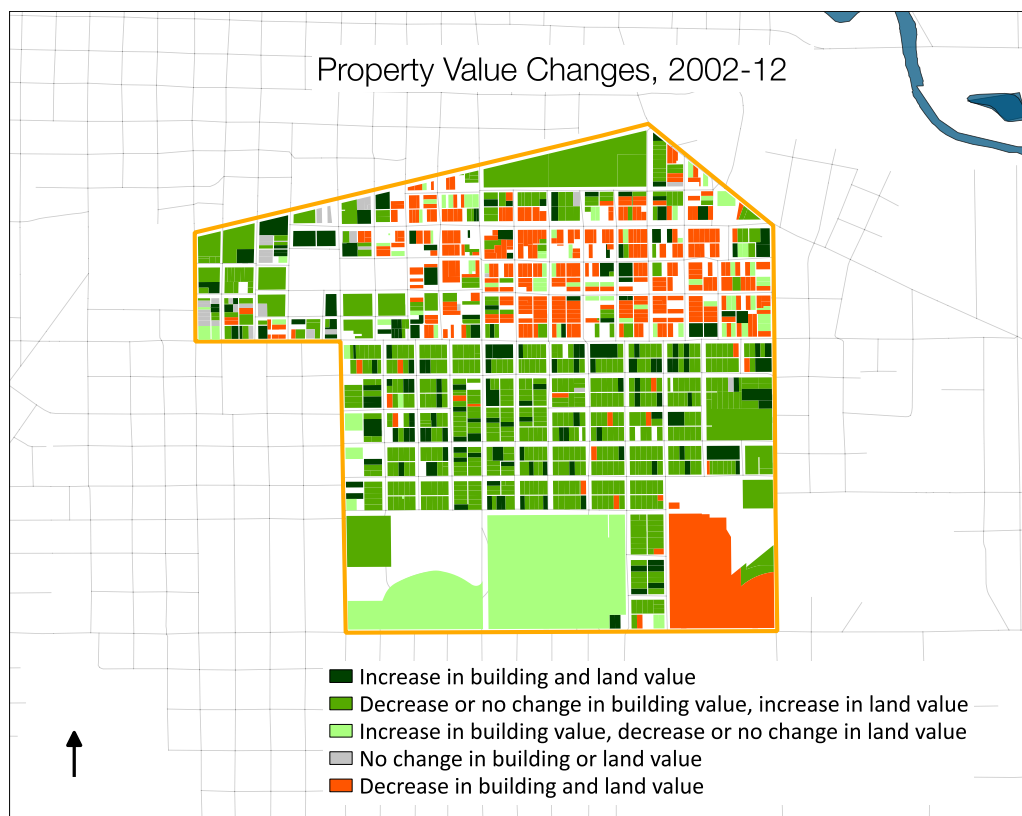
East Central is recommended for increased residential density. This does not necessarily mean that the neighborhood will return to its peak density, but it does mean that policies and programs should give priority to retaining existing residents and attracting new residents through incentives and development. On the property level, it means that decisions around properties with average or better construction quality, medium or high architectural character, and in fair to good condition will be weighted towards high or highest priority for retention, with an according range of strategies. (See section 5 for property-level strategies.)

Industry

The Industry neighborhood is located southeast of downtown Muncie and bounded by railroad tracks to the north, Ohio and Macedonia to the east, and East 12th/Memorial Drive to the south. Walnut, Willard, and Madison comprise the western boundary. The neighborhood spans 417 acres and had a population of 1,868 residents in 2010. No Industry residents responded to the ReLocal community survey, so the community weighting factor was not applied in the neighborhood.

REAL ESTATE

Industry has a below average score for real estate. The total assessed value of the neighborhood decreased significantly between 2002 and 2012 – by \$4.1 million, or 8.9 percent of total assessed value. This was driven by a large drop in assessed improvement value of \$6.1 million; the assessed value of the land actually increased during this



period for the majority of the neighborhood. No new construction has occurred recently, and the demolition rate outpaces both additions and alterations. A notable number of buildings (14 percent) and land area (16 percent) are vacant. Ten percent of properties are tax-delinquent, representing 1.1 percent of the neighborhood's total assessed value—and over 11 percent of all tax-delinquent properties in Muncie.

↑ STABILITY

Industry has a relatively high stability score, reflecting a high homeownership rate and many long-term residents. Nearly 61 percent of residents own their homes, well above the city's average of 51 percent. And Industry residents have been there for a long time: 75 percent have lived in the same house for more than 9 years, 53 percent have lived there for more than 14 years, and 13 percent last moved in 1969 or earlier. This level of longevity is notable.

The neighborhood does face some challenges. It lost 14.6 percent of its population between 2000 and 2010, and 45 percent of building permits in the past two years have been issued for demolitions. Additionally, its crime rate is relatively high, and it contained 4 percent of all building fires in Muncie from 2009 to 2011.

→ NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Industry has an average score for neighborhood character. Building condition is good, with 80 percent of the local buildings rated as being in good or very good condition. However, construction quality and architectural character are both low.

The neighborhood does not contain any locally or nationally designated historic districts, but it does hold Heekin Park, a very large public park that contains some public art.

↑ WALKABILITY

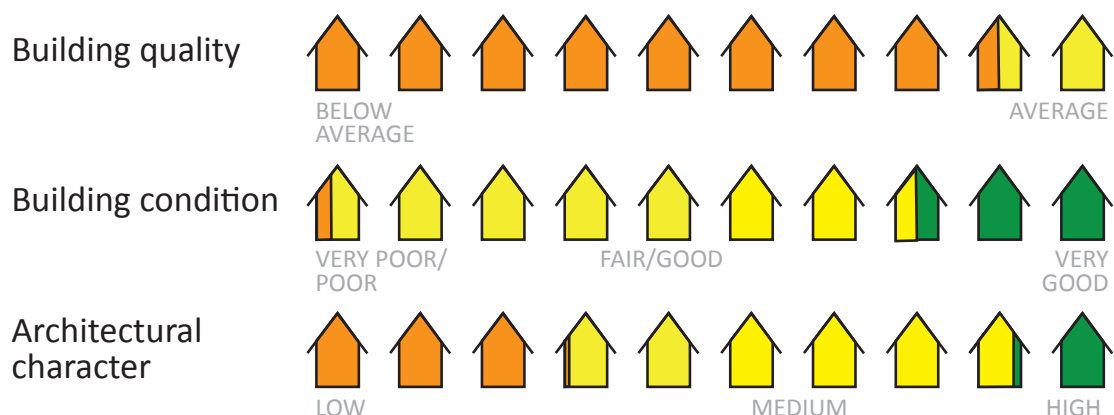
Industry has a high walkability score, indicating that it is a very walkable neighborhood with close proximity to some amenities. Traffic volume is well below Muncie's average and the street grid is well connected. And there is much to walk to. Most properties in the neighborhood are within a half-mile of a community center and other public facilities such as a library, park, museum, or fire and police stations. More than 85 percent are within a quarter-mile of neighborhood business districts in neighboring South Central. However, few Industry residents are within an easy walk of a greenway or hospital. Several bus lines run through the neighborhood.

→ FISCAL

Industry has an average fiscal score. Like the other study neighborhoods, it has a density of built infrastructure that represents a significant investment. Aggregated property value is close to \$100,000 per acre. However, that infrastructure is gradually being eroded: 45 percent of all building permits in the neighborhood in the past two years were issued for demolitions.

↑ ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Industry has one of the highest economic opportunity scores of the five neighborhoods, with good local job opportunities and high aggregated



purchasing power. The neighborhood holds about one job for every two people who live there. Despite this, more than half of Industry residents over 16 are unemployed (13.3 percent) or not in the labor force (43 percent). Non-participation in the labor force may be by choice, lack of appropriate opportunities or frustration with the labor market, or residents who are retirement-age.

Average household income is 90 percent of the city's average. When household incomes are aggregated, Industry's purchasing power is higher than that of the Westridge neighborhood.

↑ ENGAGEMENT

Industry has a high engagement score. Its neighborhood association is active, with monthly meetings. Two youth organizations and three senior organizations are located within a quarter-mile of the neighborhood, serving both younger and older residents. Despite this engagement score, no residents responded to the ReLocal survey. This may be because of the outreach method (requesting that one or two local contacts spread the word via email) or the format (an online survey).

→ ENVIRONMENT

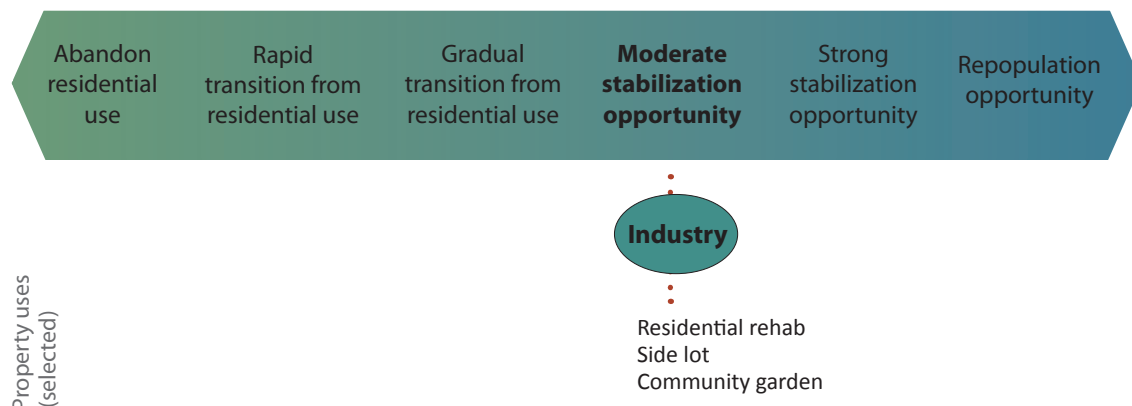
Industry has an average environmental score. It is not particularly close to a water feature such as the White River, but this also means that no properties fall within a floodplain. Compared to the other four neighborhoods, Industry has a high number of recorded trees—2.5 per acre. The neighborhood's average noise level is lower than the other study neighborhoods at 63 decibels. HUD rates this an "acceptable" noise level.

NEIGHBORHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS

Industry has a number of strengths. Residents are extremely committed to the neighborhood, as evidenced by high homeownership rates, many long-term residents, and an active neighborhood association. This commitment is a significant intangible asset that manifests itself in physical evidence such as well-maintained buildings.

The neighborhood is also highly walkable. It contains or is near to a community center and other public facilities, neighborhood businesses, Heekin Park, and senior and youth organizations. And good street connectivity, low traffic volume, and many trees should make Industry feel very walkable. No bus lines run near the neighborhood, but that can be changed.

Other challenges are more persistent. The local building stock is of relatively low quality, with little architectural character. This is reflected in declining building values, even as land values increase—crosswise trends that indicate a change in use. The neighborhood has seen very little new construction recently, and demolition is much more prevalent than reinvestment in existing buildings. Vacancy rates are relatively low compared to other study neighborhoods, though a medium to high rate of population loss (just under 15 percent from 2000 to 2010) threatens to increase vacancy. A high rate of tax delinquency (10 percent) could contribute to disinvestment and demolition, along with demolitions driven by increasing land value and decreasing building value.



Looking forward, Industry is recommended for stabilization as a lower-density residential neighborhood. Low construction quality and high crime rates make the neighborhood an unlikely prospect for potential homebuyers and residents, and thus long-term public investment in residential uses. While a residential core around Heekin Park is a promising location for targeted investment, the rest of the neighborhood offers an opportunity to support committed existing homeowners while not incentivizing additional residential development. On the property level, this means that demolition of and reinvestment in vacant buildings could both be viable strategies: residential use, side lots, community gardens, and parks all have a place in a less dense neighborhood. Residential infill should not be a priority. Decisions around vacant and abandoned properties should rely heavily on the location of a vacant lot or the construction quality, architectural character, and condition of a vacant building. (See section 5 for property-level strategies.)

Old West End

Old West End is located directly west of downtown Muncie and bounded by the White River to the north and west, railroad tracks to the south, and Liberty to the east. It spans 348 acres and had a population of 1,673 residents in 2010. Old West End residents felt that neighborhood character and stability were very important in the ReLocal community survey. Community engagement, the environment, real estate, walkability, and economic opportunity were rated as important.

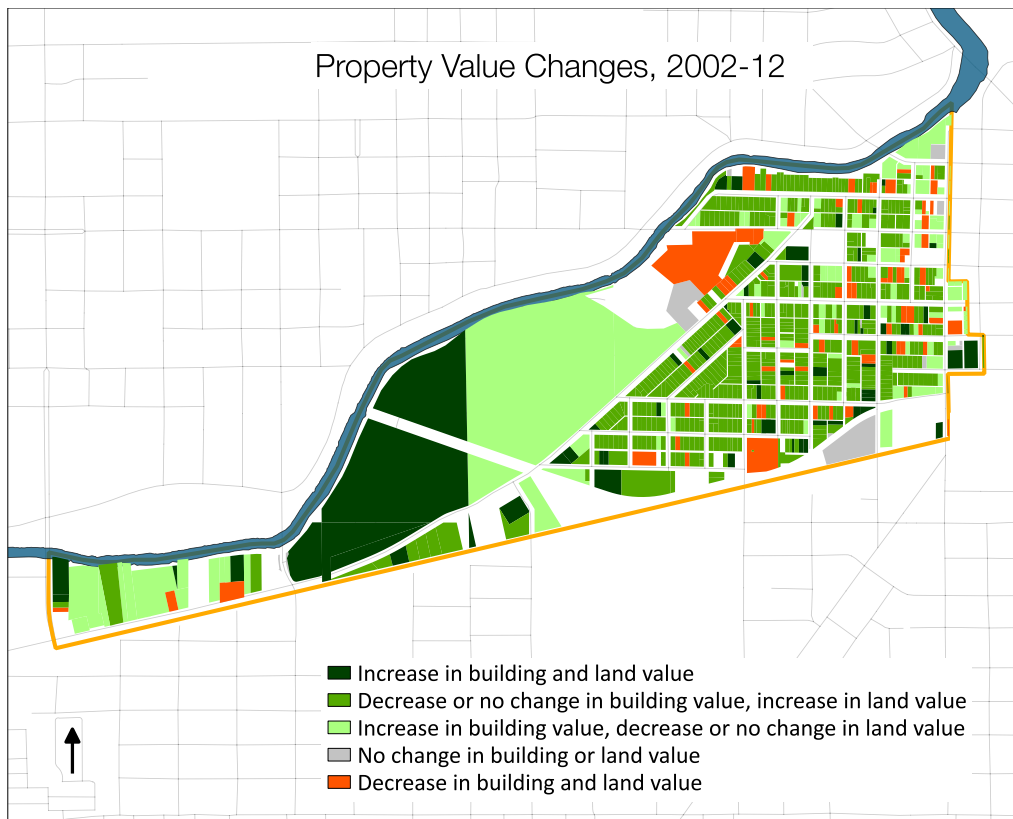
REAL ESTATE

Old West End has a high real estate score, which indicates a strong foundation for future investment. The total assessed property value in the neighborhood increased by \$1.8 million over the last ten years (a 3.7 percent increase), with increases in assessed improvement value contributing \$1.1 million. Some alterations and additions are occurring, along with a small amount of new construction. Vacant land constitutes a relatively low portion of total area—under 10 percent. The neighborhood has a good diversity of unit sizes and is relatively affordable for housing and transportation, which together cost 45.2 percent of household income—below the city’s average. And stakeholders are actively working to improve the neighborhood: five community development organizations complete rehabilitation and/or new construction projects in Old West End each year.

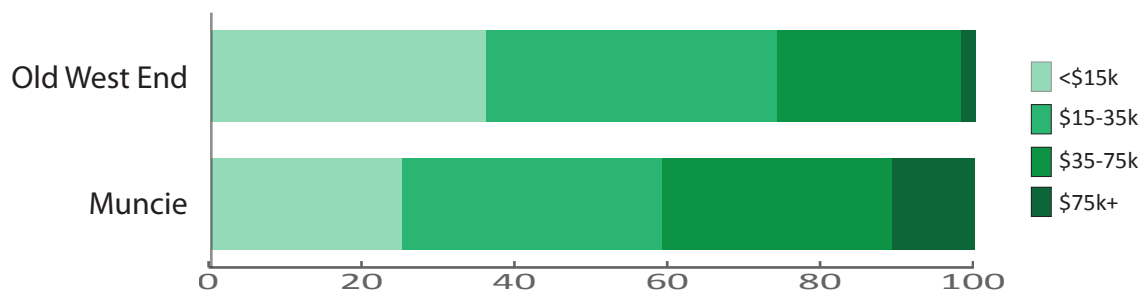
Old West End does face major challenges. Nearly one in every ten properties is tax-delinquent, and over 20 percent of the buildings in the neighborhood are vacant. Furthermore, property value per acre may fall over time if the current rate of demolition continues, as lower-value vacant lots replace buildings.

STABILITY

Old West End has one of the lowest scores for stability. Though the neighborhood also has an above-average increase in a signal population—foreign-born residents, a population that has increased in Muncie in the last ten years—it lost 20 percent of its residents between 2000 and 2010. Only 21.3 percent of households own their



▼ *Economic integration, as shown by household median income*



homes—half the city average—and a relatively low proportion of residents (36 percent) have lived in the same house for more than 9 years. Crime and fire rates are high. Nearly 40 percent of recent building permits were issued for demolition. And the neighborhood’s economic integration is low, with a spread of 36 percentage points between the lowest and highest income quartiles.

In the ReLocal community survey, Old West End residents felt that stability was one of the most important neighborhood qualities.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Old West End has an average neighborhood character score, which reflects a wide range of building conditions and architectural character. Nearly 30 percent of buildings are rated as having high or landmark character. The neighborhood does contain two National Register-listed historic districts that include 37 percent of properties and 42 percent of land area in Old West End. These historic districts indicate that the buildings are significant and retain a high degree of integrity, but the National Register designation is not associated with a local ordinance or review board. Thus, buildings can be altered—and their integrity lowered—with no review.

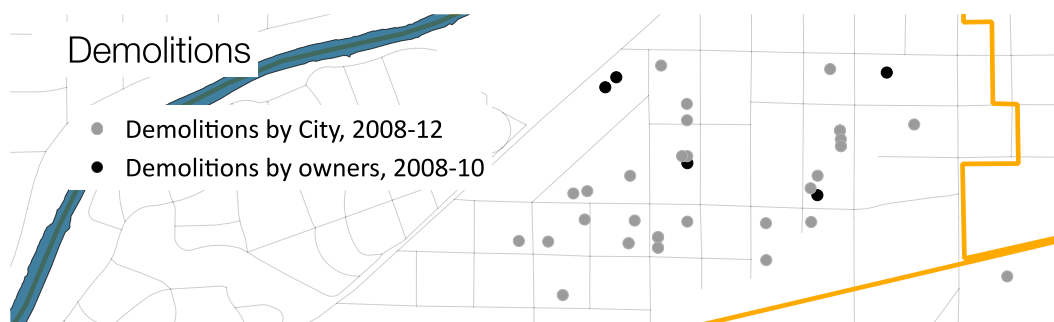
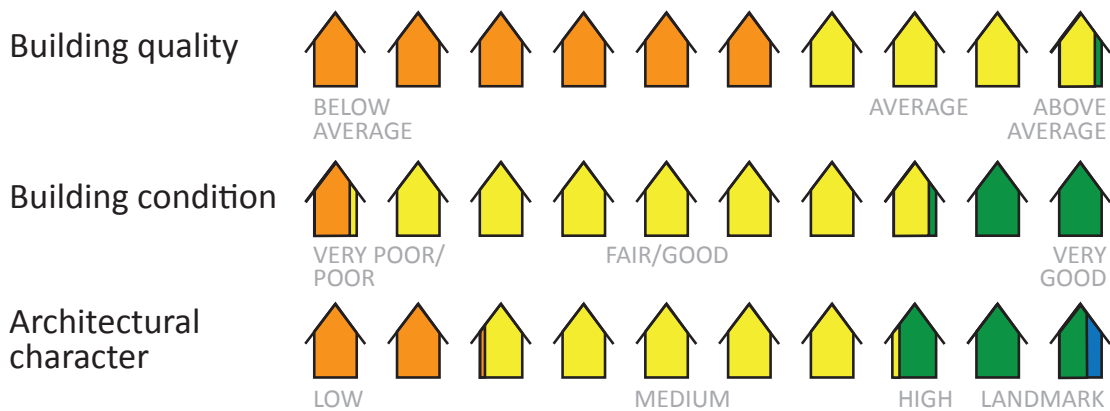
Overall building condition in the neighborhood is good, but construction quality is relatively low, with just 40 percent rated as average or above average by city inspectors. The ReLocal community survey indicates that Old West End residents hold neighborhood character as one of the most important neighborhood qualities, along with stability.

WALKABILITY

Old West End has an average walkability score. The neighborhood has excellent access to public transportation, with over 90 percent of buildings within a quarter-mile of a bus line. It is also very close to trails and greenways, a neighborhood business district, and public facilities such as libraries, parks, museums, and fire and police stations. However, getting to these amenities may not be easy without a car. The neighborhood is not particularly bicycle-friendly, as rated by Muncie residents, and sidewalks run on only one side of many roads. This is despite a relatively low traffic volume and high density of street connections that should generally make walking more pleasant and interesting.

FISCAL

Old West End has an average fiscal score. The aggregate assessed property value per acre was nearly \$146,000—evidence of significant investment in the built environment over time. From 2002 to 2012, the value of improvements per acre rose by 3 percent. This minor increase stands in



contrast with declining values in the other three study neighborhoods. However, over the past two years, the neighborhood has seen a very high proportion of demolition to rehabilitation and new construction. Demolition reduces property values by subtracting building value, and is likely to negatively impact the value of nearby buildings.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Old West End has the highest economic opportunity score, largely due to a high number of local jobs, relatively extensive neighborhood business districts, and high aggregated purchasing power. The neighborhood contains 0.56 jobs per resident, perhaps linked to the presence of many commercial or mixed-use properties—nearly 10 percent of the neighborhood’s buildings. Old West End has an unemployment rate roughly equal to the city as a whole, with over half of residents over age 16 unemployed or not in the labor force. Median and mean household incomes are both low—roughly half those of the city—but the neighborhood’s aggregated purchasing power is high.

ENGAGEMENT

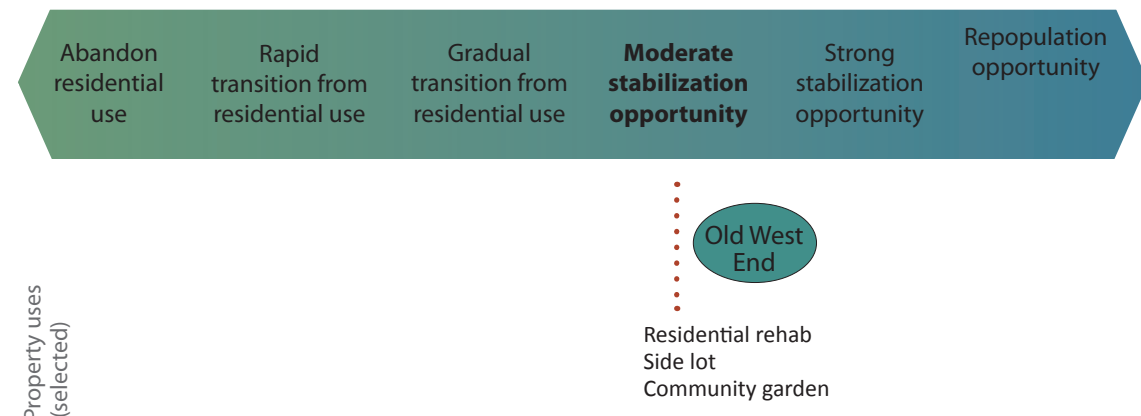
Old West End has a very high engagement score, reflecting a high level of resident engagement and social amenities. Its neighborhood association is very active and regularly attracts 20 to 30 people to monthly meetings. Two youth organizations and two senior organizations are located within a quarter-mile of the neighborhood, providing social activities for younger and older residents.

ENVIRONMENT

Old West End has an average environmental score, which reflects a balance of natural assets with challenges such as floodplains and noise. The neighborhood has 3.1 trees per acre, the highest number of all five neighborhoods. It also has excellent access to the White River, with 61 percent of properties within a quarter-mile and all properties within a half-mile of the river. However, this proximity means that 20 percent of Old West End lies in a floodplain, including 9.3 percent of the developed land (mostly two large industrial parcels). The noise levels in the neighborhood are high, with an average level of 71.6 decibels. This falls in HUD’s “normally unacceptable” range.

NEIGHBORHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS

One of Old West End’s primary strengths is its affordable, high-character built environment, though that is being eroded by demolition. The neighborhood has seen rising property values over the last decade, including increasing values of building improvements, but housing remains more affordable than the city average. Both residents and community development corporations are investing in local properties through alterations, additions, and some new construction. Buildings are in good condition, and many have high or landmark character. Property value per acre is relatively high. However, high rates of demolition threaten neighborhood character—and long-term value. Property values may fall over time if demolitions continue.



Like other neighborhoods examined in this study, Old West End is extremely walkable. It has excellent access to neighborhood business districts and downtown, public facilities, youth and senior organizations, and natural assets like the White River. Bus lines, trails, and greenways offer options for moving around without a car. Low traffic volume, trees, and good street connectivity make walking and cycling relatively pleasant, though more sidewalks and cycling infrastructure would improve the experience.

Old West End has recently seen the start of an active, engaged neighborhood association, but population stability is a significant problem. The neighborhood lost one-fifth of its population between 2000 and 2010. Homeownership rates are low and long-term residents few. One in five buildings is vacant, along with nine percent of land area; a high number of tax-delinquent buildings raises the risk of additional demolitions and more vacant land. High crime and fire rates likely discourage potential residents and homebuyers. An above-average increase in foreign-born residents may point to an opportunity to attract a new population by highlighting the area's affordability, walkability, and unique building stock.

Old West End is recommended for stabilization as a residential neighborhood with roughly its current density. The neighborhood contains the "bones" of a healthy neighborhood along with its many challenges, and a strong potential partner in the Old West End Neighborhood Association. For vacant properties, this means that a building's priority for retention depends heavily on its quality, character, and condition. Residential infill should not be a priority. (See section 5 for property-level strategies.)

South Central

The South Central neighborhood is located south of downtown Muncie and bounded by railroad tracks to the north; Walnut, Willard, and Madison to the east; East 12th/Memorial Drive to the south, and Liberty to the west. It is one of the geographically smallest neighborhoods examined for this study, spanning 160 acres. With 1,194 residents in 2010, it is also very dense.

REAL ESTATE

South Central has a low real estate score, reflecting relatively high rates of tax delinquency and foreclosure, a significant amount of vacancy, and overall loss of property value. Fifteen percent of all buildings and 20 percent of land area in the neighborhood are vacant. Nearly 11 percent of properties are tax-delinquent; these comprise 6 percent of all tax-delinquent properties in Muncie. Six foreclosures in the last five years represent only 1.2 percent of the neighborhood's buildings, but almost 5 percent of all foreclosures in the city. No new construction and very little rehabilitation activity are overshadowed by a high amount of demolition activity. Though the change in total assessed value in South Central was not enormous—a loss of \$701,000, or \$1,079 per property—the change in assessed improvements (buildings) was notable. The neighborhood lost \$2.2 million in assessed improvements, representing an 11 percent decrease in total building value. This trend is particularly evident west of Walnut Street.

On the positive side, one community development organization works in the neighborhood. And South Central has a high diversity of unit size: Though the average unit size is smaller than in most of the other five neighborhoods, a variety of unit sizes are available to meet various space needs and price points.

STABILITY

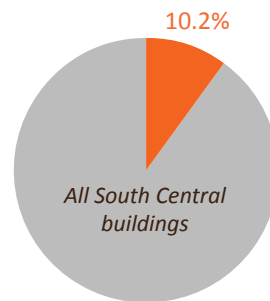
South Central has the lowest stability score among the five neighborhoods. Forty-two percent of residents have been in the same house for 9 years or more, with 20 percent there for more than 14 years. But the neighborhood lost 22 per-

cent of its population between 2000 and 2010, a loss reflected in a high proportion of demolition permits. The local homeownership rate is low, just 40 percent. Household income spread is also uneven, with more than 76 percent of households falling in the lowest two income quartiles (both making less than \$35,000 per year). The crime rate in South Central is high, with an average of 45 police incidents each year, and the fire rate is uncommonly high: 53 reported building fires each year in a neighborhood with only 520 buildings.

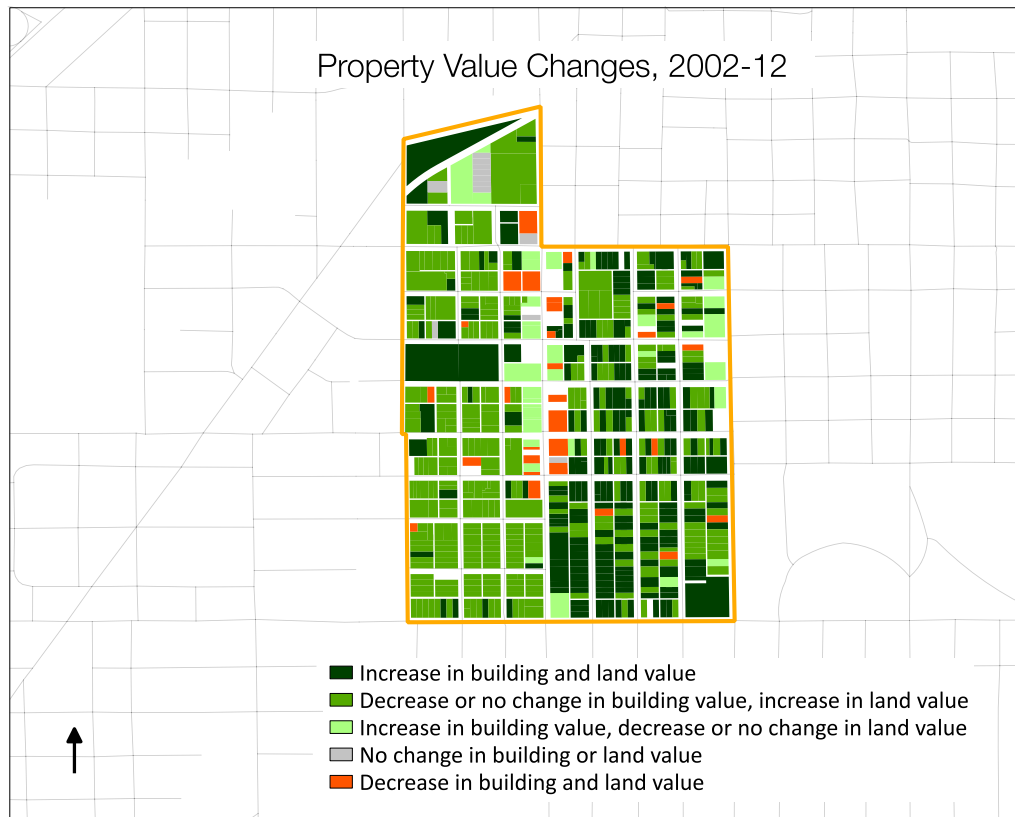
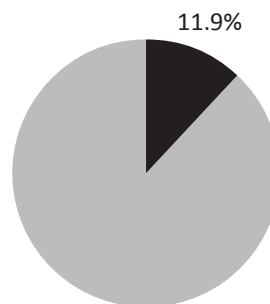
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

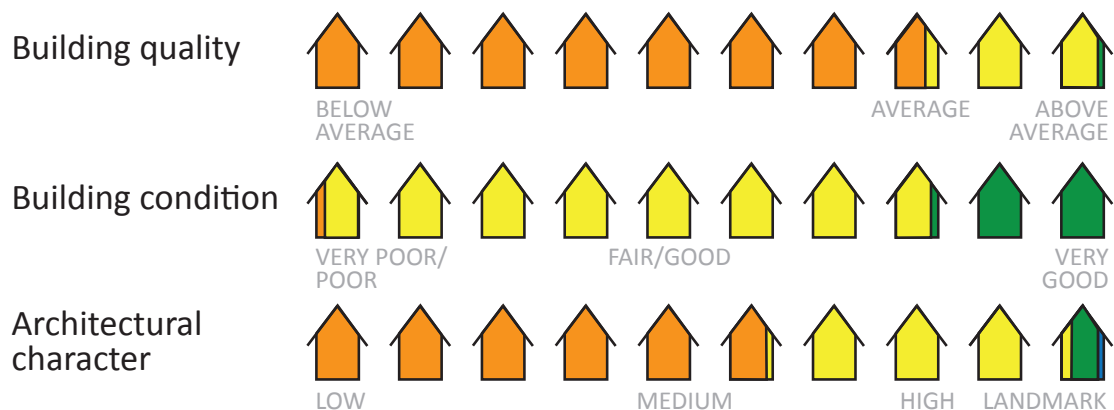
South Central has the lowest neighborhood character score of the study neighborhoods—half the score of the next lowest in this category, Old West End. Nearly 60 percent of the neighborhood’s buildings were rated as having low character; only 7 percent were rated as having high or landmark character. The neighborhood’s buildings are gen-

Building fires



Demolitions by City





erally in good condition, but less than a quarter (23 percent) of were given average or above average ratings for construction quality by the City.

↑ WALKABILITY

South Central has a high walkability score. Over 40 percent of its streets are rated bicycle-friendly. Many sidewalks and a high degree of street connectivity make it a pedestrian-friendly environment. Every property in the neighborhood is within a quarter-mile of a bus line, a neighborhood business district, and at least one public facility (library, museum, fire station, and/or police station). Nearly every property is within a half-mile of a primary or secondary school. Two notable exceptions to the walkability of the neighborhood are the lack of trails and greenways within a half-mile and very poor access to medical facilities. Walkability was one of the top-rated categories in the ReLocal community survey, scoring 4.5 on a 5-point scale of importance.

↓ FISCAL

South Central has a low fiscal score, with a high number of demolitions. The property value per acre (including both land and buildings) is relatively high. In fact, at \$146,945 per acre, it is the highest of the four study neighborhoods, and nearly double Muncie's citywide average of \$76,443 per acre. But demolition permits from 2011 to early 2013 comprised 59 percent of all building permits in the neighborhood, and just over 3 percent of all the buildings in the neighborhood.

South Central residents rated walkability and the environment as very important in the ReLocal community survey. Real estate was rated as only somewhat important.

↓ ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

South Central has a low economic opportunity score, which indicates major challenges for local households. More than 22 percent of neighborhood residents over age 16 are unemployed, and an additional 42 percent are not in the labor force, either by choice or lack of opportunity. Median and mean household incomes are roughly half of those of the city as a whole. Few local jobs are available: only one job exists for every five residents. There appear to be opportunities in neighborhood business districts along a few corridors, though; more than 7 percent of South Central properties contribute or could contribute to a neighborhood business district.

↓ ENGAGEMENT

South Central has a low engagement score. It has a neighborhood association, but it has few formal meetings per year. Two youth organizations and two senior organizations are located within a quarter-mile of the neighborhood.

ENVIRONMENT

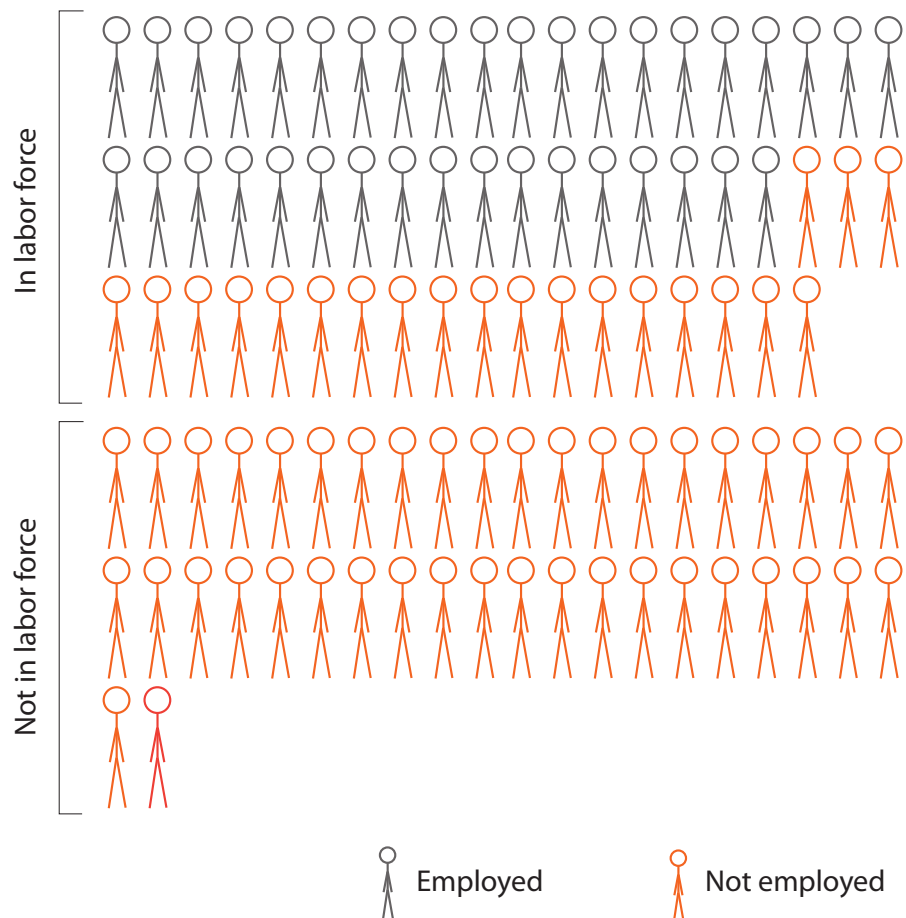
South Central has a low environmental score, with high noise levels and few natural resources nearby. The average noise level in the neighborhood is 71 decibels, which falls in the “normally unacceptable” range for HUD and would require special approvals and noise attenuation for a HUD-funded project. Less than 1 percent of properties are within a half-mile of the White River, making that feature relatively inaccessible by foot. The neighborhood has average tree cover, as reflected in the number of recorded trees per acre (1.5). The environment was one of the top-rated categories in the ReLocal community survey, scoring 4.5 on a 5-point scale of importance.

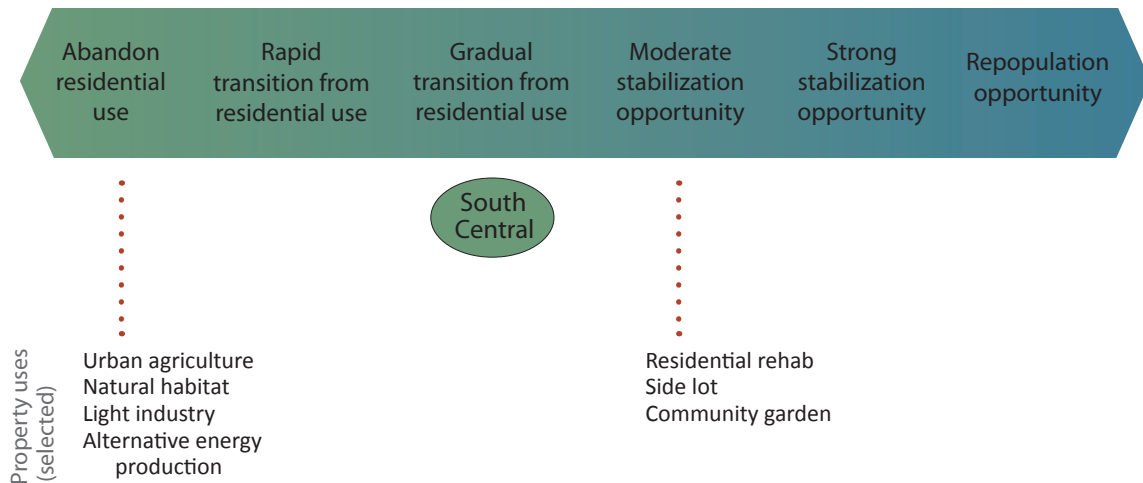
NEIGHBORHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS

South Central is a well-positioned neighborhood. It is close to downtown, neighborhood business districts, public facilities, schools, and senior and youth organizations. It is very walkable and has bike-friendly streets. It also has some built assets: well-maintained buildings with diverse unit sizes that accommodate a range of incomes and households. The total value of local buildings has decreased over the past decade, but land value has increased significantly and property value per acre is high. Among the study neighborhoods, South Central has a relatively low amount of vacant land (15 percent).

Yet construction quality is a major issue, and signs point to increasing amounts of vacant land in the future. Building stock is generally low quality, and the cumulative drop in assessed building value

Employment ►





is significant: \$2.2 million over ten years, an 11 percent decrease. No new construction is occurring in the neighborhood, and demolitions have outpaced rehabilitation activity by far. That rate reflects a difficult reality. Just over 20 percent of the neighborhood’s population moved away in the last decade—the highest loss of all five neighborhoods—and the vacancy rate in local buildings is nearly equivalent. One in every ten properties in South Central is tax delinquent.

The neighborhood also lacks indicators of widespread resident commitment—and factors that might entice new residents to move in. The homeownership rate is low. Relatively few residents have lived in South Central for a long time. Crime rates are high, and roughly one fire for every ten buildings occurs each year. Noise levels are also high.

Given these things, South Central is not a prime neighborhood for long-term residential investment. Public resources should be used to gradually transition the neighborhood from residential use to other productive uses. A land bank could help to acquire vacant buildings and land, and engage neighborhood residents and nonprofits already working in the neighborhood to help plan

the neighborhood’s future: as a center for urban agriculture, natural habitat, alternative energy production, or other uses.

This recommendation does not mean forced evacuation or widespread demolition. It does mean that effective public investment in addressing vacant and abandoned properties should be directed towards shaping a less dense neighborhood. At the property level, this means that vacant buildings are more likely to be demolished than rehabilitated, that publicly owned vacant lots should remain vacant, and that privately owned vacant lots might be acquired and designated for long-term use as open space. More property-level strategies are discussed in section 5.

It is essential to note the importance of engaging South Central residents to develop an alternative vision of what the neighborhood might look like as a less dense place, and how that change could benefit them. South Central has an unemployment rate of nearly 40 percent and a relatively low number of jobs per resident. Any proposed changes should recognize these challenges, along with the needs of existing households, and consider how they can be addressed as part of a gradual neighborhood transition.

Westridge

The Westridge neighborhood is located northwest of downtown Muncie, immediately west of the Ball State campus. It is bounded by the White River to the north and east, railroad tracks to the south, and Madison to the west. It spans 301 acres and had a population of 766 residents in 2010. Very few residents responded to the ReLocal community survey, so the community weighting factor was not applied in Westridge.

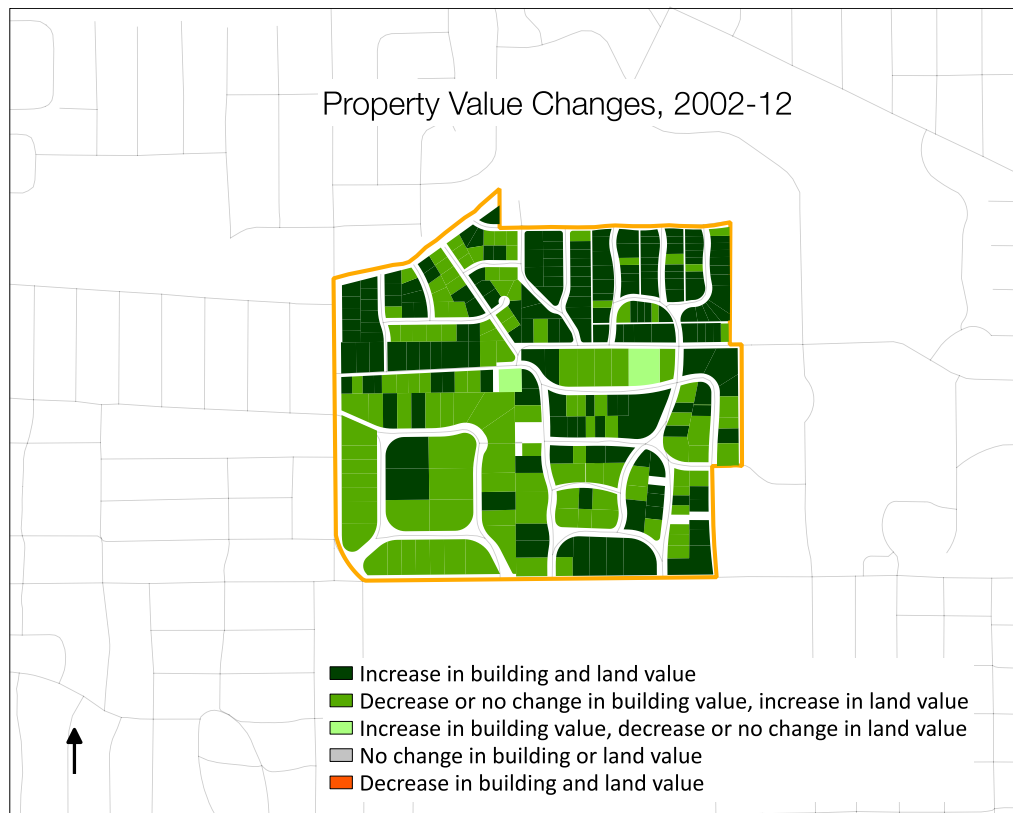
↑ REAL ESTATE

Westridge has a high real estate score, with a strong and stable market and very little vacancy. The neighborhood does not have any tax-delinquent properties, and has not seen any foreclosures in the last three-and-a-half years. The neighborhood is mostly built-out, with only three vacant lots and one vacant building. Two building permits have been issued in the past two years for alterations or additions.

The affordability of housing and transportation in Westridge is close to Muncie's average, with housing and transportation together costing 52.3 percent of income. Westridge units have an average size of 2,570 square feet, with very little variation in size between units; the neighborhood is composed entirely or almost entirely of detached single-family houses. This means that households with lower incomes are unlikely to be able to afford to live in Westridge.

↑ STABILITY

Westridge is an extremely stable neighborhood. Close to 75 percent of residents have lived in the same house for 9 years or more, and half have not moved in the past 14 years. Homeownership rates are high, with roughly 78 percent of residents owning their homes. Westridge lost some population between 2000 and 2010, but very little compared to the other neighborhoods in this study (5.2 percent). Crime rates are low. Two signal populations are increasing in Westridge: foreign-born residents and students. Both these populations have increased in Muncie in the last ten years.



and may continue to increase. Westridge shows above-average growth for both groups.

The neighborhood does have very low economic integration: nearly three-quarters of local households make more than \$35,000 per year. While this points to general prosperity, it underscores the point made above that the neighborhood housing stock is not affordable to households with lower incomes.

↑ NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

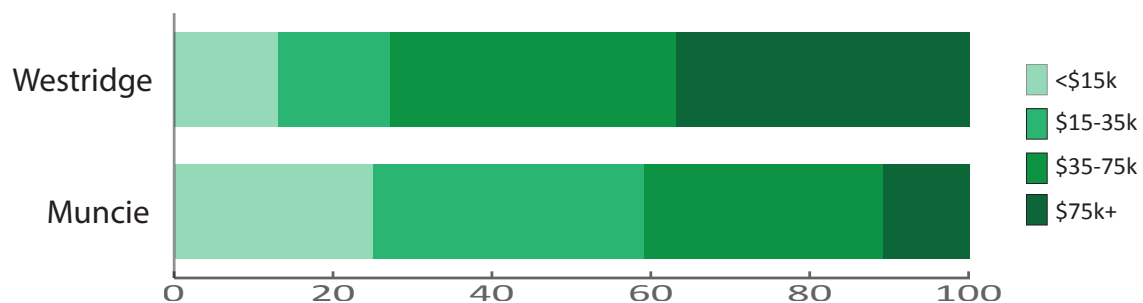
Westridge has an above average neighborhood character score, with high-quality, well-maintained building stock. Nearly 40 percent of buildings have high or landmark character, while a scant 4 percent have low character. Construction quality and condition are both very high. A National Register historic district includes 31 percent of Westridge's properties, but no design guidelines exist to preserve the district's character. The neighborhood does not have any public space or public art, which reflects its exclusively residential use.

↓ WALKABILITY

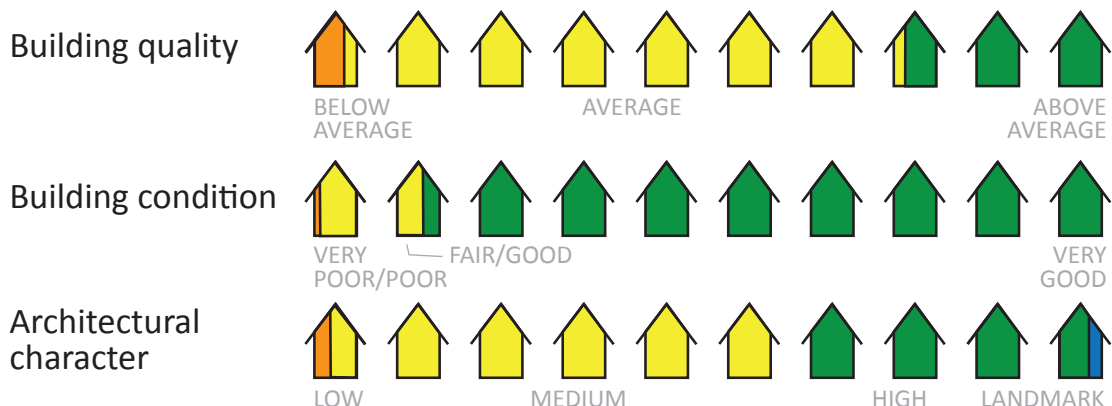
Westridge has a low walkability score, with some amenities close by but poor provisions for pedestrians and cyclists. It is close to schools and has good access to public transportation. Though no community center or neighborhood business district is located nearby, over 80 percent of properties are within a half-mile of another public facility such as a fire station, police station, library, museum, or park. Traffic volume is relatively low—the average daily traffic count (ADT) in Westridge is just 72 percent of the citywide average. But citizens rated only 13 percent of streets in the neighborhood as bike-friendly. Furthermore, only 0.3 feet of sidewalk exists for every linear foot of road. This means that basic infrastructure to make walking safe and pleasant is missing.

↑ FISCAL

Westridge has a high fiscal score, with high-value built infrastructure that remains strong. The property value per acre in Westridge is close to \$320,000, the highest of the five neighborhoods and more than four times that of Muncie. Out of



▲ Economic integration, as shown by household median income



the eight building permits issued in the past two years, none was for demolition.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Westridge has an average economic opportunity score, reflecting the neighborhood's prosperity but also its exclusively residential uses. The aggregated household income is very high—just over \$22.8 million. The local unemployment rate is notably low, with a rate half that of the city: 8.3 percent compared to a citywide unemployment rate of 17.4 percent, even with one in four Westridge residents at retirement age (over 65). Since Westridge is a completely residential neighborhood, there is no neighborhood business district, no employers within neighborhood boundaries (though Ball State is immediately adjacent), and no business association.

ENGAGEMENT

Westridge has an average engagement score, with some neighborhood civic activity but few to no identified resources nearby for seniors and youth. The Westridge Neighborhood Association has a large membership (55 people) with two annual meetings and bimonthly board meetings. The neighborhood's engagement score is not above average because no senior or youth organizations were identified within a quarter-mile of the neighborhood.

ENVIRONMENT

Westridge has an average environmental score, with some natural assets and a very low noise level. None of the neighborhood is in a floodplain, and 1.1 trees per acre were recorded. Westridge's most notable environmental score was with noise: the average noise level across the neighborhood was 5.8 decibels, a fraction of the limit for HUD's "acceptable" noise level.

NEIGHBORHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS

Westridge was examined as a local benchmark, with a relatively stable population and healthy real estate market. Thus, no recommendations are provided for the neighborhood.

The neighborhood's health was reflected across most of ReLocal's eight categories. The real estate market is strong, with very few vacant buildings, only one vacant parcel, and no tax-delinquent or foreclosed properties. Many long-term residents, high homeownership rates, and low crime rates make the neighborhood exceptionally stable. The built environment contains high-quality, well-maintained buildings with a high level of architectural character. The neighborhood is close to schools and public transit, with low traffic volume, though it could have more sidewalks, bike-friendly streets, and closer proximity to community centers and a neighborhood business district. Westridge's fiscal score is high due to very high property value per acre, high aggregated household income, and high purchasing power.

Westridge is not perfect: it could be more walkable and more accessible to households with diverse incomes. However, these qualities are simply the way the neighborhood is.

Strategies for Vacant Properties

This section offers strategies and tools to help local decisionmakers and advocates evaluate how to best utilize vacant properties as part of a neighborhood-level strategy. An array of recommendations exists for each vacant building or lot, depending on a number of factors. Taken cumulatively, they will help effectively direct available resources and enable neighborhoods to become more stable, vibrant, and sustainable.

Strategies and tools are tailored to fit each building's construction quality, condition, and architectural character, but they rely most heavily on the neighborhood context and direction discussed in section 4. What happens to a vacant lot or vacant building—demolition, stabilization and mothballing, rehabilitation, or moving—should be aligned with a sustainable long-range plan for the neighborhood. In some neighborhoods, the array of strategies presented here will help preserve residential areas that people will want to live in and return to: stabilization and rehabilitation of existing buildings, infill development, small-scale green spaces. In other neighborhoods with falling populations, lower-quality building stock, and additional significant challenges, the strategies will support a gradual transition away from residential use and toward less dense land uses. All strategies presented here are designed to effectively use scarce public resources and raise the quality of life for current residents.

Recommended strategies vary: some are very simple, while some are complex. Some are low-budget but require political willpower or strong community support; others take more financial resources. Similarly, some tools aim to catalyze small changes, while others have more ambitious goals. Strategies for two vacant buildings on a block may differ, but both contribute to the same long-range neighborhood vision.

The full version of ReLocal offers an array of recommendations for every vacant property (buildings and vacant lots), organized by priority for retention. This approach—where several recom-

mendations are offered for each property—allows highly local decisions to be made within a strategic framework. The field test offers a sample range of recommendations for vacant buildings, but does not assign them to individual properties in the study neighborhoods.

HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR RETENTION

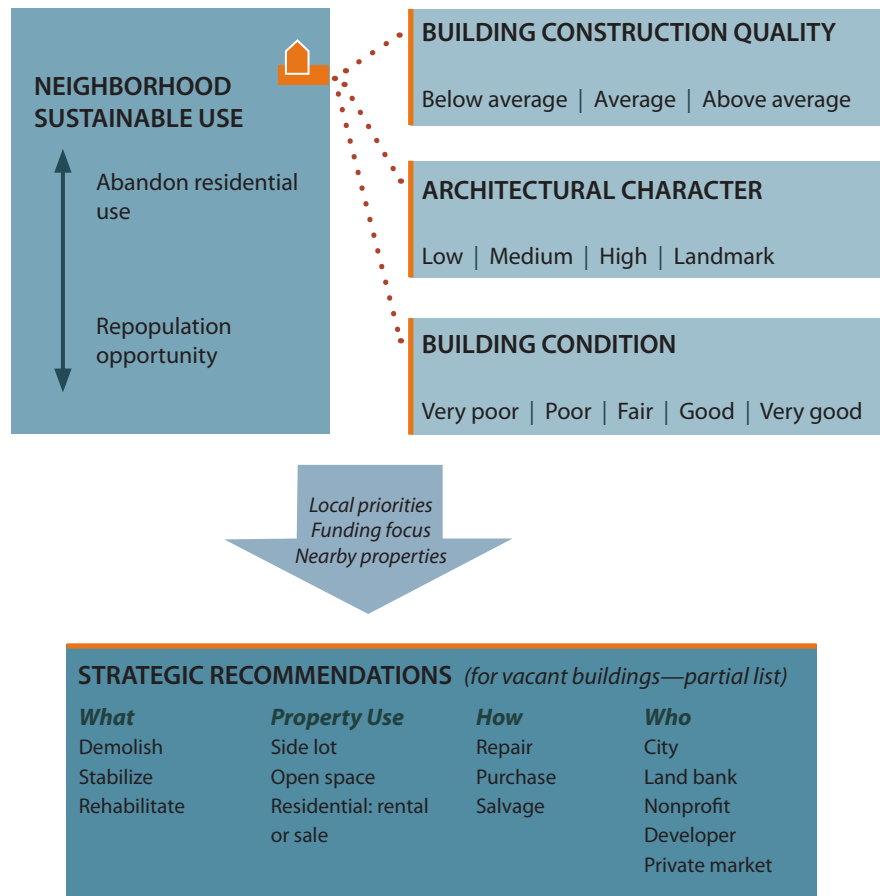
- Stabilize and move building to other land (if in neighborhood transitioning from residential use)
- Stabilize and hold property for future decision
- Stabilize and reconvey to community development corporation or developer
- Rehabilitate and reconvey to private property owner, potentially in partnership with institutional homeownership program
- Rehabilitate and reuse as rental housing
- If held by private property owner, offer assistance including marketing, low-interest loans or technical assistance for repairs, repairs or stabilization by City (with lien), or other incentives

HIGH PRIORITY FOR RETENTION

- Reconvey to nonprofit or private party as-is, with conditions
- Stabilize and move building to other land (if in neighborhood transitioning from residential use)
- Stabilize and hold property for future decision
- Stabilize and reconvey to community development corporation or developer, with conditions
- Rehabilitate and reconvey to private property owner
- Rehabilitate and reuse as rental housing

LOW PRIORITY FOR RETENTION

- Demolish and reconvey land to neighboring property owners as side lot
- Demolish and repurpose land for community use (garden, park, playground, etc.)



- Demolish and repurpose land as natural landscape
- Demolish and hold land for future decision
- Reconvey to nonprofit or private party as-is
- Stabilize and hold property (land and building) for future decision
- Stabilize and reconvey to nonprofit or private party

NO PRIORITY FOR RETENTION

- Demolish and reconvey land to neighboring property owners as side lot
- Demolish and repurpose land for community use (garden, park, playground, etc.)
- Demolish and repurpose land as natural landscape
- Demolish and hold land for future decision
- Demolish and move in other house (if in stabilizing or repopulating neighborhood)
- Demolish and use lot as site for new infill (if in stabilizing or repopulating neighborhood)

The recommendations here should be applied with attention to city and neighborhood priorities, as well as the various funding sources that help make programs and incentives possible. Private, state, and federal funds have a range of focuses: improving housing quality, encouraging homeownership, preserving historic resources, shaping transit-oriented development, providing jobs, cleaning up brownfields, supporting local food production, increasing community engagement, and improving the health of ecological systems—to name a few. This list includes diverse strategies that can take advantage of various funding sources, help partners with different priorities to align their efforts, and help to meet other needs while effectively tackling vacant properties.

NOTE: Demolition method depends on architectural character: demolish and dispose of materials, document and demolish, salvage significant components and demolish remainder, or salvage all possible and demolish remainder

APPENDIX

Acknowledgments

ReLocal Elements

Acknowledgments

This pilot project would not have been possible without assistance from dedicated and enthusiastic local partners. Bill Morgan, former Preservation Planner with the Muncie Community Development Department, invited us to work in Muncie and arranged logistics during our field visit. He also played an essential role in gathering a wealth of data, along with the able Kyle Johnson, GIS Coordinator for the Delaware County GIS Department. J.P. Hall, Regional Rep of Indiana Landmarks, provided valuable advice and on-the-ground support. Cynthia Brubaker added guidance and necessary person-power with her graduate students in Ball State's Historic Preservation and Planning master's programs. These students made the field survey possible through their time and willingness, and we extend thanks to Elizabet Biggio, Joe Clark, Kathi Corwin, Mary

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LocalData provided a superb platform for field survey, enabling our team to collect information on nearly 4,000 properties in 3 days. Thanks to Prashant Singh for in-person technical assistance, as well as Alicia Rouault and Matt Hampel.

The PlaceEconomics project team consisted of Cara Bertron, Donovan Rypkema, Courtney Williams, Briana Paxton, and Jesse Lattig.

ReLocal Elements

This section provides a detailed overview of the ReLocal tool. ReLocal is comprised of eight categories that cover a broad range of community measures: the built and natural environments, the real estate market, fiscal responsibility, and diverse quality-of-life metrics.

Real Estate

A strong real estate market is rightly linked to healthy neighborhoods. It supports consistently valued property, some (but not too much) sales activity, low vacancy levels, few foreclosures and vacancies, and markers of continued investment like building permits for new construction and rehabilitation. Though the real estate market includes hundreds of nuanced factors that vary daily, the metrics included here incorporate major factors for evaluating past disinvestment and prospective reinvestment in transitional neighborhoods.

PROPERTY VALUE CHANGES

Property value reflects many variables in the health of a neighborhood. Steady or rising property values over time indicate that homebuyers and investors feel that the neighborhood is worth investing in. This score is based on property value trends over recent years.

SALES

Sales reflect the stability and desirability of a neighborhood. A low sales volume where properties spend relatively few days on the market indicates a stable neighborhood where people are eager to buy in; conversely, a high sales volume or long time on the market point to investor flipping or a hesitancy by prospective homeowners to invest. This score is based on sales volume and time on the market. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

NEW CONSTRUCTION

New construction indicates optimism and investment in an area, as well as job creation. This score is based on construction activity (building permits) over a given period. Large redevelopment projects may be linked to a high number of demolition permits.

RENOVATION

Renovation projects signal investment and long-term owner occupancy. They also create jobs, increasing local economic activity. This score is based on rehabilitation activity (building permits) over a given period.

VACANT LAND

A high number of vacant lots signals long-term disinvestment and depopulation, and potentially a greater investment needed to make a difference. This score is based on the proportion of vacant land to developed land in the neighborhood, excluding parks and other intentional open space.

VACANT BUILDINGS

Vacant buildings are another indicator of disinvestment, depopulation, and devalued real estate. This score is based on the proportion of vacant buildings to occupied buildings.

FORECLOSURES

Foreclosures indicate a real estate market with a high number of underwater properties, where the value of the home exceeds the mortgage value, or more general economic distress. This score is based on the number of foreclosures in proportion to the total number of owner-occupied properties.

TAX DELINQUENCY

Tax delinquency is a signal of economic distress and overall disinvestment. This score is based on the number of tax-delinquent properties and amount owed.

AFFORDABILITY

This category includes housing and transit, the two largest expenses incurred by the vast majority of households. Neighborhoods that have a range of housing choices (size and cost) and are located close to neighborhood business districts or downtowns are more likely to accommodate a broader range of incomes and more diverse residents. This score is based on the Center for Neighborhood Technology's H+T Affordability Index, which is calculated from block-level Census data. By combining a 15 percent allocation for transportation with the 30 percent housing affordability standard, CNT recommends a new view of affordability that combines housing and transportation costs and consumes no more than 45 percent of household income.

DIVERSITY OF UNIT SIZE

A range of unit sizes allows a neighborhood to accommodate diverse household sizes and incomes and creates a more inclusive neighborhood. This score is based on parcel-level data on the size and type of residential buildings.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Community development corporations (CDCs) are formed to help strengthen a weak market by developing properties, revitalizing commercial corridors, and taking risks where private-sector developers are unwilling to act. This score is based on the presence of a community-based organization, as well as its level of activity and investment.

VIEWS

Properties with views—of a park, scenic natural feature, or sweeping panorama—command higher values. This property-level metric was not included in the Muncie field test because of the city's flat terrain.

Stability

Neighborhood stability plays a central role in determining whether investments will hold their value over time. An area that has experienced population decline or is rapidly changing from owner occupancy to rental housing may require interventions that are not possible given capacity. Allocating limited resources could fail to address the underlying issues or 'turn the tide.'

POPULATION CHANGE

Population change is the number of people who have left or moved to the neighborhood over the last decade. A healthy, stable neighborhood will gain more residents than it loses. Population change is scored based on the population change from 2000 to 2010.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Economic integration reflects the diversity of housing choices within a neighborhood through the range of incomes. A greater variety of housing choices will accommodate a greater range of incomes. This diversity creates a more livable environment for all residents. Economic integration is scored for each neighborhood based on whether the neighborhood reflects the income ranges of the city as a whole.

DIVERSITY

Racial and ethnic diversity points to a neighborhood that welcomes and sustains a variety of people. This type of neighborhood is likely to be more resilient in the face of external changes. Diversity is scored based on whether it reflects the demographics of the city as a whole. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

OWNER OCCUPANCY

Owner occupancy indicates a sustained financial, physical, and social investment in the neighborhood. Homeowners are more likely to make physical improvements to their homes, participate in local civic activities, and reside in the neighborhood longer. This score is based on proportion of homeowners in the neighborhood.

LONG-TERM RESIDENTS

Resident mobility is an indicator of stability, connection, and commitment to place. A lower rate of resident mobility means that residents stay in the neighborhood longer, contributing to lower turnover rates and higher feelings of neighborhood ownership. This score is based on the proportion of residents who have lived in the neighborhood longer than nine years as of 2013.

SIGNAL POPULATION TRENDS

A sharp increase in certain demographics, or “signal populations,” may signal the beginning of a larger neighborhood trend. This may be true even if the overall neighborhood population is decreasing. This score is based on neighborhood-level data compared with city-level data.

DEMOLITION PERMITS

Demolition permits measures the number of buildings that have been demolished in the neighborhood over a given period of time. Many demolition permits point to a high degree of change in the neighborhood as more familiar built fabric is removed. Demolition is scored based on number of demolition permits as a percentage of all building permits in the neighborhood. When the number of demolition permits is close to the number of building permits over the same period—that is, demolition is associated with redevelopment—demolition scores are not treated as a negative.

CRIME

Crime rates affect the actual and perceived quality of a neighborhood. High crime rates discourage investment and improvements, make the neighborhood less attractive to prospective residents, and may even cause current residents to leave. This score is based on reported crime rates in recent years.

FIRE CALLS

Building fires may be the result of outdated or poorly built facilities (such as poor wiring), arson, or simply accident. A high number of building fires indicates a high level of disinvestment and/or criminal activity. This score is based on fire calls linked to building fires in recent years.

Neighborhood Character

Neighborhood character contributes to a sense of place. It helps distinguish one neighborhood from another through obvious and subtle differences in mostly physical elements: street width and layout, street furniture, street trees, building size and scale, building style, building age. Many of these factors are measured in other categories. This category captures the indicators relating to a neighborhood’s buildings and history, as told through the built environment.

BUILDING QUALITY

The construction quality of building stock helps determine how soon additional private or public investments will be needed. Higher-quality building stock holds its value longer—an important factor in areas prone to disinvestment. This score is based on field surveys or city records.

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

Architectural character adds personality and charm to a neighborhood, whether through gingerbread houses swagged with Victorian trim, modest workers’ cottages, glassy mid-century houses, or a combination of different architectural styles in the same neighborhood. This score is based on field surveys.

BUILDING CONDITION

Building condition indicates the regularity and quality of maintenance. This score is based on field surveys.

NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS

The National Register of Historic Places is a record of places in the U.S. with local, state, or national importance, or significance. A historic district listed in the National Register is a collection of buildings or landscape features that are significant for the same reason, and which convey their significance (integrity) to residents and visitors. Historic districts indicate a well-preserved sense of history and place. This score is based on the existence of one or more National Register-listed historic districts and the proportion of neighborhood buildings included in their boundaries.

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Local historic districts also denote collections of buildings or landscape features that are locally significant and have sufficient integrity to convey their significance. Local districts also carry the distinction of being regulated by a review board of local citizens, which ensures that publicly visible changes to private or public property are in keeping with the character of the district. This score is based on the existence of one or more local historic districts and the proportion of neighborhood buildings included in their boundaries; it is weighted more heavily than National Register historic districts because of the local review board's regulatory oversight powers.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines in a neighborhood assist property owners in making improvements in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. They ensure consistency, and reflect local and/or municipal investment in retaining a local sense of place. This score is based on the existence and consistent application of design guidelines.

PUBLIC ART

Though public art is not essential for daily life, it adds a cultural dimension to daily life, as it is open to everyone free of charge. This score is based on City lists of formally recognized public art, if available, as well as field surveys.

MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC SPACES

Public spaces are evidence of historical planning priorities. Their presence and maintenance demonstrates the value that the municipal government and citizens place on these public spaces for socializing and recreation. This score is based on field surveys.

Walkability

Homebuyers and renters in urban areas increasingly value proximity to jobs, schools, shopping, and public assets as a contributor to quality of life. A walkable neighborhood allows people to access goods and services without driving and is also supported by public health advocates who seek to incorporate more exercise in daily activities. Reinvesting in walkable neighborhoods with nearby amenities is a long-term approach to building stronger, more sustainable, more livable communities. Walkability scores are calculated according to the proportion of buildings and occupied buildings within a given distance of a community amenity (generally one half-mile).

STREET GRID

A street network with short blocks provides more options and shorter routes between points. A higher number of visually interesting routes means that walking or cycling is more pleasant, and raises the likelihood of people choosing an alternative (non-driving) modes of transportation.

SIDEWALKABILITY INDEX

Sidewalks play an essential role in measuring walkability. They create a separate space for pedestrians and increase perceived and actual safety. Sidewalks are especially critical for those with limited mobility or higher vulnerability such as people with disabilities, seniors, and children; but they are important for everyone. This score is based on the proportion of sidewalks to roads in a neighborhood.

SIDEWALK CONDITION

Sidewalk condition also affects the walkability of an area, as well as its accessibility for community members with limited mobility. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to lack of recent data.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Proximity to public transportation allows residents to access other areas of the city and may bring in business customers from other neighborhoods. Good access to a variety of transit options also contributes to a more equitable community,

where residents without cars are not at a disadvantage in moving around the city. This score is based on number and proximity of public transportation routes.

BIKE ROUTES

Safe bike routes allow cyclists to ride to work, school, and errands, or for pleasure without concerns about safety. Bike routes could include streets with on-street bike lanes, sharrows, or separated bike lanes; as well as off-street pathways. This score measures the length of bike-friendly street segments as determined by a municipality, advocacy group, or citizen poll.

WALKING TRAILS

Walking trails provide pedestrians and sometimes cyclists with navigation options. By separating people from fast-moving cars that emit pollution and noise, these networks increase safety and enhance the experience of walking or cycling. This factor measures the length of bike path and walking trail segments.

TRAFFIC

Roads that carry higher volumes of traffic are likely less pleasant to walk or bike on, and thus discourage alternative modes of transportation. This score is based on the average and peak traffic counts on selected roads in the neighborhood.

SCHOOLS

An operating school is a significant neighborhood asset. It allows children and parents to walk or bike to school and creates a potential hub for community volunteer investment. A school building that is no longer in educational use remains a significant asset that can be reused for a variety of community-oriented uses, from housing to commercial/office space to culture.

NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DISTRICT

A healthy business district in the neighborhood provides basic goods and services to residents. This is a major asset in a walkable neighborhood. Even a struggling business district holds the potential to meet basic neighborhood needs with targeted, committed investment.

PROXIMITY TO DOWNTOWN

Downtown is typically a hub of jobs, transportation, culture, and entertainment. Proximity to these amenities—or the potential for these amenities, in some places—is a strength for residential neighborhoods. Additionally, efforts to make downtowns more vibrant can “spill over” with benefits to other nearby neighborhoods.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Public facilities include libraries, schools, community centers, recreation centers, and parks - spaces designed and designated for public use. Proximity to these facilities allows neighborhood residents to not drive and opens access to people who do not drive because of income, disability, or age (youth and seniors). This score sums up the number and proximity of public facilities in and around the neighborhood.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Proximity to medical services allows car-less residents, particularly seniors, to access important health services and generates local jobs. This score is based on the presence and proximity of medical services in and around the neighborhood.

WALK SCORE

Walk Score is a scoring system developed by the Walk Score company that assigns scores to given places based on their proximity to businesses, schools, parks, transit, entertainment, and other common destinations. A higher Walk Score indicates that the place is more walkable. For ReLocal, Walk Score is used as a check and not included in the overall Walkability score.

Fiscal

Fiscal responsibility is important for the long-term sustainability of any municipality, and especially for cities and towns that are already struggling because of long-term population loss and disinvestment. These indicators measure the costs and contributions of neighborhood elements, with the goal of enabling local governments to capitalize on existing assets and spend new funds conservatively and effectively.

PROPERTY VALUE PER ACRE

Property value evaluates the worth of land and buildings in a neighborhood according to estimated or actual market value. This score is based on property value per acre, according to the county assessor's office.

PROPERTY TAX GENERATION

Property taxes provide a significant amount of revenue to local government coffers. Looking at what areas generate property taxes recognizes that importance by aggregating and averaging property taxes in the neighborhood by area. This score is based on property taxes collected per acre.

SALES TAX GENERATION

Sales taxes also contribute to local government revenue. This score is based on sales taxes collected per acre.

DENSITY

Areas where more people live and work concentrates activity and requires less public investment in infrastructure, transportation, public spaces, and other public goods. This score is based on the concentration of residents per acre. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

DENSITY POTENTIAL

Density potential measures how many additional residents could fit in a neighborhood if current development patterns replace vacant residential properties. Though less important than current density, density potential looks to the future in considering what a neighborhood might look like with less vacancy and more infill development.

This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

VALUE OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Public infrastructure represents past investments in the built environment for the public good, sometimes through generations. True fiscal responsibility requires that municipalities seriously examine the benefits of capitalizing on these long-term investments via incremental maintenance expenditures. The score is based on the replacement costs of various types of infrastructure. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEPRECIATION

This indicator acknowledges that public infrastructure no longer holds its full value due to wear and tear over time and occasional obsolescence. The score is based on the approximate depreciation rates and current values of existing infrastructure. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

DEMOLITION TO REHABILITATION RATIO

Demolition lowers property value by removing—or subtracting—the value of improvements from the overall value of the property. When demolition outpaces rehabilitation in a neighborhood, it signals a high level of disinvestment unmatched by reinvestment.

INTERVENTION TOOLS AVAILABLE

Diverse tools exist for improving a community: sparking revitalization, encouraging rehabilitation and reuse, improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities, creating affordable housing, and many more. This score is based on the availability of intervention tools at all levels, from local to national.

USE OF INTERVENTION TOOLS

Intervention tools are of little value if they are not employed. This score is based on how frequently and effectively available intervention tools are used in a given neighborhood, with a focus on the municipal government's use of the tools. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

Economic Opportunity

Economic activity contributes to neighborhood strength and sustainability by generating jobs and services to serve residents and perhaps attract visitors. A thriving business district, employment centers, and at-home businesses generate financial revenue for business owners and workers, as well as tax revenue for local and state governments. Economic opportunities for entrepreneurs also help determine residents' ability to build wealth.

AGGREGATE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household income indicates current prosperity and trends over time. This score is based on household income compared to that of the city as a whole.

AGGREGATE PURCHASING POWER

Aggregate purchasing power measures the cumulative income of all households in the neighborhood. Higher purchasing power means more opportunities for businesses, and thus more local jobs. This is scored relative to other neighborhoods in the city.

PURCHASING POWER PER ACRE

Purchasing power per acre is a geographically-based measure of aggregated household income, which reflects the density of households in a neighborhood. This score is based on purchasing power per acre in the neighborhood compared to the city as a whole.

EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

An employment center is a cluster of employers who provide job opportunities for locals and others. This score is based on the number and accessibility of jobs in employment centers, if applicable.

NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DISTRICT

Small businesses in a neighborhood business district offer accessible goods and services, provide local jobs, and generate income and sales taxes. This score reflects the number of buildings that contribute to neighborhood business districts.

BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

A business or merchants association promotes and sometimes recruits local businesses, helping to strengthen a neighborhood business district. This score is based on the presence and level of activity of a business or merchants association.

AT-HOME BUSINESSES

Entrepreneurs working from home provide a level of economic and intellectual capital that helps energize a neighborhood and increase a city's tax base. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to lack of data.

HOUSEHOLDS WITH HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

High-speed internet provides access to communication, education, and commerce. A high number of households with high-speed internet points to increased opportunities for neighborhood residents. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to lack of data.

IMMIGRANT IN-MIGRATION

In-migration reflects perceptions of economic and other opportunities as people move into and invest in a neighborhood. In particular, immigrants serve as a bellwether of economic development, as they are more likely to start new businesses. This score is based on the rates of in-migrants from other countries in the past 5 years. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to very small immigration figures with a high margin of error.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

The unemployment rate is an indicator of the level of economic activity and opportunity in and around a neighborhood. This score is based on the neighborhood unemployment rate compared to that of the city as a whole.

Engagement

Though public engagement is intangible, it has strong implications for the social and physical health of a neighborhood. A healthy neighborhood holds people who believe that they can make a difference, who gather to discuss problems and opportunities, and who take ownership of public spaces. Some indicators for engagement are non-physical, such as voter registration; others are represented by a building or space.

CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Neighborhood associations and block groups are a fundamental part of shaping city policy at the grassroots level. This score is based on the existence of an active neighborhood association or block groups, as judged through online activity, conversations with City staff, and an interview with the group leader, if possible.

SENIOR ORGANIZATIONS

Senior organizations provide a way for seniors to socialize with each other and give back to the broader community. This type of organization improves the quality of life for senior residents and can serve as a hub for community service activities. This score is based on the existence of one or more active senior organizations and weighted according to the number of seniors (65 years and older) living in the neighborhood.

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Youth organizations focus on engaging young people in community activities. This score is based on the existence of one or more active youth organizations and weighted according to the proportion of young people living in the neighborhood.

THIRD PLACES

Third places are informal community gathering places such as coffee shops, bookstores, or bars. They provide safe places for people to casually meet and interact with friends, neighbors, and strangers. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration signals that citizens are engaged and committed at a very basic level. This score is based on the proportion of eligible registered voters in the neighborhood. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to inconsistent data.

VOTER PARTICIPATION

Voter participation also reflects community members' civic engagement. It is based on the voter participation rate over the past five years. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to inconsistent data.

Environment

Environmental factors constitute a broad category, reflecting past land uses, as with brownfields; natural resources such as trees and water; and current quality-of-life and health concerns such as noise, air, and odor pollution. Judicious long-term investments prioritize healthy places where people want to live, work, play, and invest.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

Neighborhood parks provide a place for community members of all ages to play, relax, and socialize. This score is based on the proportion of park land to non-park land in the neighborhood, as well as the geographic accessibility/location of parks.

TOPOGRAPHY

Steep topography can be an asset in view properties, but it is a serious environmental concern. Buildings constructed on steep hillsides may cause erosion, eventually reduce water quality, and fall victim to sliding. This is a yes/no score based on the proportion of land at a non-buildable slope. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to the city's flat terrain.

EMBODIED ENERGY

Embodied energy reflects past investments in time, physical labor, and materials. Reinvesting in places with a high amount of embodied energy saves time and money now, and also capitalizes on past expenditures. This score provides an estimated aggregate of the embodied energy in a neighborhood's buildings.

TREE COVER

Trees along public rights-of-way, in parks, and on private property add a sense of place, as well as more tangible benefits such as shade, aesthetic pleasure, and reduction of the urban heat island effect. A higher proportion of tree cover in a neighborhood results in a higher score.

WATER

Water can provide wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and significant ecological benefits.

This score is based on the presence and accessibility of a body of water.

FLOODPLAINS

Floodplains hold excess stormwater and allow it to gradually seep into the ground, recharging water sources and helping to reduce flooding. This score is based on the amount of developed land that falls in a floodplain.

BROWNFIELDS

Brownfields are sites that have, in the past, held industrial uses that affect the ability of the property to be used for other uses. Brownfields may require cleanup to federal standards as part of redevelopment, though some federal funds are designated for planning and remediation. They may be weighted as an opportunity for new development or a liability inhibiting other new development and lowering property values, depending on community concerns, public and private impetus, and available funding. This score is based on the proportion of brownfields land to other land in the neighborhood and may be negative. This metric was not included in the Muncie field test due to lack of local data.

AIR/ODOR POLLUTION

Air pollution from traffic or industry affects resident health, particularly that of vulnerable populations such as children and seniors. This score is based on air quality levels and may be negative.

NOISE

Noise pollution affects quality of life, particularly for residential properties. If loud enough, it can disrupt sleep and daytime activities. For the Muncie field test, noise pollution was calculated based on proximity to major roads and railroad tracks.

GRAFFITI

Graffiti creates and encourages the impression that a place is not actively watched or cared for. This score reflects the amount of graffiti noted in windshield surveys.

