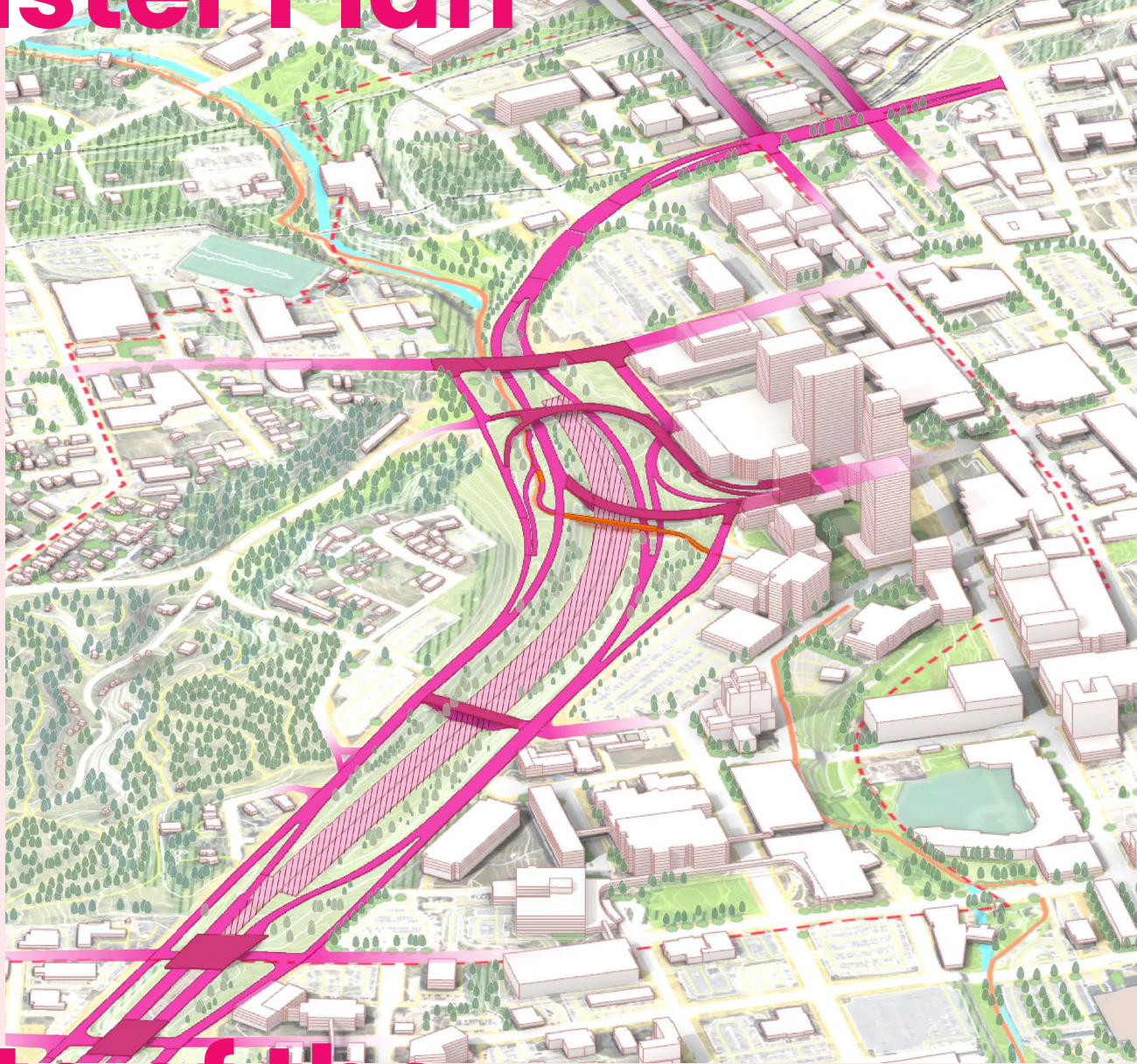


# Akron Innerbelt Master Plan



PART I

## State of the Planning Area

DRAFT

MARCH 2025



# Innerbelt Master Plan: State of the Planning Area

The State of the Planning Area Report is first among a series of products that will come out of the Innerbelt Master Plan process. The Report analyzes and documents key conditions and trends in and around the former Innerbelt land. It’s intended to help the community, the City, and the planning team establish a shared understanding of the planning area before we begin to reimagine its future.

## How Will This Report Guide the Master Plan Process?

**Documenting the Baseline:** the Report documents conditions in the Innerbelt planning area at the start of the Master Plan process. As the Master Plan is developed and implemented and as the planning area evolves in the coming years, this baseline documentation helps us to evaluate “are we moving in the right direction?”

**Uncover Needs and Challenges:** the Report combines data analysis and community voices to reveal key challenges and community needs that the Master Plan should address.

**Point to New Opportunities:** the Report also reveals potential opportunities in the planning area and in the wider city of Akron that the Master Plan can capitalize on.

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# The Innerbelt Planning Area Overview

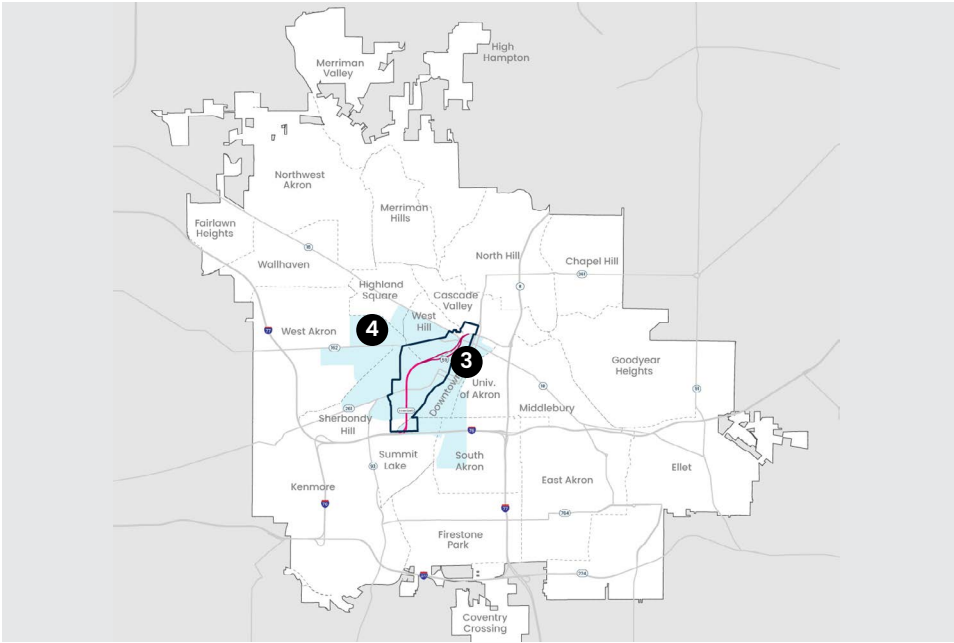
The Innerbelt Master Plan encompasses multiple geographic scales.

**The (Decommissioned Innerbelt) Site:** the northern portion of the Innerbelt was decommissioned as a highway in 2016 and is now under City of Akron control. This 30-acre section of the Innerbelt was chosen as the initial focus for redevelopment because it was already reaching the end of its lifespan, and because its adjacency to downtown makes it mostly likely to attract the resources needed for redevelopment.

**The Study Area:** further out from the Site, we have defined a “Study Area” that encompasses the communities most directly affected by the Innerbelt, including parts of downtown Akron and the neighborhoods of Summit Lake, Sherbondy Hill, West Akron, and West Hill. The Study Area is further

divided into a North and a South Study Area, indicating not a difference of importance, but rather a difference of timescale: the City of Akron controls the decommissioned portion of the Innerbelt in the North Study Area and is in a position to take quicker action there, while the still-active portion of the Innerbelt in the South Sub-area requires more long-range thinking.

**The Impact Area:** We recognize that the impact of the Innerbelt went far beyond the Study Area itself. To measure the broader socioeconomic implications of the project, we have defined an “Impact Area”, which is broader than the Study Area. The Impact Area aligns with the U.S. Census Bureau boundaries, allowing us to analyze and measure the impact of the Master Plan using rigorous data.



## INNERBELT PLANNING AREA WITHIN THE CITY OF AKRON

### 1 Decommissioned Innerbelt

The northern portion of the Innerbelt was decommissioned in 2016 and is under City of Akron control. This 30-acre section of the Innerbelt was chosen as the initial focus for redevelopment because it was already reaching the end of its lifespan, and because its adjacency to downtown makes it mostly likely to attract the resources needed for redevelopment.

### 2 Innerbelt (Active Portion)

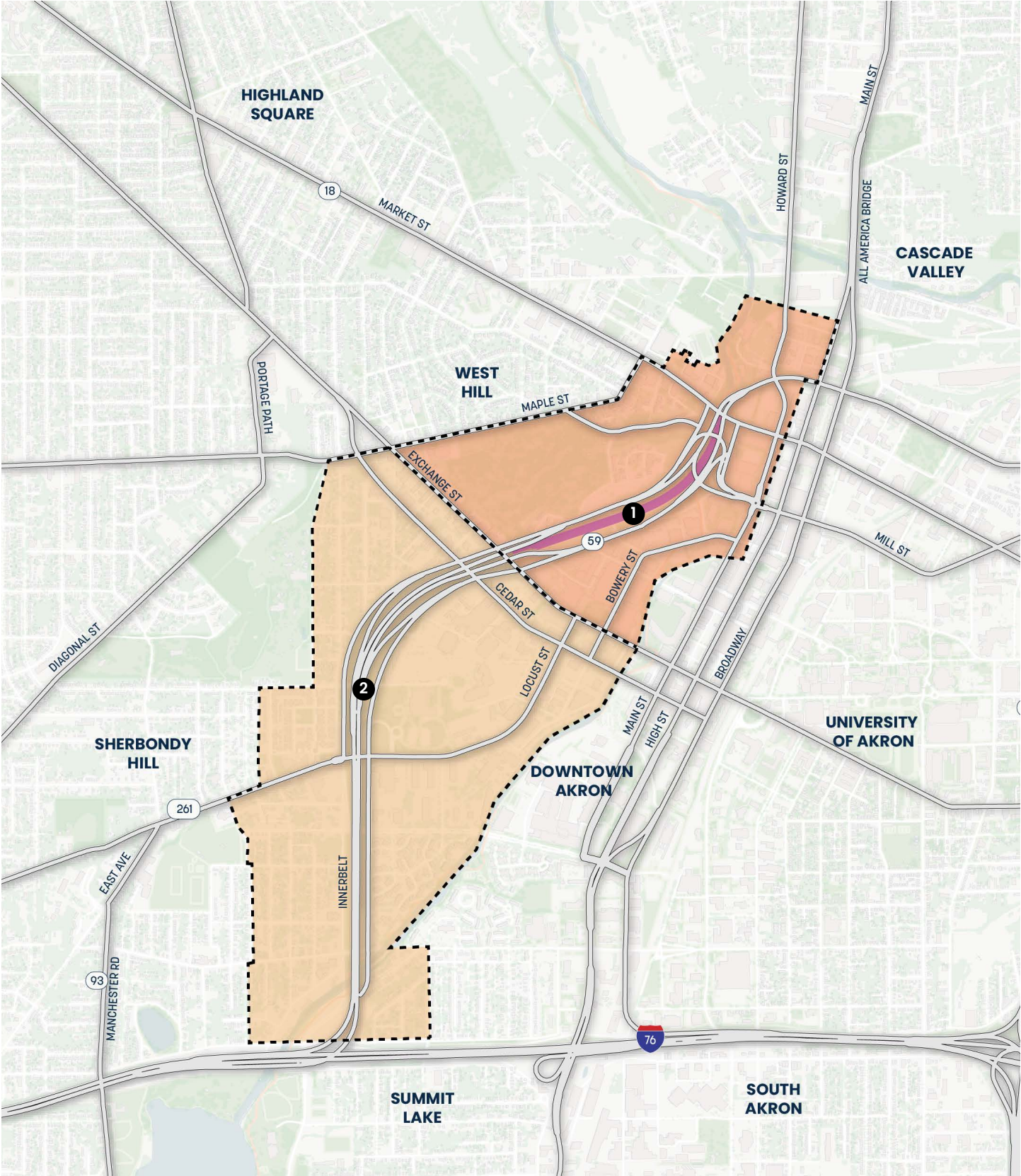
South of W Exchange St, the Innerbelt remains an active highway (SR-59) not directly under City of Akron control. The Master Plan will address this portion of the Innerbelt as well, but changes will likely take much longer to materialize.

### 3 Study Area

The Study Area encompasses North and South Study Area. This reflects the fact that the northern portion of the Innerbelt, in the North Study Area, has been fully decommissioned and is under the City’s direct control, which enables quicker action and demands more detailed planning.

### 4 Impact Area

The Impact Area is the area for which we collect socioeconomic data to measure the broader implications of the Innerbelt Master Plan. This area aligns with the U.S. Census Bureau boundaries, enabling more rigorous data measurement.

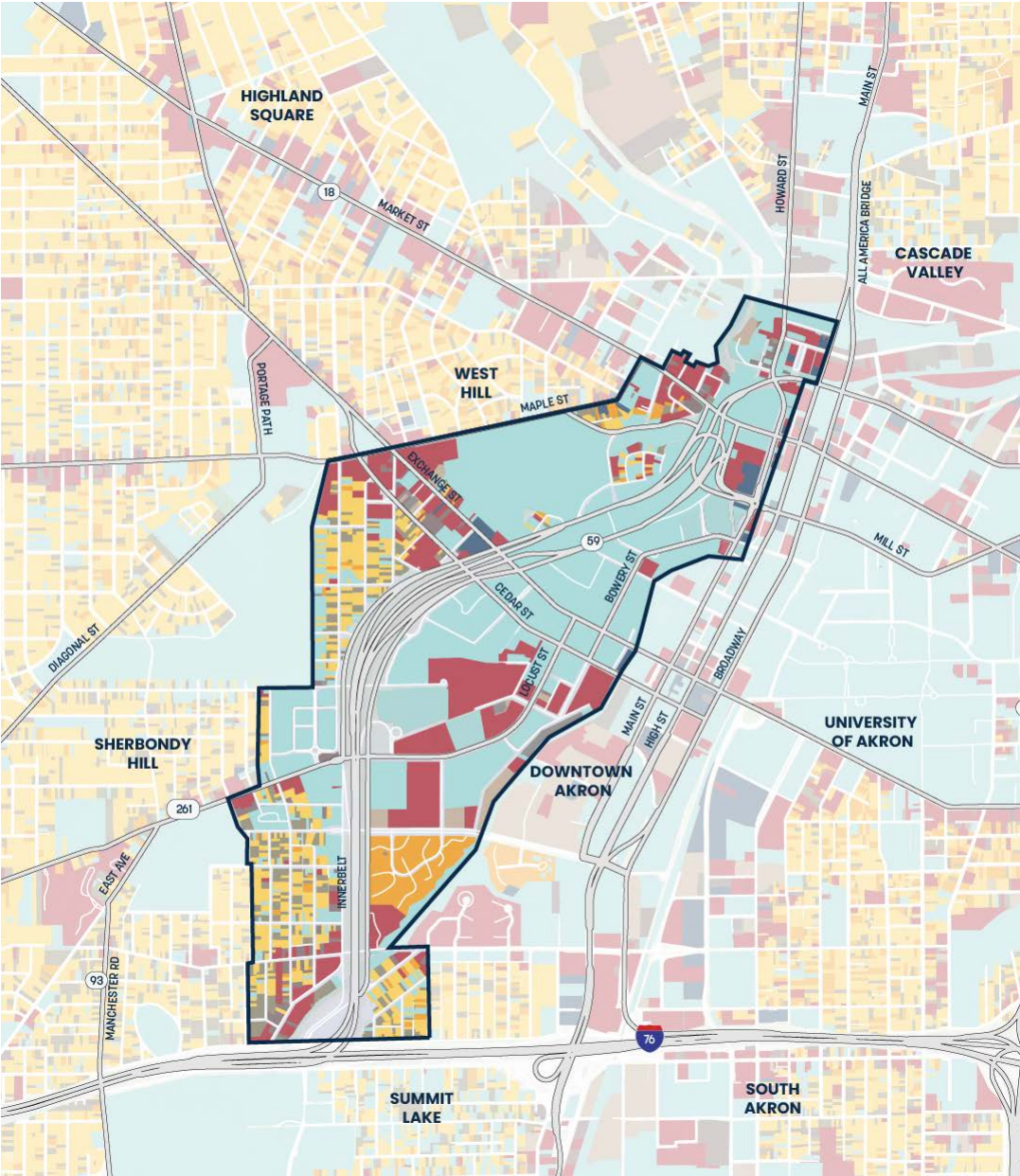




# Study Area Land Use

The Study Area includes diverse parts of Akron when it comes to land use and urban character. To the west, the Innerbelt abuts the largely residential neighborhoods of West Akron and Sherbondy Hill. To the east, Downtown Akron is predominantly

commercial and institutional, a development pattern that reflects both the legacies of an early 20th century downtown and post-war urban renewal.

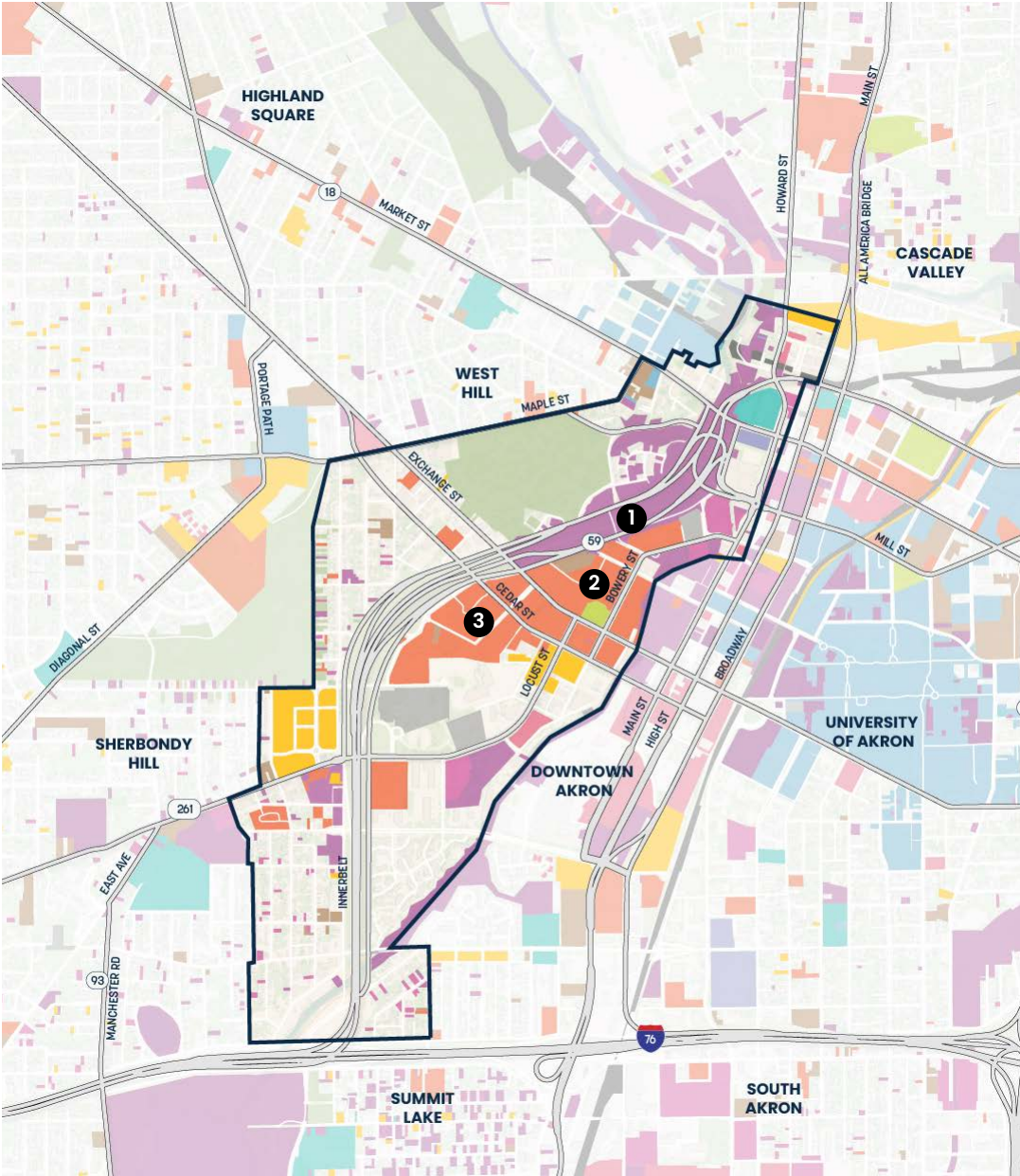


- LAND USE**
- Single Family Housing
  - Multi Family Housing
  - Other Housing
  - Commercial
  - Office
  - Industrial
  - Exempt Parcels
  - Vacant

# Ownership & Control

Understanding land ownership of the former Innerbelt site is significant, because ownership equals control and determines how quickly and easily changes can happen.

A large portion of the northern, decommissioned portion of the former Innerbelt site is under City of Akron ownership. This land, totaling about 30 acres, is at the heart of the Primary Study Area. The still-active portion of the Innerbelt is owned by the Ohio Department of Transportation. There are other significant owners abutting the Innerbelt site, including major institutions such as Cleveland Clinic Akron General Hospital, Akron Children's Hospital, and Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank.



- LAND OWNERSHIP**
- Local Government**
- City of Akron
  - Summit County
  - Akron Housing Authority
  - Board of Education
- State & Federal Government**
- State of Ohio
  - Federal Government
- Other**
- Private Education
  - Charities & Hospitals
  - Places of Worship
  - Tax Abatement
  - Utilities
  - Railroad
  - Public Open Space
  - Private Open Space
- Major Landowners**
- 1 City-owned Portion of the (Decommissioned) Innerbelt
  - 2 Akron Children's Hospital
  - 3 Cleveland Clinic Akron General Hospital



# Urban Character

The diverse collection of land uses, ownership, and activities within the study area is reflected in the varied urban design and architectural characteristics – the scale and orientation of streets, blocks,

and buildings. Some of these areas are historic, while others are relatively new. All have been shaped by the impact of the Innerbelt.



### URBAN “CHARACTER ZONES” AROUND THE INNERBELT

#### Downtown Areas

- 1 Northside
- 2 Civic Core
- 3 Bowery / Lock 3
- 4 Southside

#### Opportunity Park Areas

- 5 Hospitals
- 6 Light Industry

#### Neighborhoods

- 7 West Hill
- 8 Glendale Area
- 9 Sherbondy Hill
- 10 Summit Lake

East of the Innerbelt, different types of historic fabric and adaptive reuse defines Downtown Akron.



### 1 Northside: A Re-energized Cultural District

Northside is an active district that serves as a destination for dining, entertainment and cultural activities. Housing and hotel uses here help to support a lively district. This is the location of Akron-favorite Luigi’s Restaurant – a draw for many. As a stop along the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, this area serves as an entry point to downtown. Railroad tracks and the 5-lane Martin Luther King Boulevard create a physical barrier between Northside and Downtown.



### 2 Downtown: A Civic Core

Akron’s civic core includes a concentration of business and institutional uses, interspersed with public spaces. This area has the opportunity to support greater activity on a day-to-day basis than it currently does. The city’s public library is a valued destination, and considerable effort has been made to help the South Main Street and Mill Street intersection feel more like a destination and less like the entrance to a highway on/off ramp as it connects with the Innerbelt to the west.



### 3 Bowery / Lock 3: Regional Entertainment Destination

Bowery / Lock 3 boasts a range of cultural, entertainment and recreational activities. While restaurants, the Civic Theater and Canal Park stadium animate the street edge, a series of parks and activated public spaces exist along the canal behind these buildings. New investments in Lock 3 help to connect these spaces more directly to the street.



### 4 Southside: Innovation District

Farther south along Main Street, the urban fabric is defined by a number of office and entrepreneurial spaces, like Bounce Innovation Hub and the Akron Makerspace, housed in old industrial and warehouse buildings.



Within the area that was designated as the Opportunity Park Renewal Zone, south of Downtown and East of the Innerbelt, the urban fabric is defined by larger more disconnected parcels and institutional campuses.



**Hospital District: Large Institutional Campuses**

Downtown’s hospital district houses Akron Children’s Medical Center and the Akron campus of The Cleveland Clinic as well as supportive social and medical offices. The manner in which these facilities have expanded and developed over time and the paired one-way streets of West Exchange and West Cedar limit the opportunity for a sense of arrival at either of the large institutions.



**Industrial Area**

This area is defined by large industrial parcels with limited access and a disconnected street grid. This area was developed as part of the Opportunity Park Renewal Area, and the scars of urban renewal are present in the remaining stub of Wooster Avenue, once a thriving main street.

The residential neighborhoods outside of the Innerbelt retain the tightly knit historic fabric. However, the thriving main street corridors that connected them to Downtown have, in many ways been impacted by the Innerbelt.



**West Hill Gateway**

There is a strong residential component to this neighborhood, with many historic houses. However, parking lots, car dealerships and larger retail spaces contribute to this area feeling like more of a pass-through than a gateway. The intersection of Maple Street and East Market Street hints at the neighborhood uses tucked behind the main street, including churches and schools. The West Hill mural and Glendale Cemetery entrance provide a glimpse of neighborhood pride and history. The historic Diamond Grill is a neighborhood institution; a remnant of the past urban fabric in a sea of surface parking.



**Glendale Cemetery: A Historic Pocket**

Glendale Cemetery is a green respite between downtown and residential neighborhoods to the northwest. The topography around the Cemetery creates a small, disconnected pocket of historic urban fabric nestled between the Glendale Steps and the former Innerbelt site.



**Sherbondy Hill**

A residential neighborhood that was historically anchored by Wooster Avenue. Now named Vernon Odom Boulevard, this street remains a key commercial corridor. It is designated as a Great Streets District and is a focus of the City’s economic development team.



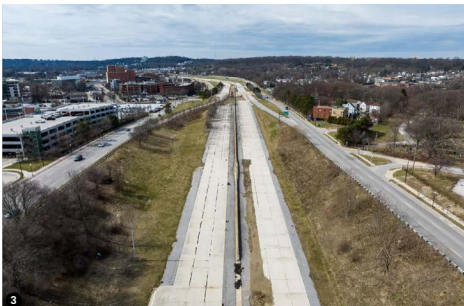
**Summit Lake**

This historic residential neighborhood lies adjacent to Summit Lake, the highest point on the Ohio & Erie Canal, but was fragmented and cut off from Downtown by the interchange between I-76 and the Innerbelt.



# Understanding the Former Innerbelt Land

The decommissioned portion of the Innerbelt, totalling 30 acres and running from West Market Street to West Exchange Street, is controlled by the City of Akron. It represents the most immediate opportunity for large-scale physical intervention. Here, we undertake a detailed examination of its physical conditions.



### KEY MOMENTS ALONG THE INNERBELT

#### 1 Market Street Overpass

The decommissioned Innerbelt crosses under Market St, slopes upwards and curves to become Martin Luther King Boulevard

#### 2 Mill Street Ramps

A number of high-speed roads at different levels inhibit pedestrian access

#### 3 View of Decomised Section

Much of the decommissioned Innerbelt sits in a trough, with steep slopes on either side presenting challenges for access

#### 4 Towpath Trail Bridge

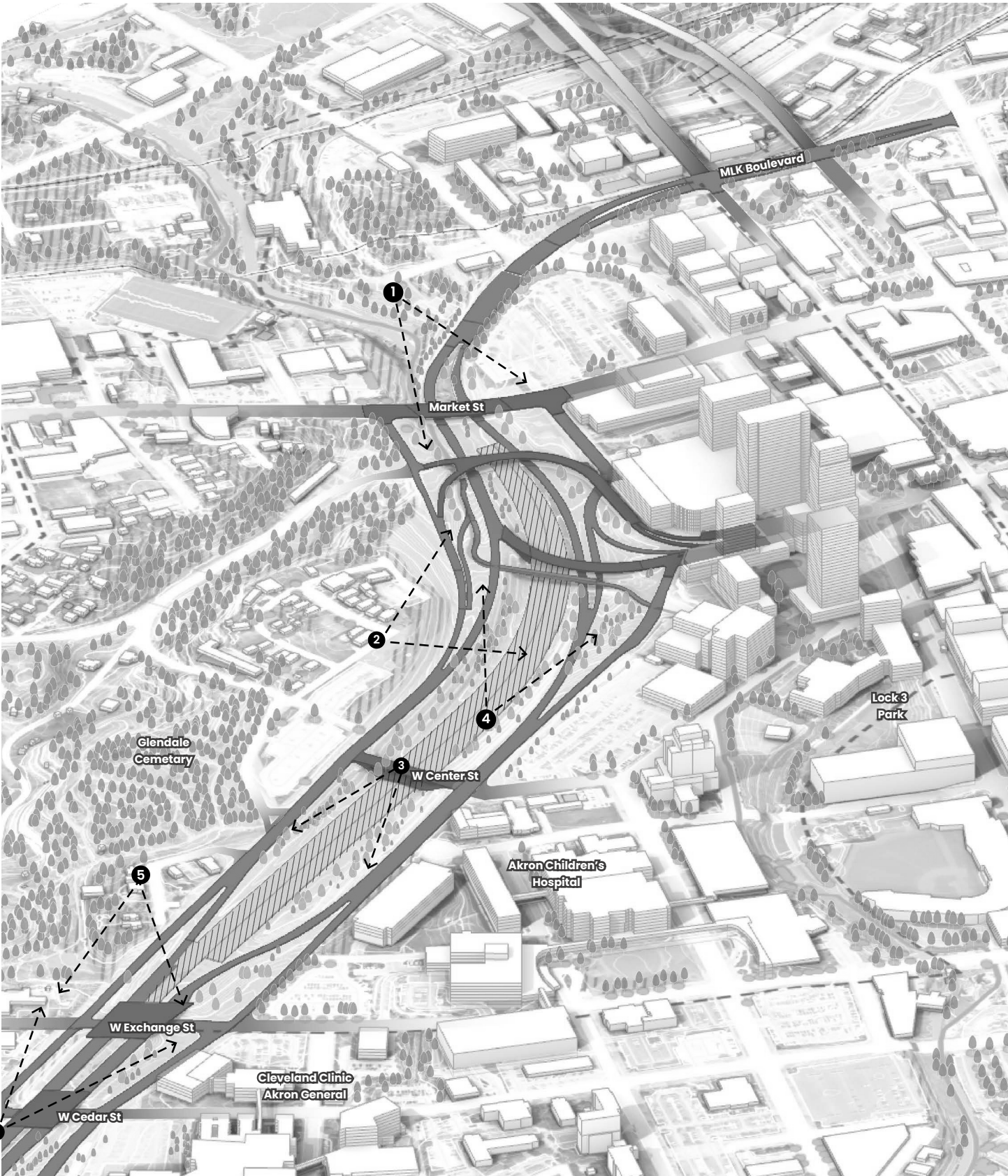
The Towpath Trail Bridge is the only overpass dedicated to pedestrians crossing the Innerbelt

#### 5 Cedar / Exchange Underpass

W Cedar and W Exchange, two major east-west arterials in the city, cross under an active Innerbelt

#### 6 Transition to Active Highway

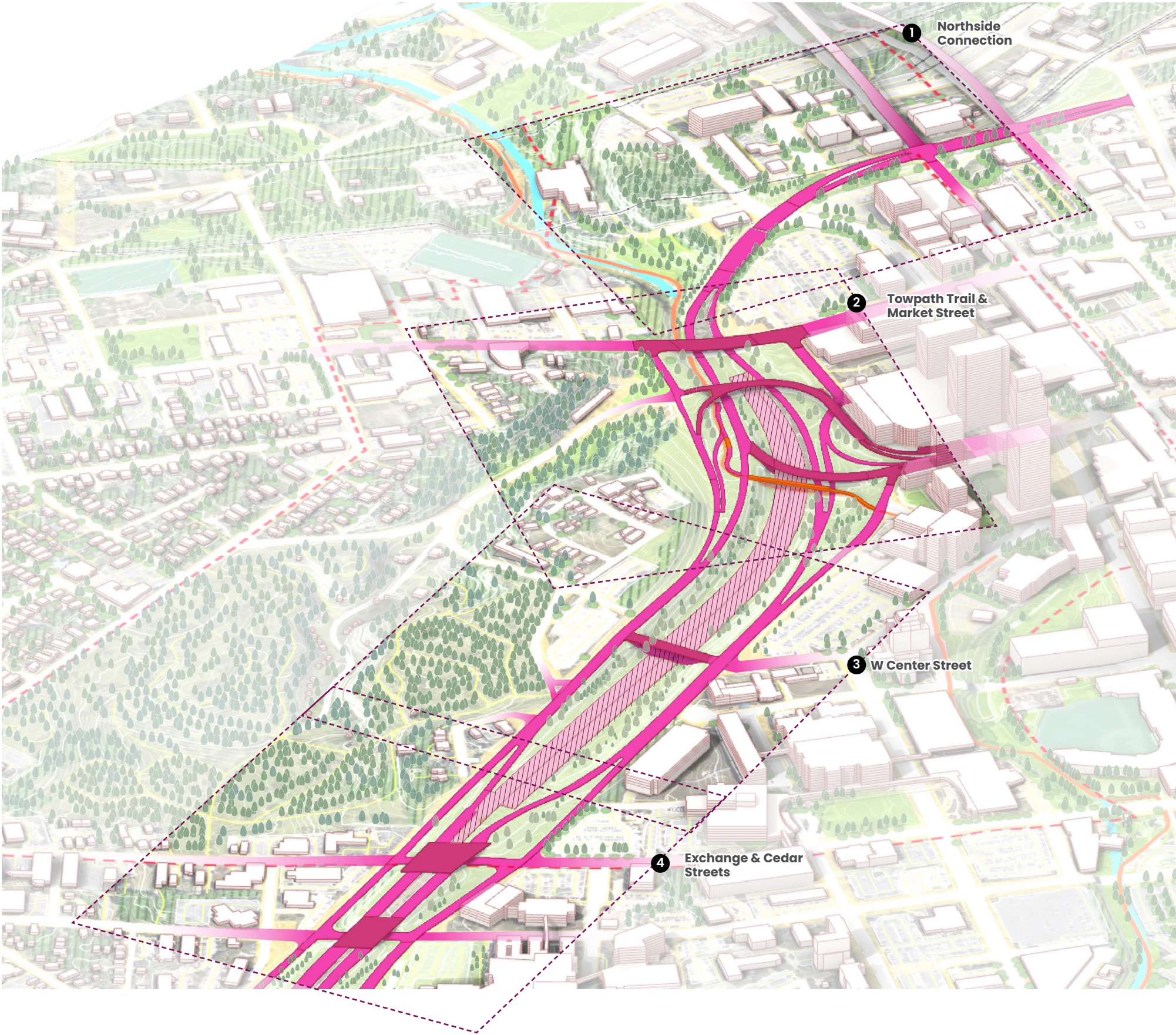
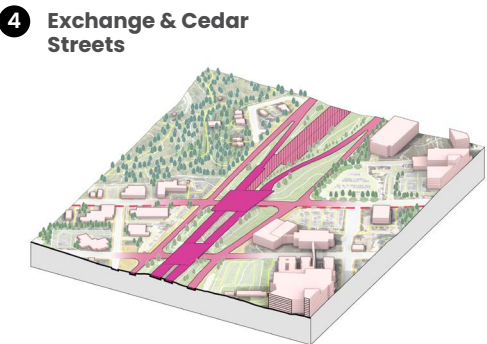
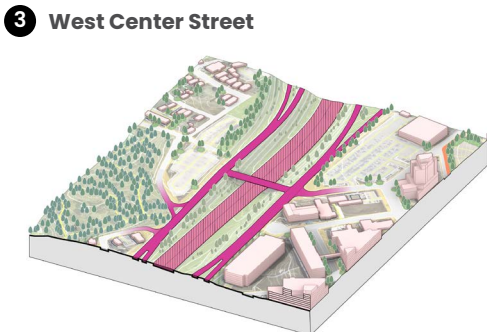
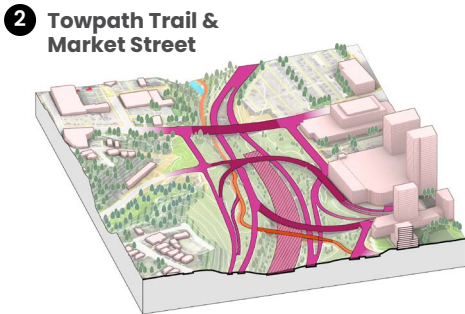
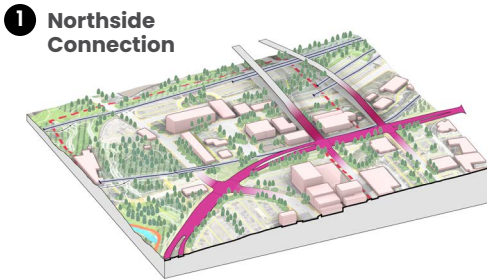
South of W Exchange, the Innerbelt transitions into an active highway





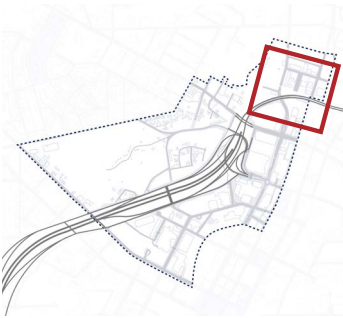
# Typical Conditions

The complex road geometries and topography of the Innerbelt site presents significant challenges to its redesign. To fully grapple with these complex conditions, we have undertaken a detailed analysis of the site and identified a number of “typical conditions.”

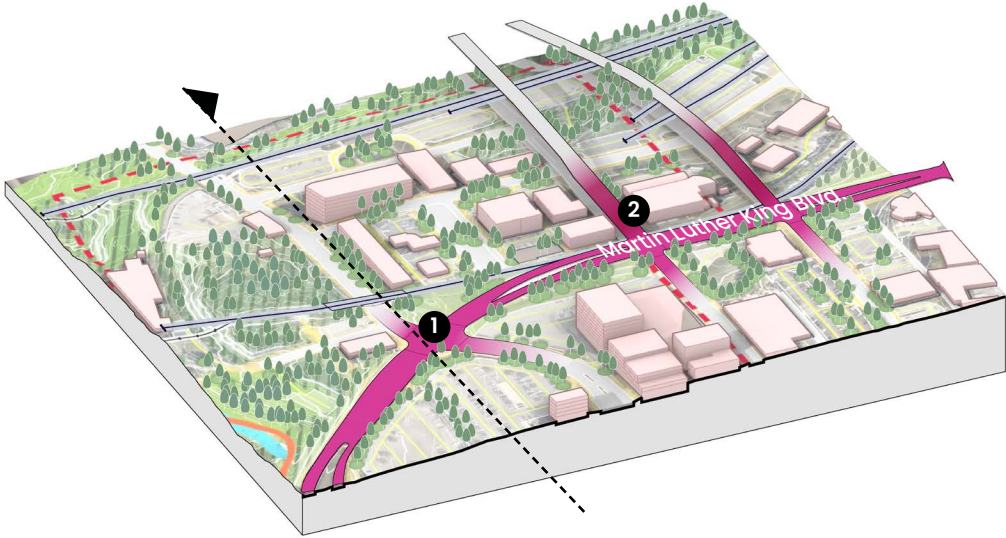




Northside Connection

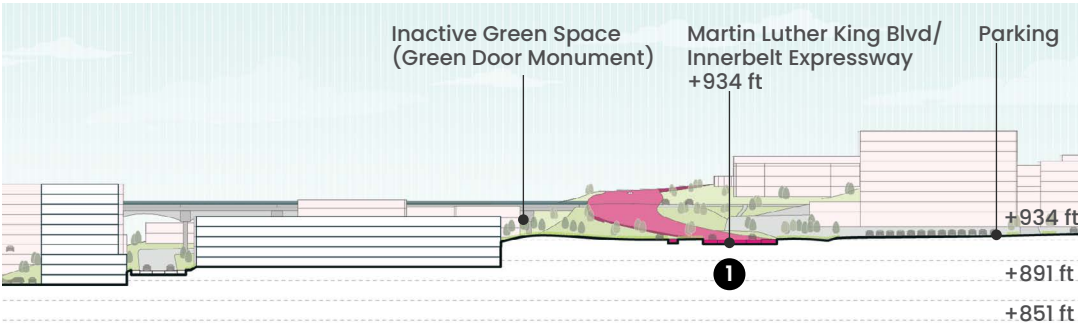


The Innerbelt transitions into MLK Blvd, rises by over 40 feet in elevation, and becomes part of the urban street grid. The Boulevard is a wide car-centric arterial, with inactive spaces on either side.



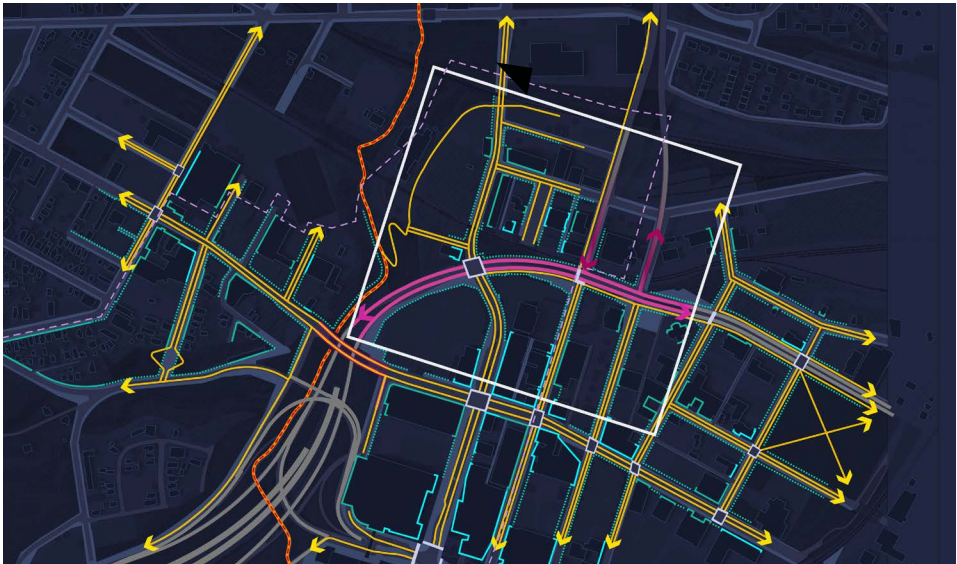
KEY ELEVATIONS

- 1 MLK Blvd. / Perkins St. (+934 ft)
- 2 MLK Blvd. / Perkins St. (+971 ft)

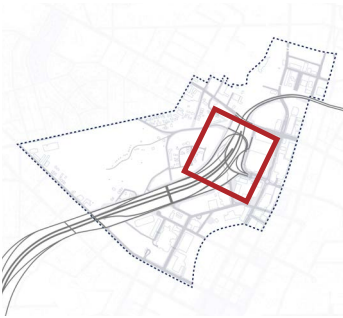


PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY

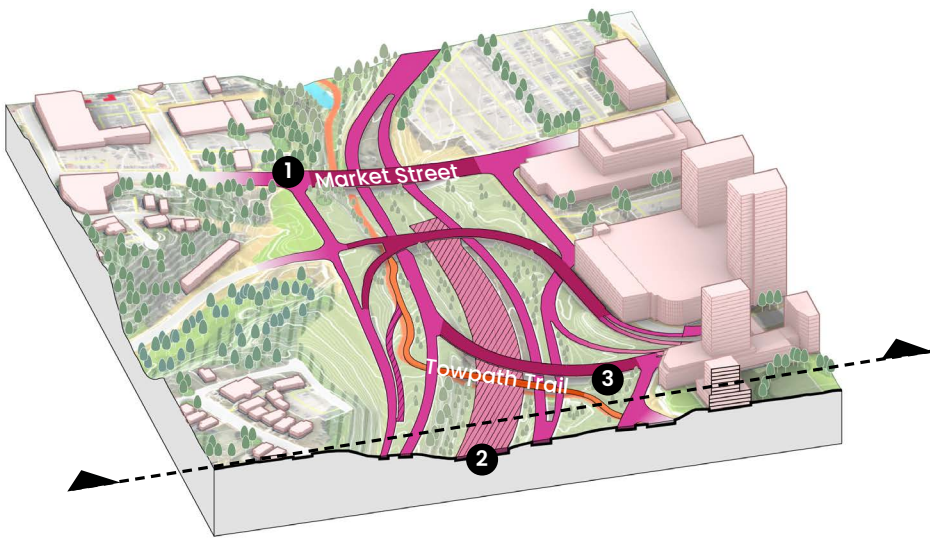
- Ohio & Erie Towpath Trail
- Pedestrian Pathway
- Active Building Edges
- Inactive Building Edges
- Parking / Inactive Space



Towpath Trail & Market Street

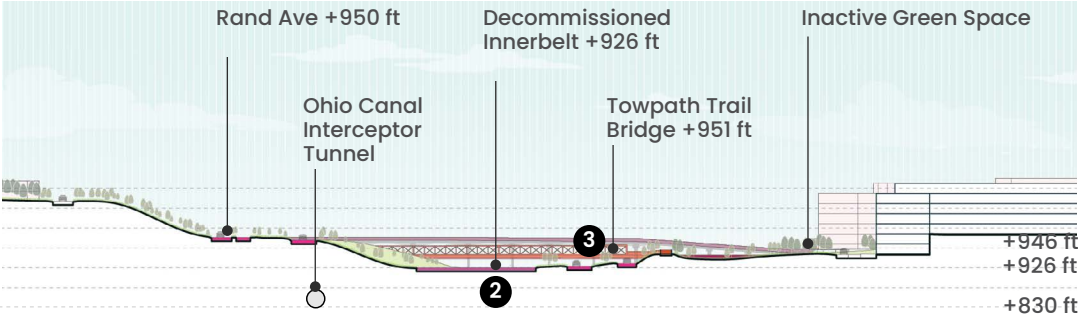


Market Street and the Towpath Trail pass ~20' over the decommissioned Innerbelt, providing connections across the barrier. A complex series of ramps connect Rand and Dart to W Mill Street.



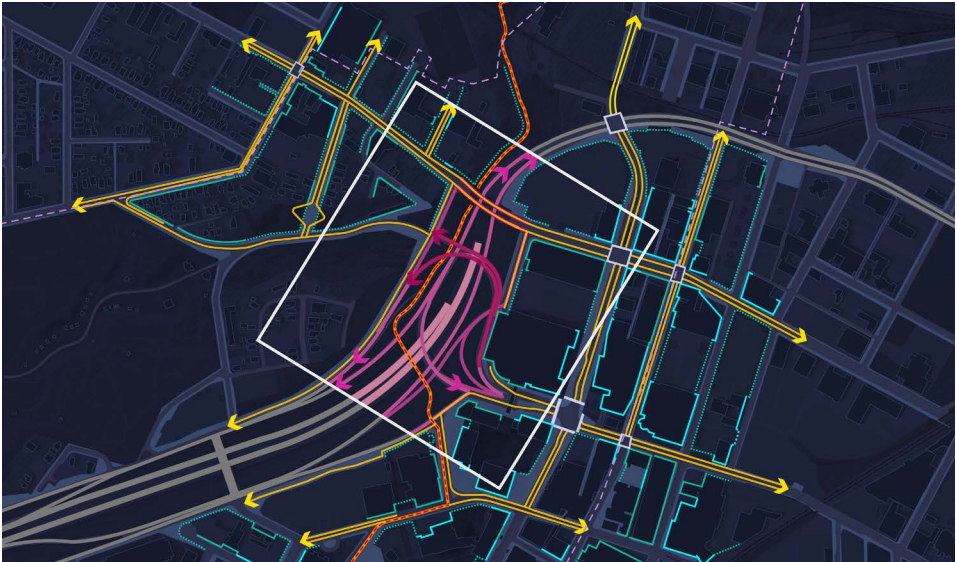
KEY ELEVATIONS

- 1 Market Street (+933 ft)
- 2 Decommissioned Innerbelt (+926 ft)
- 3 Towpath Trail Bridge (+951 ft)



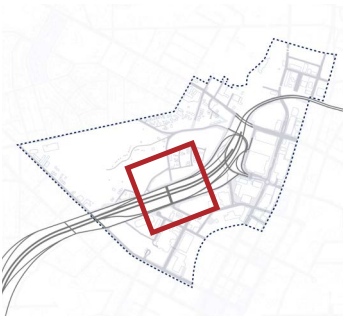
PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY

- Ohio & Erie Towpath Trail
- Pedestrian Pathway
- Active Building Edges
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- Parking / Inactive Space





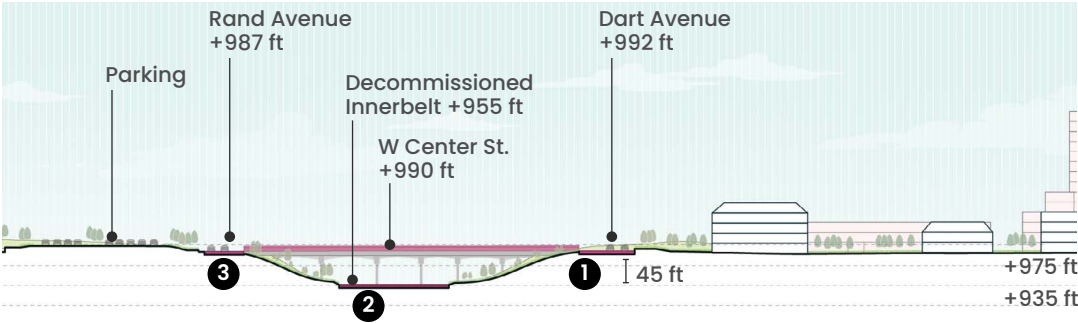
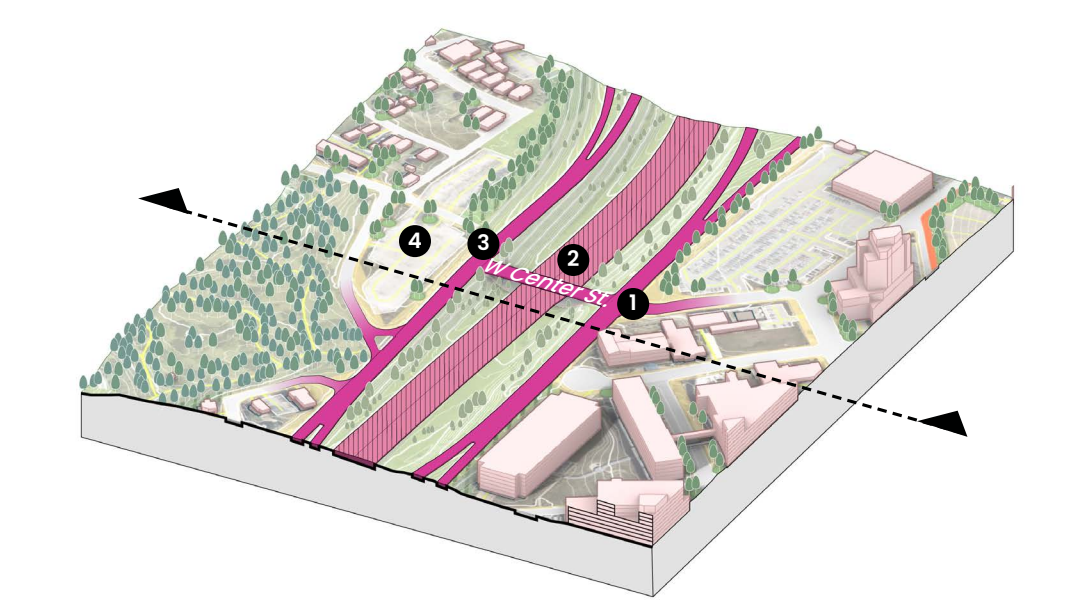
# W Center Street



West Center Street is a potentially critical connection across the Innerbelt, with Glendale Cemetery on one side and large downtown employers on the other. However, it currently terminates in somewhat hazardous conditions on Rand Ave, with narrow sidewalks and fast-moving traffic. The Innerbelt at this section resembles a large ditch that is 30-40' deep.

KEY ELEVATIONS

- 1 Rand Ave (+992 ft)
- 2 Rand Ave (+955 ft)
- 3 Dart Ave (+987 ft)



PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY

- Ohio & Erie Towpath Trail
- Pedestrian Pathway
- Active Building Edges
- Inactive Building Edges
- Parking / Inactive Space



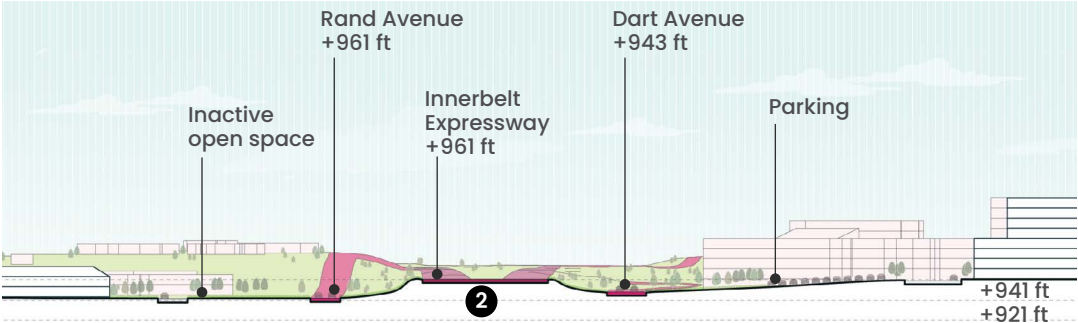
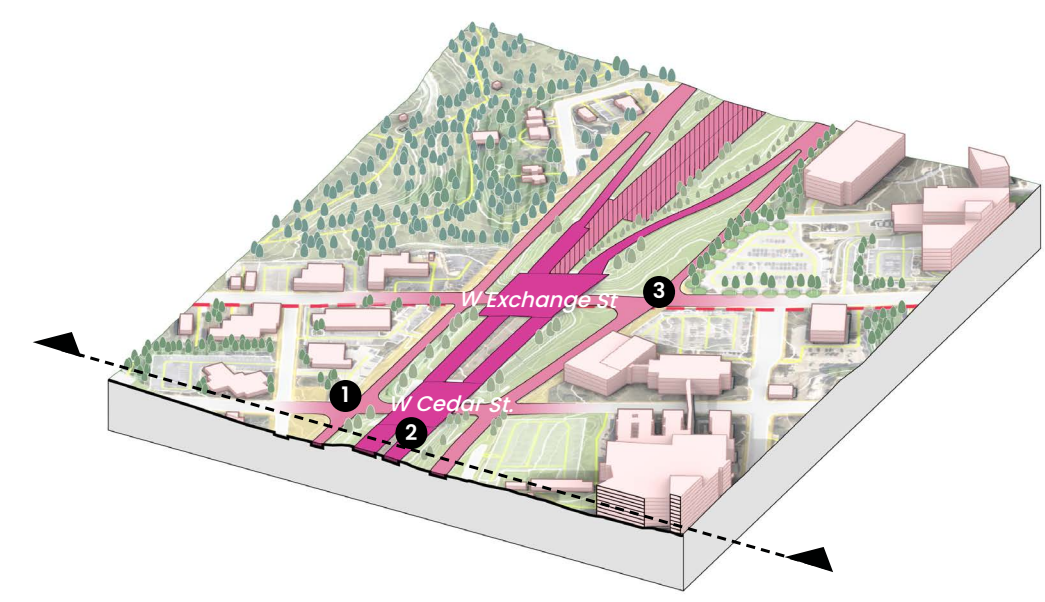
# Exchange & Cedar Street



W Exchange St and W Cedar St are critical and heavily travelled east-west connections, passing under the still-active section of the Innerbelt through a pair of underpasses.

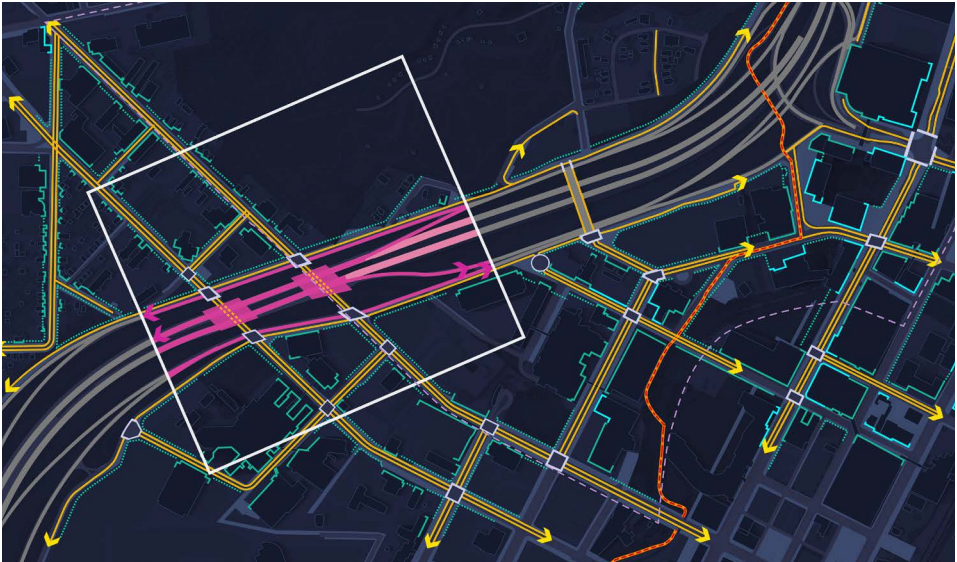
KEY ELEVATIONS

- 1 Rand Ave @ W Cedar St (+940 ft)
- 2 Innerbelt Expressway(+961 ft)
- 3 Dart Ave @ W Exchange St (+953 ft)



PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY

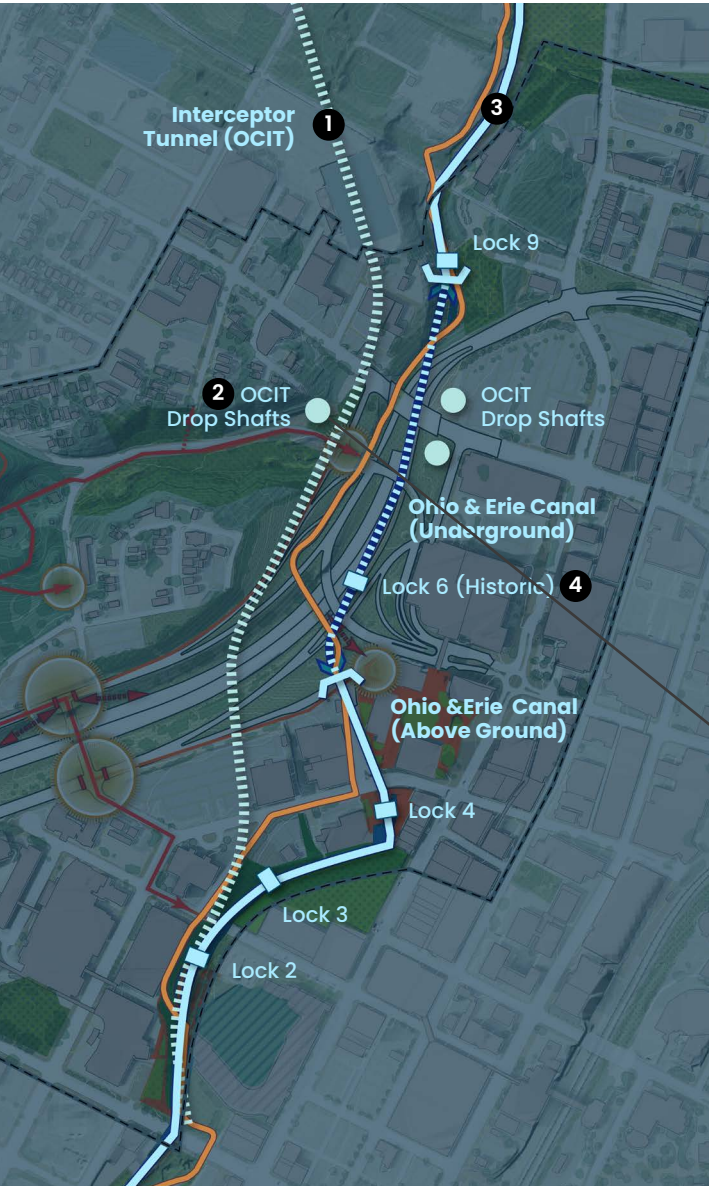
- Ohio & Erie Towpath Trail
- Pedestrian Pathway
- Active Building Edges
- Inactive Building Edges
- Parking / Inactive Space





# Underground Infrastructure

Two major pieces of water infrastructure run beneath the former Innerbelt Site. The historic Ohio & Erie Canal may have the potential to be daylighted, as recommended by the Phase I report. The OCIT reduces combined sewer overflows into the Ohio Canal, Little Cuyahoga River and Cuyahoga River.



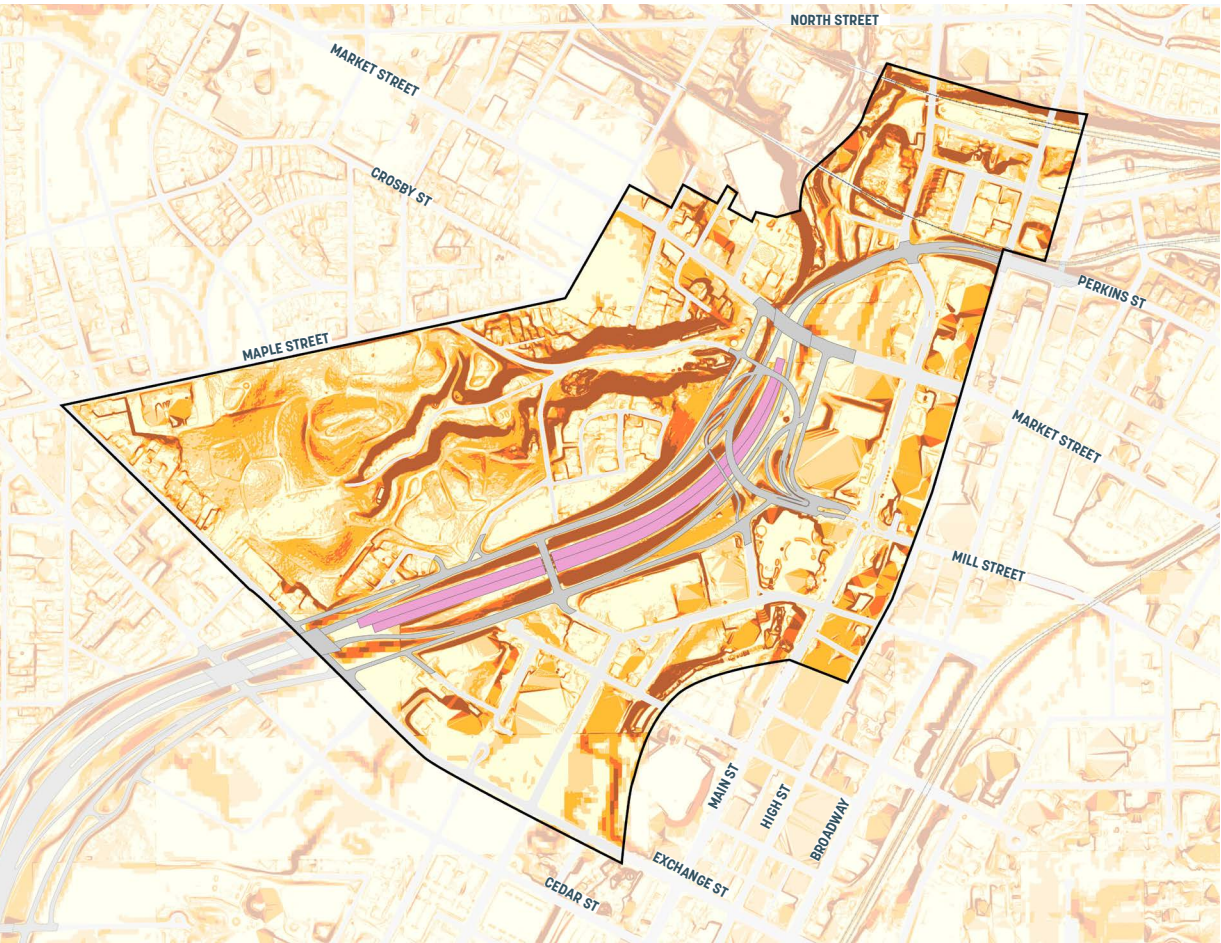
## UNDERGROUND INFRASTRUCTURE AROUND THE FORMER INNERBELT LAND

- 1 OCIT Interceptor Tunnel**  
The OCIT was completed in 2020 as part of Akron Waterways Renewed and runs approximately 100' below ground.
- 2 OCIT Drop Shafts**  
The OCIT's main impact on site are the drop shafts located near West Market Street that connect the tunnel to the surface.
- 3 Ohio & Erie Canal Enclosure**  
The canal runs below grade from Bowery Street to the Beech Street Trailhead and runs between 7' and 30' below ground.
- 4 Lock 6**  
The remnants of a historic lock may still remain below the Innerbelt.



# Site Topography

Steep slopes pose a significant obstacle to accessibility and development feasibility. Terrain can be reshaped for small sites, but at the scale of the Innerbelt would require massive resources. The Innerbelt was constructed within an existing valley and is sunken up to 45 feet in some places – approximately three stories. The areas on either side of the Innerbelt also have significant slopes of over 30%, compounding the separation between West Akron and Downtown.



## SLOPE ANALYSIS

- Slope: 0-5%
- Slope: 5-10%
- Slope: 10-20%
- Slope: 20-30%
- Slope: 30% and greater
- Study Area
- Decommissioned Innerbelt
- Active Roadway



# Challenges to Redeveloping the Former Innerbelt Land

The physical conditions of the former Innerbelt land and the character of its urban surroundings pose many challenges to its redevelopment and productive re-use.

## Challenges of Infrastructure and Topography

The southern portions of the Innerbelt, as well Rand and Dart Avenues that replaced the northern portion, are still wide, active roadways that offer few opportunities for safe crossing and hamper the productive reuse of the former Innerbelt land. The decommissioned portion of the Innerbelt sits in a wide trench that can be up to 30’ below its surroundings, making redevelopment physically complex and financially costly. Other infrastructure barriers (access ramps and railways) and topographical changes add to this physical complexity.burdened (defined as those

## Challenges of Surrounding Land Use

Urban Renewal decimated much of the fine-grained urban fabric that once existed along the Innerbelt. Over time, the city that has grown around the site has largely turned its back to the Innerbelt. Today, it is lined with large “super blocks” with internal and non-connected streets, vacant spaces, parking, and backs of large, monolithic buildings. Restoring connections across the Innerbelt will need to address the physical barriers imposed by these conditions.

## Implications for Redevelopment Approach

The physical complexity of the former Innerbelt land means that redevelopment on the site itself may be challenging, costly, and less feasible in the near term. It also requires that we take an incremental approach that tackles the lowest hanging fruit first, which will help to build development momentum in the longer term. Stitching the wound of the Innerbelt, for example, may need to start from its outer edges by strengthening the health of its surrounding urban fabric.



# History & Culture

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

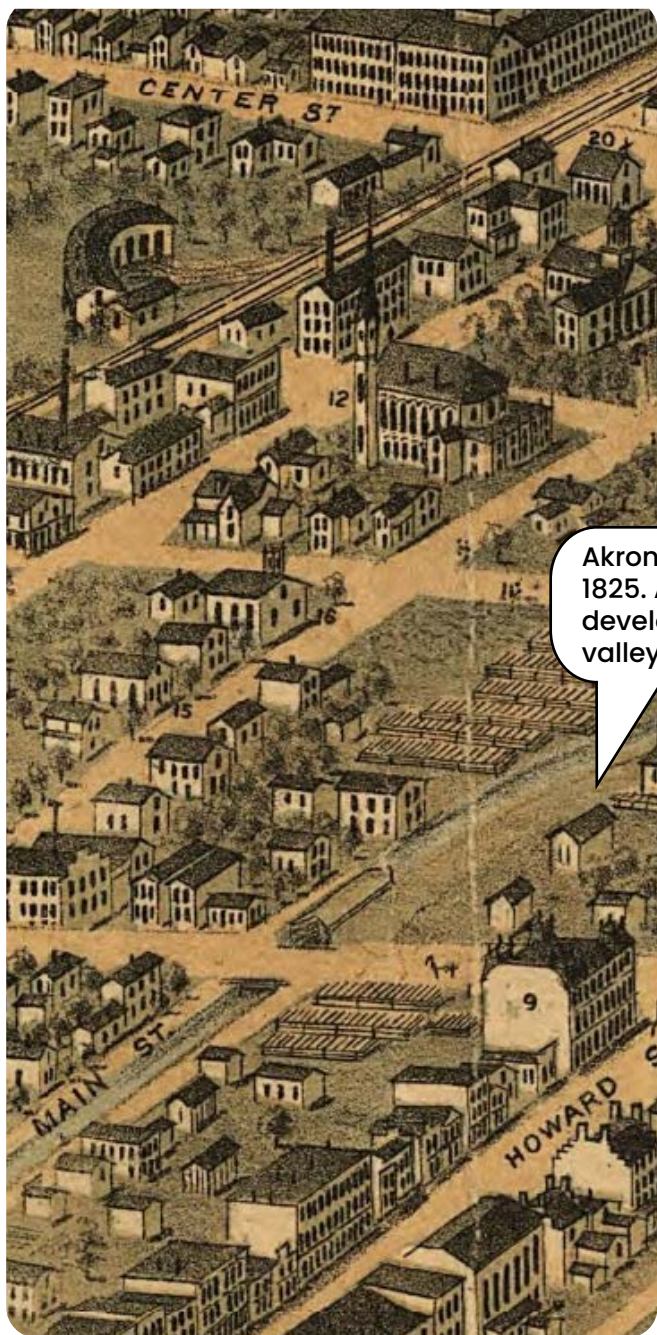
**What existed before the Innerbelt and Urban Renewal projects?**

**What did the Innerbelt erase?**

**How did discriminatory urban development practices impact the area?**

**What important cultural assets exist today?**

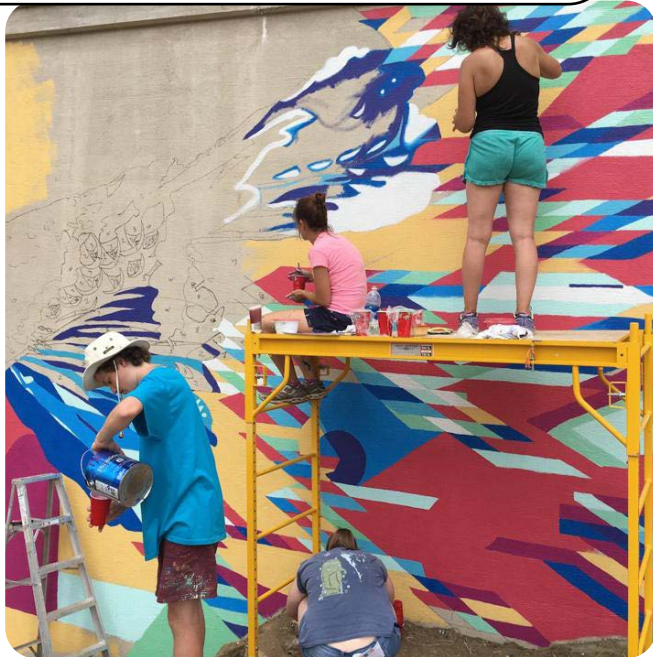
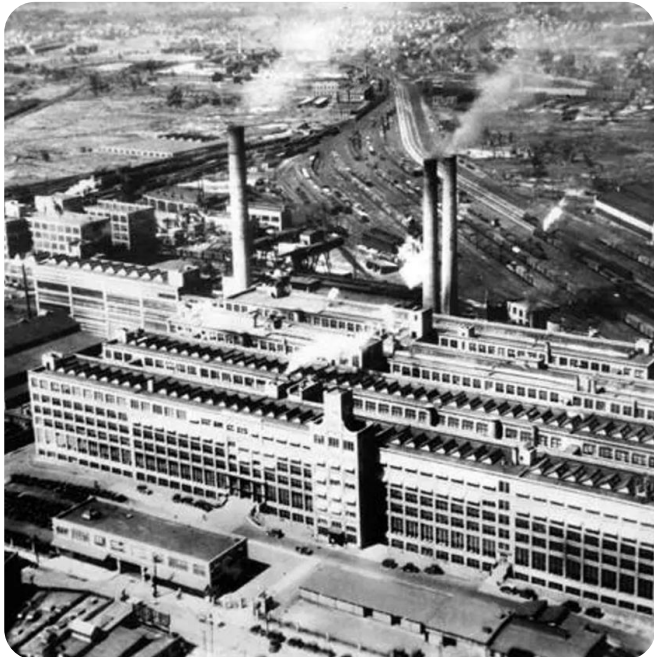




Akron was founded around the Ohio & Erie Canal in 1825. Around 1870, the city continued to grow and developed around the canal, transforming a natural valley into a heavily industrialized area.



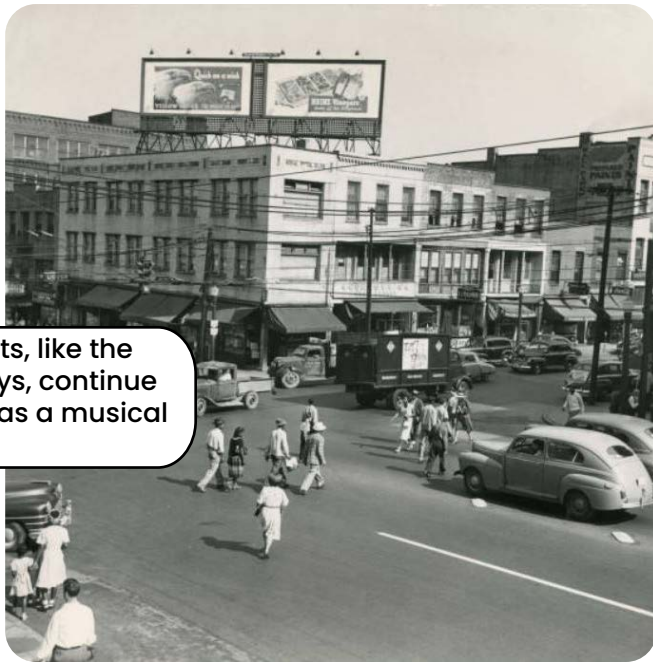
Long ago, Native American tribes like the Seneca and Delaware used the Portage Path to travel between the Cuyahoga and Tuscarawas Rivers.



Akron became known as the "Rubber Capital of the World" as companies like Goodyear, Goodrich, and Firestone grew into nationally dominant companies in the early 1900s



Today, contemporary artists, like the Grammy winning Black Keys, continue to build on Akron's legacy as a musical crossroads.





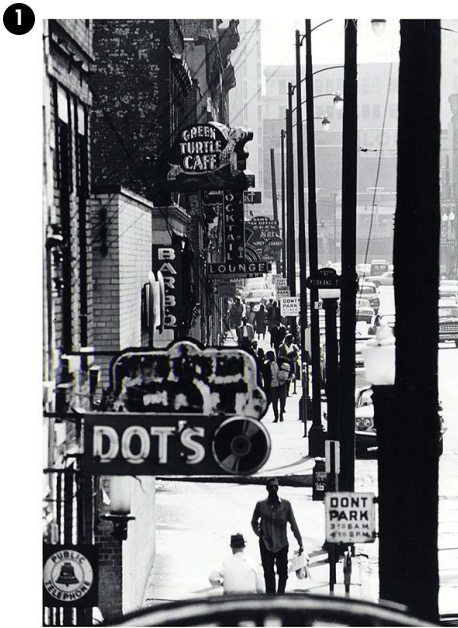
# Memories of “Black Harlem”

Akron in the early 1900s was a boomtown known as the Rubber Capital of the World. A thriving manufacturing industry created jobs and opportunities, leading to the city’s population more than tripling between 1910 and 1930. The neighborhoods around the Ohio and Erie Canal grew into vibrant working class neighborhoods, becoming a prominent immigrant community and then a predominantly Black Neighborhood.

These neighborhoods were anchored by thriving business districts along Wooster Avenue and Howard Street. Those who grew up in the neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s describe a deeply interconnected

community with entrepreneurs building generational wealth.

Through stories and historic mapping over the past few years, a picture emerges of a cultural mecca that was even called “**Little Harlem.**” Akron’s location between Detroit and New York, made the city a popular stop for national talent like Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie. Howard Street became iconic for its jazz clubs. Neighborhood businesses like the Matthews Hotel, one of the few on the crosscontinental rail route that served African Americans, contributed to the neighborhood being a thriving cultural & economic hub.



- HISTORIC ASSETS IN AND AROUND THE STUDY AREA**
- Food and Entertainment
  - Retail
  - Commercial/ Industry
  - Places of Worship
  - Parks
  - National Register Sites
  - Schools and Community Services

- Notable Places**
- 1 Dot’s Record Shop
  - 2 Matthews Hotel  
Akron’s most prominent Black hotel hosted performers like Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald. It was listed in the Green Book guides that helped Black motorists find safe accommodations when traveling.
  - 3 Cosmopolitan Club
  - 4 The Smoke Pit
  - 5 Elks Club Parade on Howard Street in 1942





# Impact of Discriminatory Urban Development Practices

The Innerbelt represents an emblematic episode in a history of discriminatory urban development practices in American cities. Its impact needs be put in context of all of these other practices:

**Redlining (1930s–1960s)** was a discriminatory housing policy in which the federal government, through the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) and later the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), systematically denied mortgages and investment in predominantly Black and immigrant neighborhoods. These areas were marked in red on government-sanctioned maps, signifying them as high-risk, leading to decades of disinvestment, segregation, and racial wealth disparities. Conversely, federally subsidized mortgages for white families enabled mass suburban development and “white flight” from cities.

**Urban Renewal (1940s–1970s)** was a federally funded program under the Housing Act of 1949 that aimed to revitalize cities but disproportionately resulted in the displacement of Black and low-income communities. Cities used eminent domain to clear “blighted” neighborhoods for new development, often favoring commercial or civic projects over affordable housing, exacerbating racial and economic inequalities. In Akron, two urban renewal projects at Cascade Plaza (1963) and Opportunity Park (1967) enabled the destruction of Black

commercial and civic centers at Howard Street and Wooster Ave. The building of the Innerbelt coincides with these policies in reinforcing racial and economic segregation. Redlining created disinvested neighborhoods, which urban renewal later targeted as “blighted” for demolition, displacing communities. The same areas were then frequently selected for urban highway construction, further fracturing neighborhoods and limiting economic mobility. Undoing the impact of the Innerbelt, then, is more than about undoing the expressway itself, but rather about tackling the compounding effects of all of these practices – the loss of homes, businesses, community cohesion, cultural memories, and generational wealth.



**AERIAL OF THE INNERBELT, 1978**  
This photograph from the Akron Beacon Journal illustrates the scale of the destruction caused by Urban Renewal programs.

## URBAN RENEWAL AROUND THE INNERBELT

### [UNDERLAY] “Redlining” (1930s–1960s)

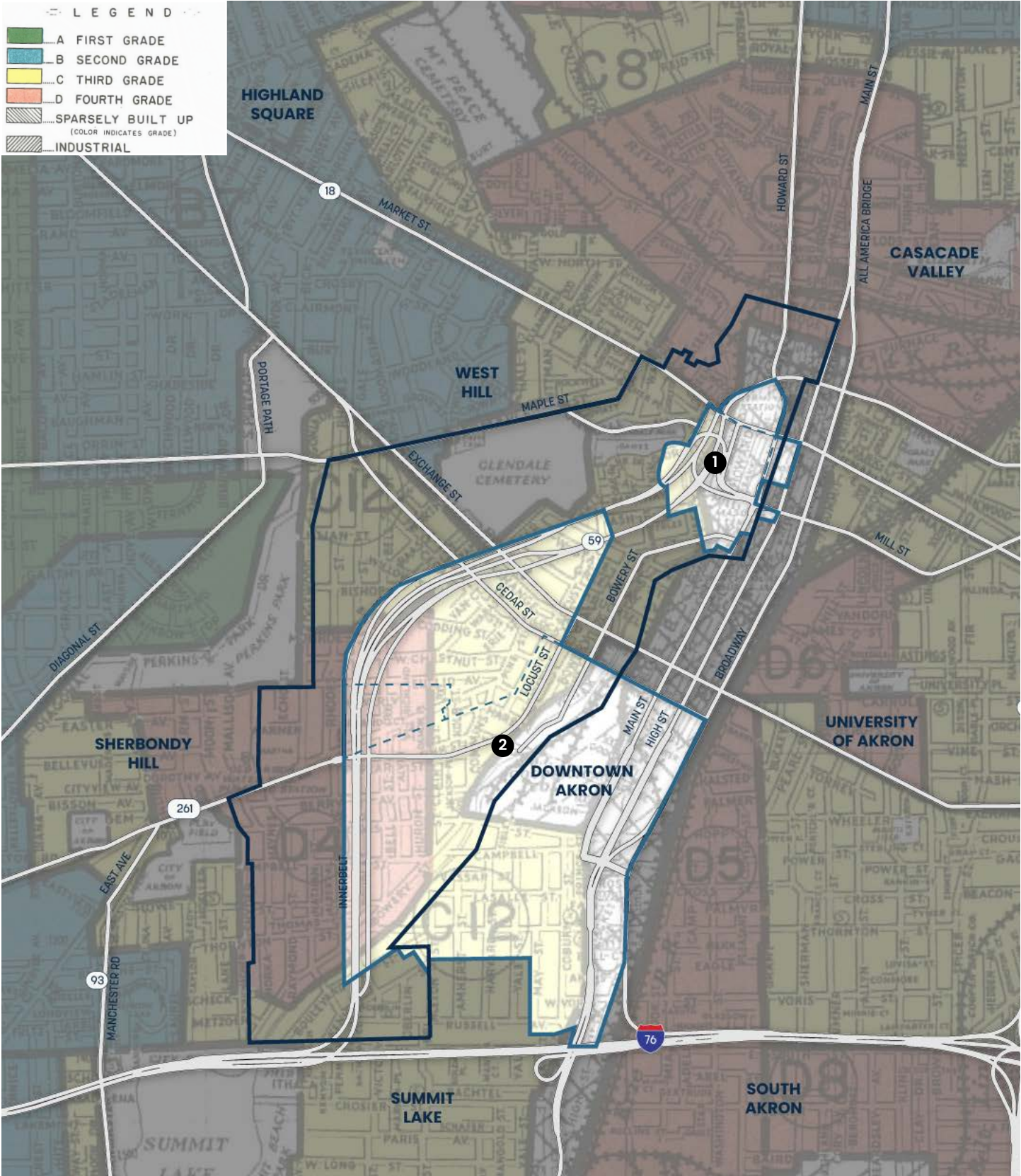
Redlining practices categorized the neighborhoods around Howard Street and Wooster Avenue as “hazardous” (D) or “declining” (C) despite their vitality.

### ❶ Cascade Renewal Area (1963)

Demolition of 45 acres included Howard St, and paved way for the development of Cascade Plaza.

### ❷ Opportunity Park Renewal Area (1967)

One of the largest urban renewal projects in the country, Opportunity Park involved the demolition of 400 acres, including the once vibrant






# Contemporary Cultural Geography


What are the places and cultural “institutions” that define the past, present and future of Black Akron?


The scars of the Innerbelt and Urban Renewal area continue to shape the cultural geography of Central Akron today. Downtown, the historic fabric and institutions that remain have provided a foundation for investment in contemporary cultural landmarks like the Knight Center, Akron Art Museum and Lock 3 Park. However, much of the vibrancy provided by historic industry and neighborhoods has been lost or shifted towards the suburbs.

The Innerbelt remains a significant divide between the growing energy and opportunities in Downtown and the neighborhoods of West Akron. There are a number of churches and historic sites, like Glendale Cemetery, west of the Innerbelt. Established organizations, like the Akron Urban League, and emerging community hubs, like House 330, provide spaces for people to come together, but this is a far cry from the thriving Black business districts that existed before the Innerbelt.


CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL ASSETS


-  Restaurants


  - 1 Diamond Grill
  - 2 Luigi's Restaurant
  - 3 Peanut Shoppe
  - 4 Diamond Deli
  - 5 Spaghetti Warehouse
  - 6 Canal Place
-  Theater, Arts and Museum

  - 7 Akron Art Museum
  - 8 EJ Thomas Hall
  - 9 Akron Civic Theater
-  National Register Sites

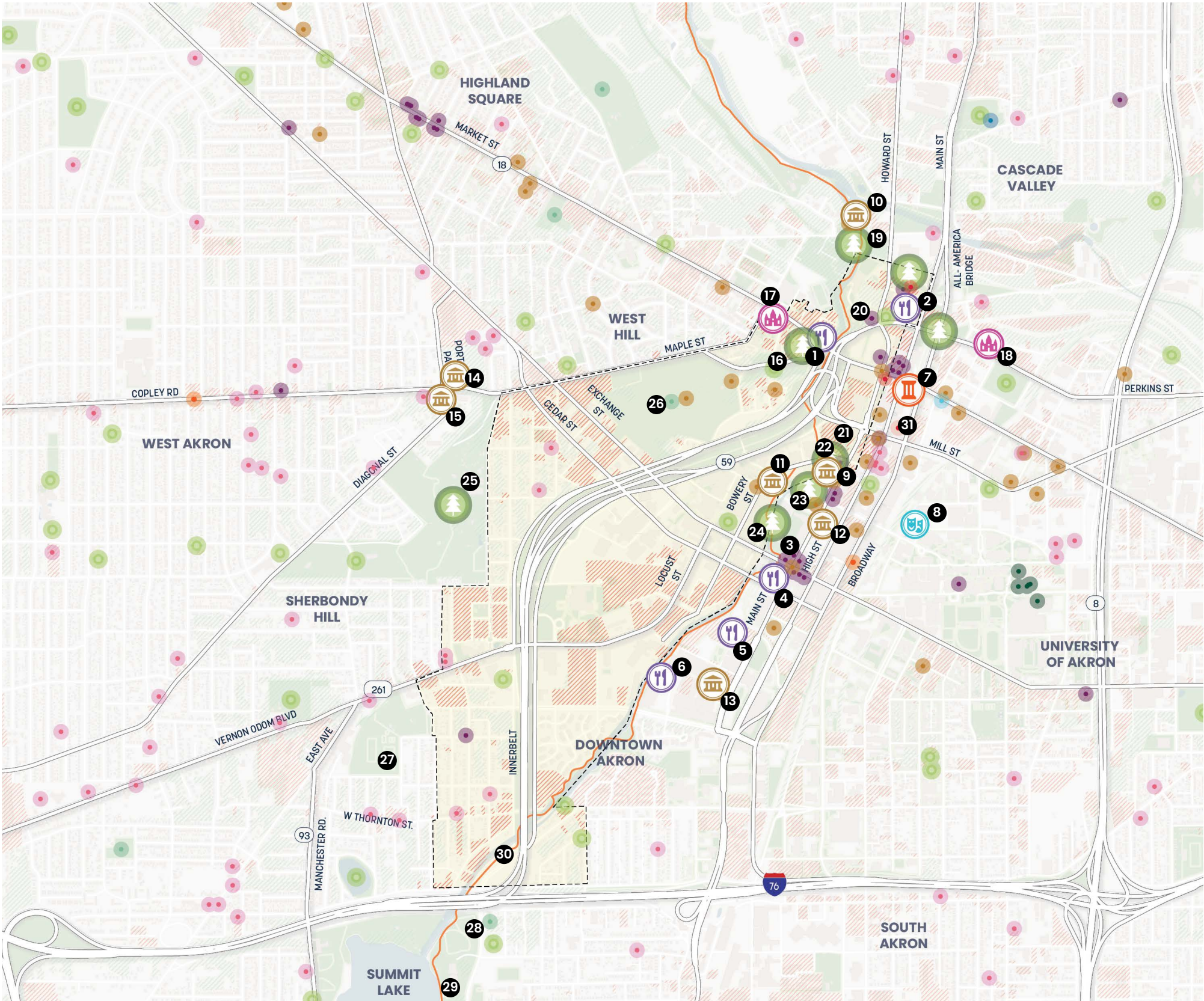
  - 10 Akron Civic Theater
  - 11 Mustill Store
  - 12 Akron YMCA
  - 13 Mayflower Manor Apts.
  - 14 Bounce Innovation Hub
  - 15 Perkins Stone Mansion
  - 16 John Brown House
  - 17 Glendale Steps

-  Places of Worship

  - 18 St Vincent de Paul Parish
  - 19 Wesley Temple Zion Church
-  Parks, Sports & Cemeteries

  - 20 Cascade Locks Park
  - 21 Beech Street Trailhead
  - 22 Cascade Plaza
  - 23 Lock 4 Park
  - 24 Lock 3 Park
  - 25 Lock 2 Park
  - 26 Akron Zoological Park
  - 27 Glendale Cemetery
  - 28 Lane Field Park
  - 29 George Sisler Field
  - 30 Summit Lake Trailhead
  - 31 Towpath Trail
-  Tourism

  - 32 Knight Center





# Discussion: Between the Past and Potential Futures

The redevelopment of the former Innerbelt land must begin by recognizing the claims that history has on this site. It must first acknowledge the vibrancy of Black civic, commercial, and cultural life that once existed in and around the site. It must also acknowledge and memorialize the destruction wrought by the Innerbelt and Urban Renewal (as well as the legacy of racist urban development practices they represent). It must find ways to repair the material and psychological losses caused by this destruction.

At the same time as we recognize this history, we must also exercise imagination. The past cannot be recreated wholesale on the site, and our effort to redevelop the former Innerbelt land must leverage and respond to the dynamism and creativity of the evolving city around it. The potential future(s) of the former Innerbelt land may not look like what existed before, but they can nevertheless honor and learn from the past while positioning the community for the future.

## How We Could Honor and Learn from the Past while Moving towards the Future:

- There are physical remnants of the former Innerbelt, along with a shared community desire and capacity to reclaim its history in new ways. Historic elements should be presented authentically and unflinchingly, telling the story of the area across different points in time.
- Strategic spaces are available to meaningfully and impactfully reconnect the community. Redevelopment should build outward from existing nodes of strength while finding creative ways to bridge the gaps—healing from the edges and growing toward the center.
- Akron is known for its inventiveness and resourcefulness, strengths that position the community to forge a new path toward just and equitable growth. This effort should reflect unique, forward-thinking solutions grounded in the city's assets and building on past work.
- Redevelopment of the former Innerbelt land should include a framework that supports reparation efforts and delivers community benefits as an integral part of the process.





# Community Wellbeing

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

**Who lives in the Planning Area?**

**What are their key needs, and are these needs being adequately met?**

**How is the Innerbelt impacting their wellbeing? And how might we address these impacts?**



# Community Wellbeing At a Glance

We compared census data from 2015 and 2022 for both the impact Area and the city as a whole. This allowed us to identify trends and areas with the biggest disparities. This information will serve as a baseline to help measure the impact of the Master Plan.

Stat	2022		2022 vs. 2015		2022
	#	%	#	%	Innerbelt vs City of Akron
Median Age	37		1	1.90%	0
Race: White	8,786	27.20%	202	2.40%	-30.10%
Race: Black or African American	20,500	63.50%	-4,796	-19.00%	34.00% ❶
Household - Married Couples	2,445	16.50%	-227	-8.50%	-11.40%
Households - w/ people under 18 years	4,313	29.20%	153	3.70%	3.20%
Households - w/ people over 65 years	4,227	28.60%	186	4.60%	1.70% ❷
Unmarried Mothers	414	96.30%	-73	-15.00%	29.90%
Bachelor's degree or higher	2,879	13.80%			-8.80%
Foreign born	615	1.90%	224	57.30%	-4.30%
Speak English less than "very well"	315	1.10%	134	74.00%	-3.10%
With a broadband Internet subscription	12,261	82.90%			-4.00%
In Labor Force	14,068	56.20%	-1,300	-8.50%	-7.00%
Employed	12,664	50.60%	413	3.40%	-7.70% ❸
Unemployment Rate	10.00%		0	-50.80%	2.30%
Commute - drove alone	8,725	72.30%	163	1.90%	-3.10%
Commute - transit	560	4.60%	-832	-59.80%	2.20%
Commute - walked	195	1.60%	-198	-50.40%	-0.30%
Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	518	4.10%	138	36.30%	-0.50%
Median household income (dollars)	29,504		5,553	23.20%	-17,092
Mean household income (dollars)	42,141		9,015	27.20%	-20,045 ❹
No health insurance coverage	2,919	9.20%	-2,860	-49.50%	0.70%
Poverty Level	34.60%		-6.30%	-15.40%	11.90%
Child Poverty	54.40%		-8.10%	-12.90%	16.70% ❹
Senior Poverty	20.40%		2.50%	14.10%	7.80%

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS IN THE IMPACT AREA

❶ Black Population is Higher, Though Declining

Compared to Akron as a whole, the Impact Area is 35% more Black. However, the Black population is declining, decreasing by 19% between 2015 and 2022.

❷ More Kids, More Seniors, More Unmarried Mothers

Compared to Akron as a whole, the Impact Area has more kids and more seniors. The Impact Area also has a significantly higher percentage of unmarried mothers.

❸ Lower Participation in the Labor Force

In the Impact Area, 51% of the population is employed, compared to 58% citywide and 61% in Summit County.

❹ Lower Income and Higher Poverty

Household income is much lower in the Innerbelt Impact Area than citywide. Conversely, poverty rate (35%) is much higher than citywide (23%). This

# Population Change

Typical of many post-industrial “shrinking cities”, Akron’s population has shrunk drastically from almost 300,000 in the 1960s to around 190,000 today, though the declining trend has stabilized in recent years. Since 2015, the Impact Area has experienced a steeper population decline (10%) compared to the city as a whole (4%).

% POPULATION CHANGE, 2015 – 2022

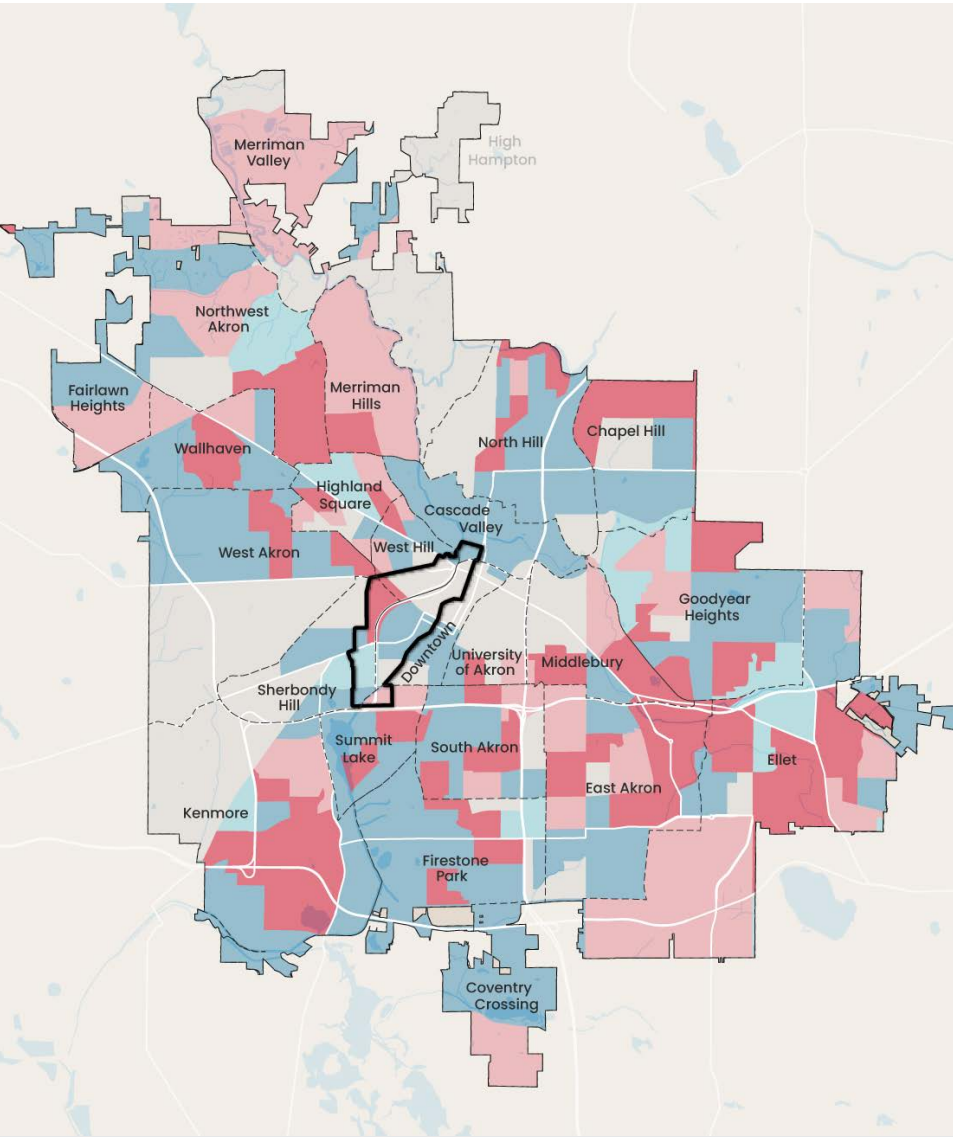
- Legend
- 25% or more
  - 25% to -5%
  - 5% to 5%
  - 5% to 25%
  - 25% or more

❶ From 2015–2022, the Impact Area Experienced Steeper Population Loss...

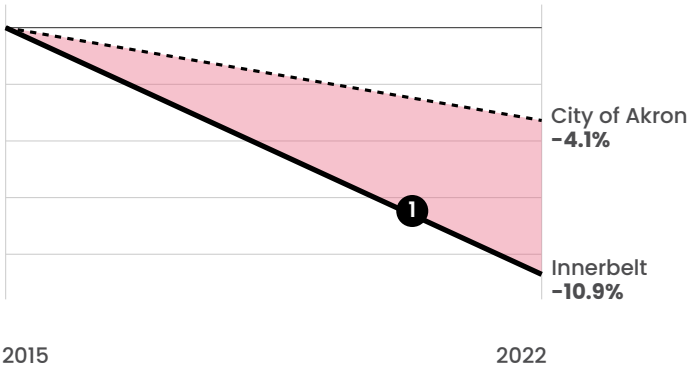
Between 2015 and 2022, the Impact Area lost ~10% of its population (vs. 4.1% for the city at large). The neighborhoods just south of West Exchange St. lost over 25% of their population.

❷ ...and Slower Income Growth

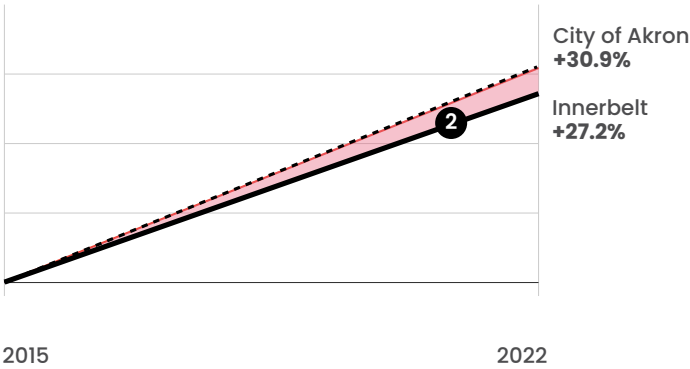
The area around the Innerbelt saw a ~27% increase while the city as a whole saw a ~31% increase.



Change in Population (2015–2022)



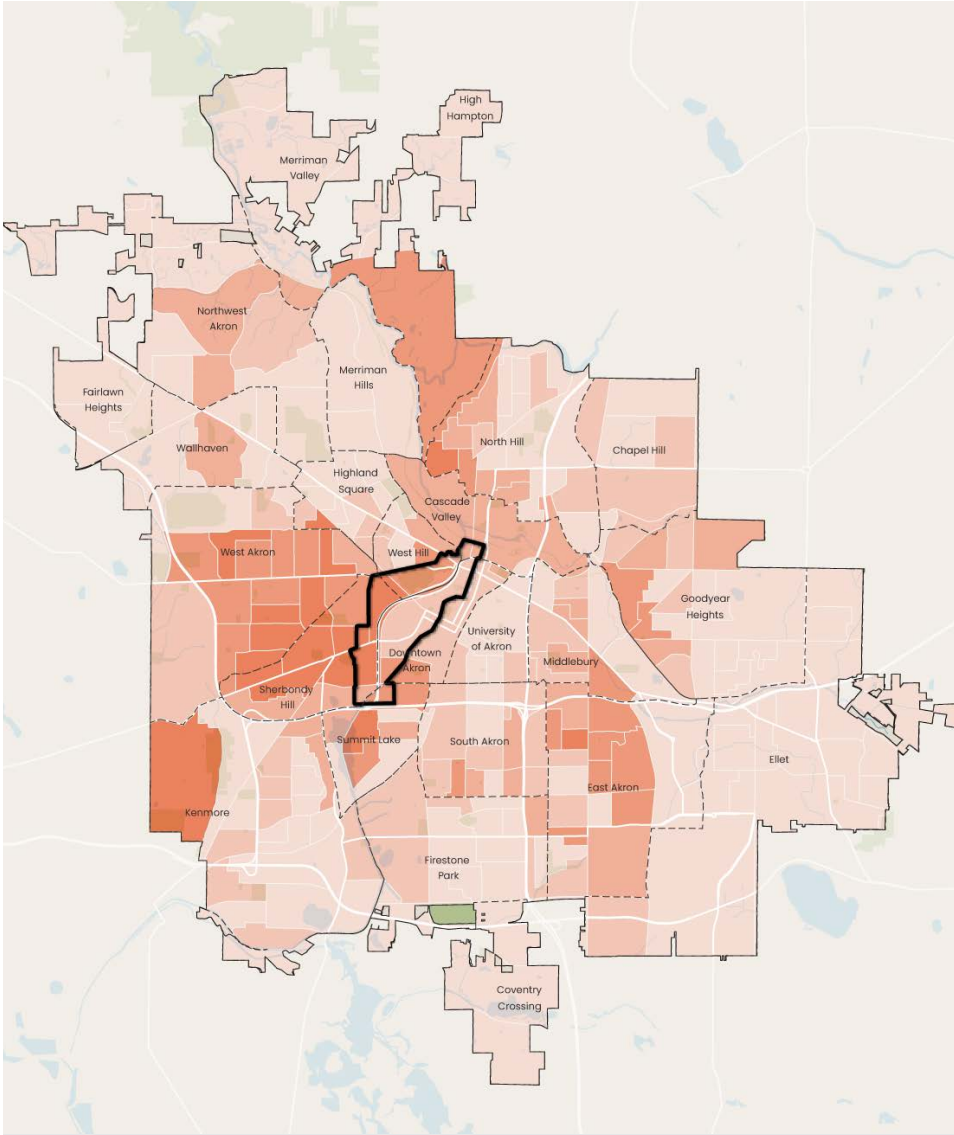
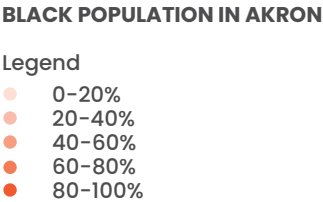
Change in Average Income (2015–2022)



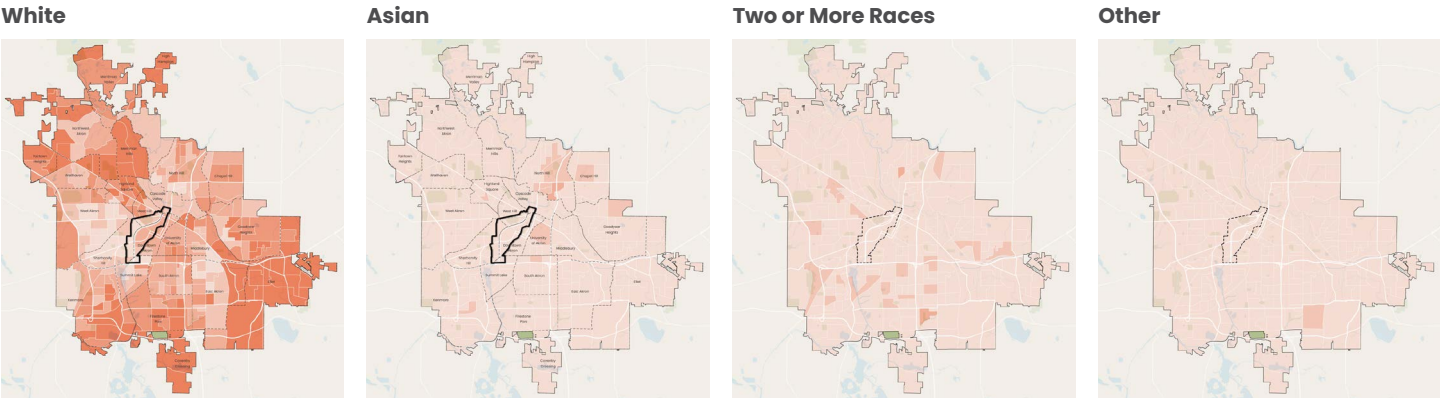


# Race & Ethnicity

Akron has a substantial Black population (~31% according to the 2020 U.S. Census), and a significant portion of that community lives in the Impact Area, corresponding to the three neighborhoods that saw the most significant impact from the Innerbelt and urban renewal – West Akron, Sherbondy Hill, and Summit Lake.

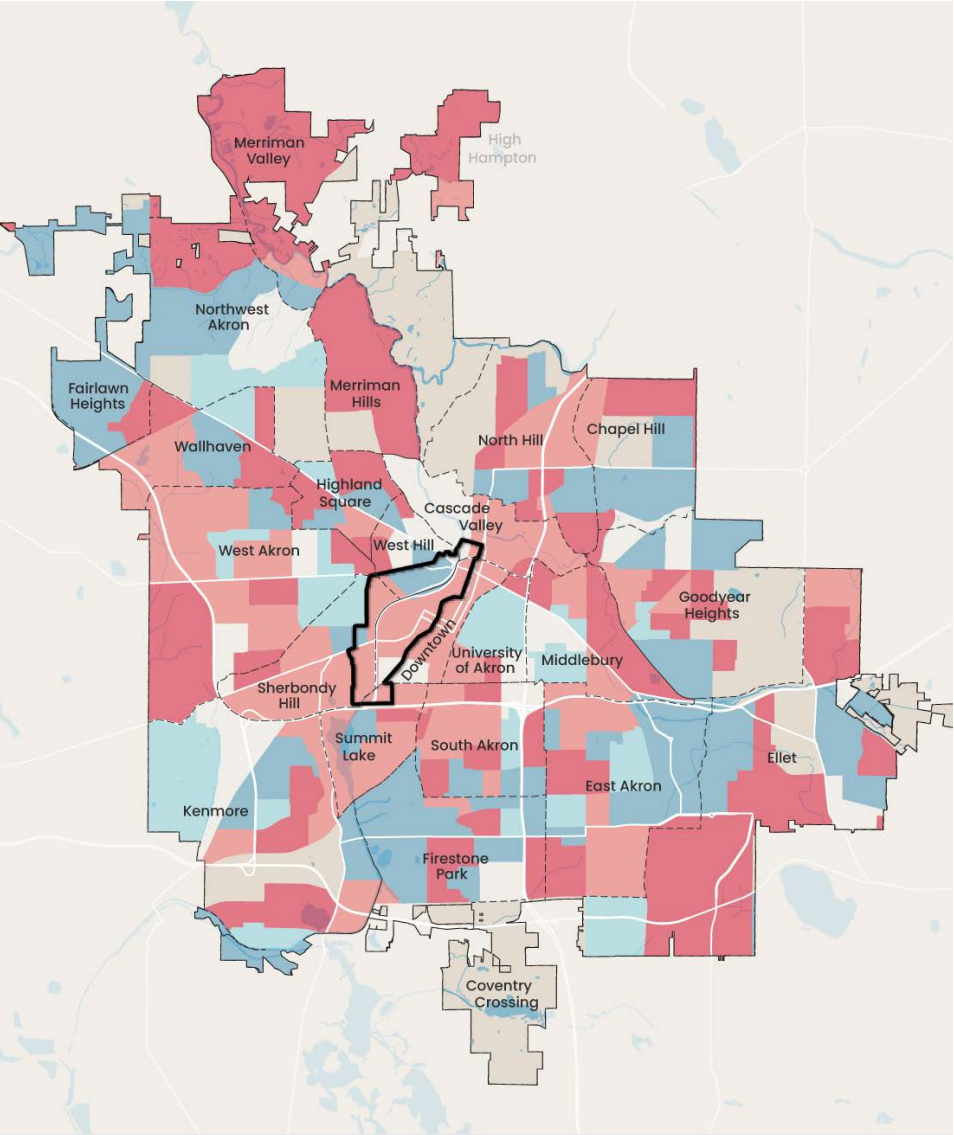
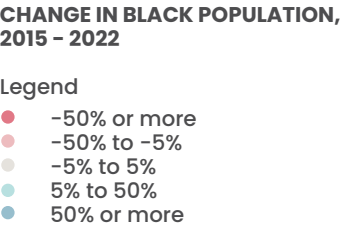


OTHER RACES & ETHNICITIES



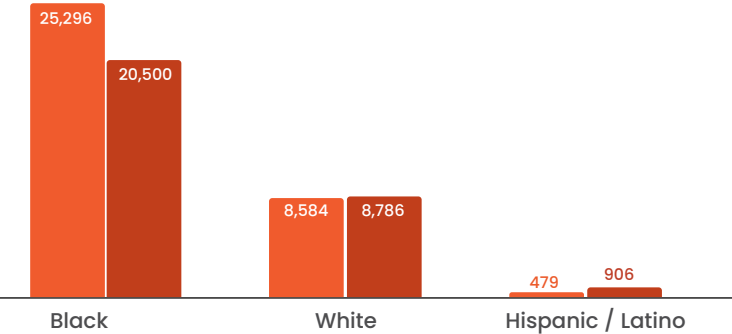
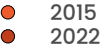
## Decline in the Black Population

Notably, these same areas have seen a significant decrease in its Black population. Between 2015 and 2022, all of the population decline in the Impact Area is attributable to a decrease in its Black population (while the white and Hispanic/Latino populations have both slightly increased). This change may underlie the community sentiments around gentrification and displacement.



POPULATION BY RACE IN THE INNERBELT IMPACT AREA, 2015 VS. 2022

All of the population decline in the Impact Area between 2015 and 2022 is due to a decrease in the Black population.

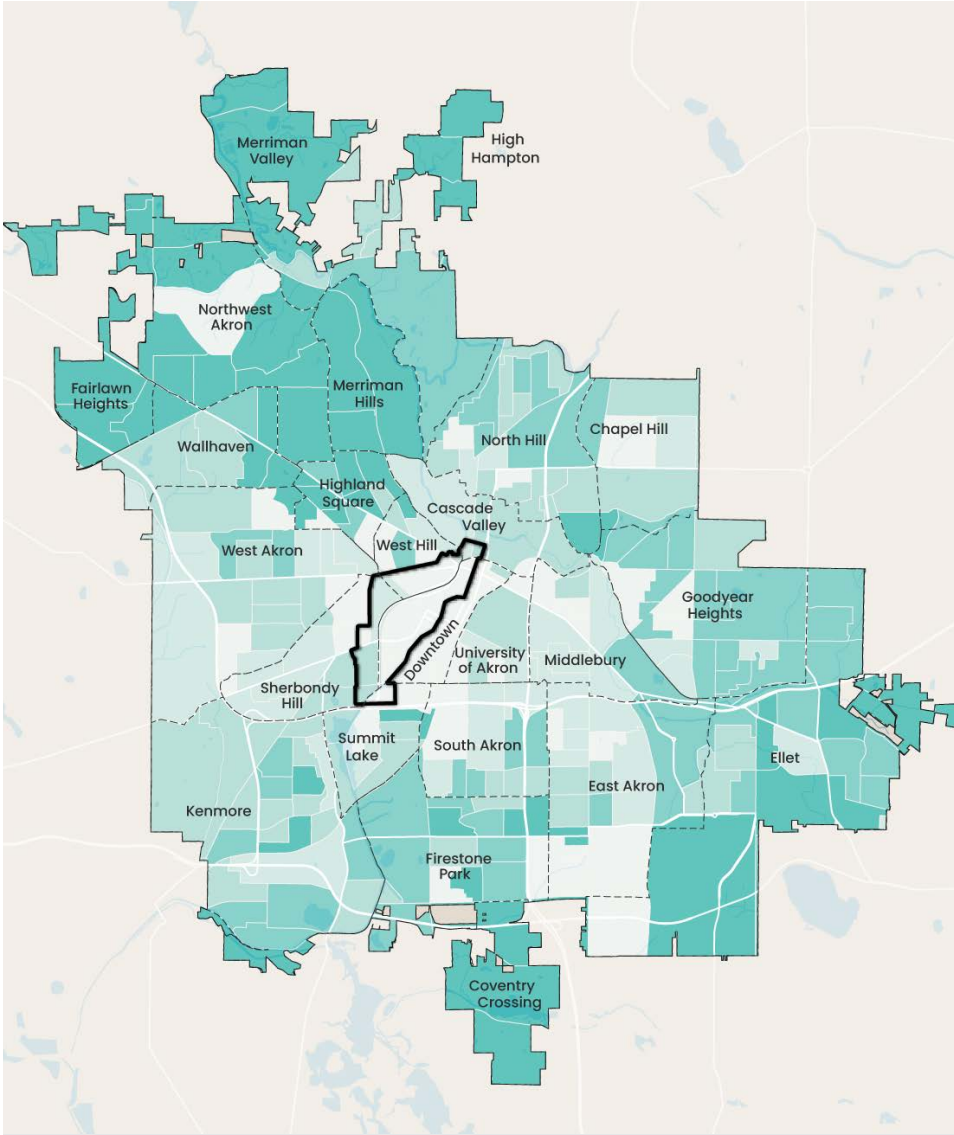
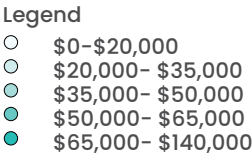




# Income & Poverty

The Innerbelt’s Impact Area also contains some of the lowest income areas of Akron. As in many other American cities, race and economic class present two (mutually reinforcing) facets of urban inequality and segregation.

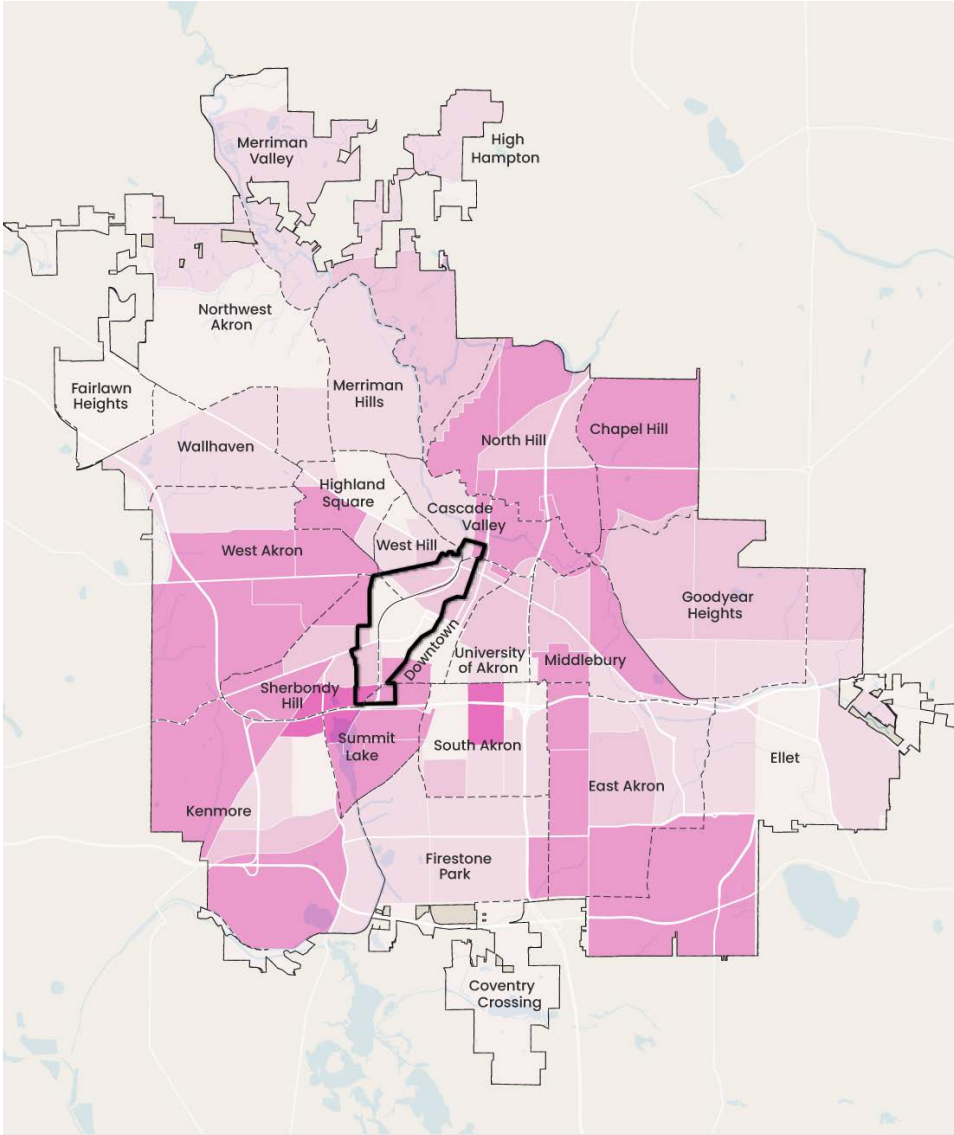
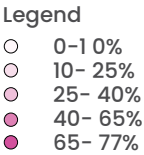
MEDIAN INCOME PER CENSUS BLOCK GROUP



## Childhood Poverty

Childhood poverty is another indicator of the higher level of community need around the Innerbelt. The childhood poverty rate in the Innerbelt Impact Area is 12% higher than citywide (which is already an elevated 34%).

% HOUSEHOLDS IN POVERTY WITH A CHILD UNDER 18

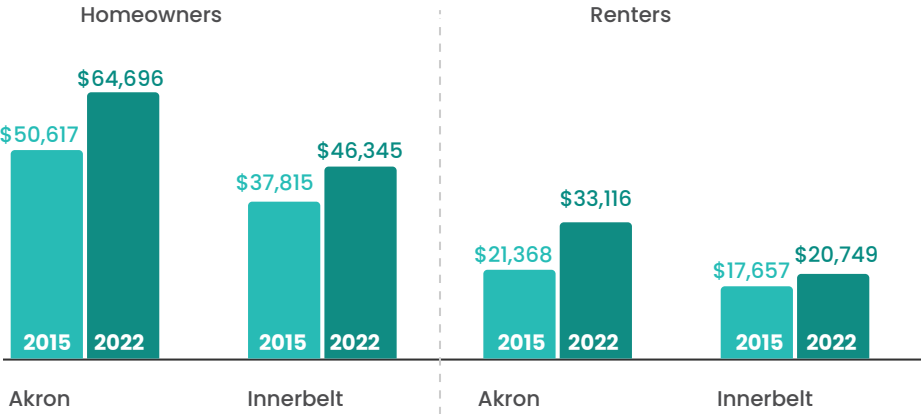


INCOME & POVERTY: THE RACE AND ETHNICITY GAP

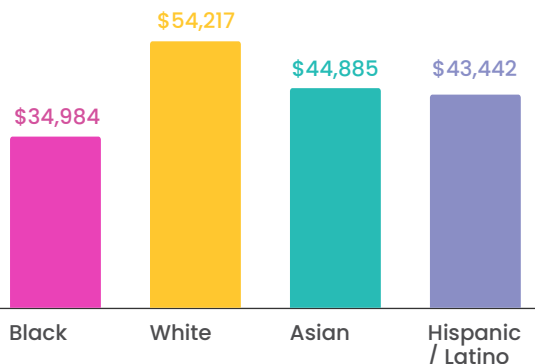
Across Akron and the Innerbelt, homeowners tend to earn more than renters. Incomes for residents of the Impact Area are significantly lower than citywide and are growing at a slower rate.

INCOME OF HOMEOWNERS VS RENTERS

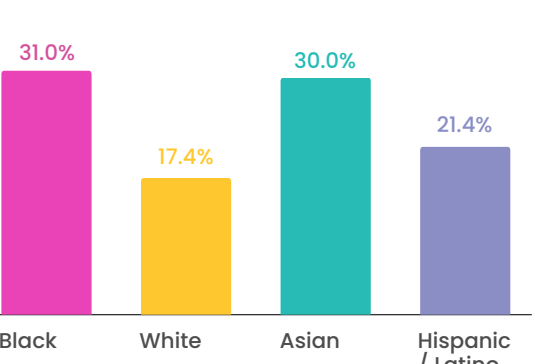
Across Akron and the Innerbelt, homeowners tend to earn more than renters. Incomes for residents of the Impact Area are significantly lower than citywide and are growing at a slower rate.



Median Income by Race in Akron



Poverty Rates by Race in Akron





# Community Services & Resources

Akron maintains a legacy of strong civic organization, and many of the community services are tied to these organizations. Residents around the Innerbelt rely on a range of community services and resources to meet their everyday needs. These resources include:

### Schools

There are over a dozen public and private schools around the planning area. In Akron, high schools have strong identities and play an important cultural role in addition to education.

### Community Centers

There are also a number of city- and privately- operated community centers around the Innerbelt, most of which are to the west. However participants at the community meeting responded that there was a serious need for more safe and supervised spaces for youth.

### Access to Healthy Food

Despite the presence of a few stores, like Aldi and Mustard Seed Market, access to fresh produce and groceries was one of the most frequent challenges identified by the community.

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES AROUND THE INNERBELT

**Schools**

- 1 Promise School
- 2 St. Vincent St. Mary High
- 3 St. Vincent de Paul Parish School
- 4 NHF STEM Middle School
- 5 Stark State College
- 6 University of Akron /
- 7 St. Mary School
- 8 Leggett CLC
- 9 Helen Arnold CLC
- 10 George C. Miller South School
- 11 Crouse CLC
- 12 Stewart Primary Elementary
- 13 Schumacher CLC
- 14 John R Buchtel CLC
- 15 Portage Path CLC
- 16 Project Learn of Summit County

**Community/Recreational Centers**

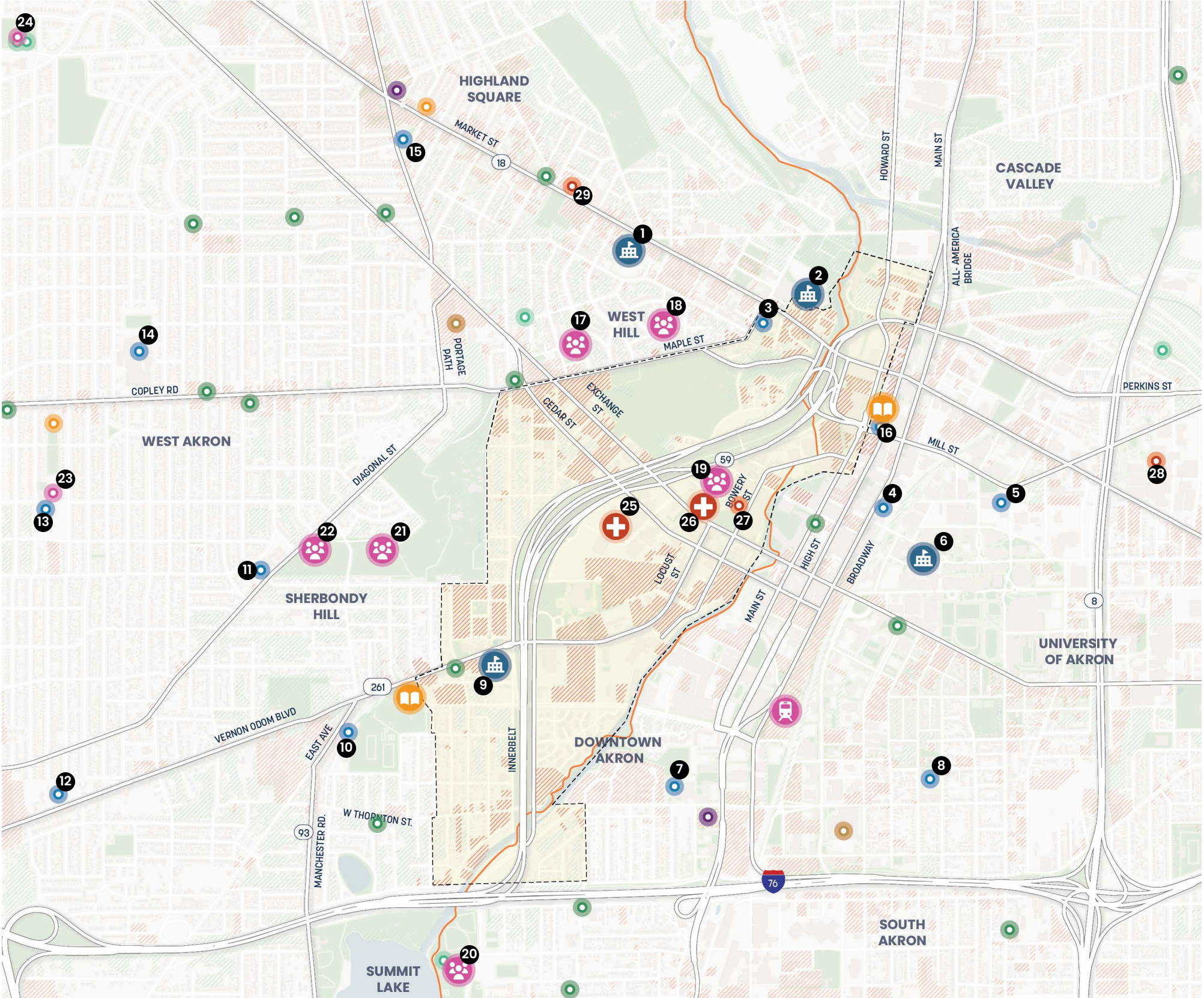
- 17 Balch St. Fitness Center
- 18 Salvation Army
- 19 Ronald McDonald House
- 20 Summit Lake Community Center
- 21 Ed Davis Community Center
- 22 Perkins Woods Pool
- 23 Lawton St. Community Center
- 24 Forest Lodge Community Center

**Hospitals / Health Care**

- 25 Cleveland Clinic Akron General Hospital
- 26 Akron Children's Hospital
- 27 Akron Children's Hospital Considine
- 28 Summa Health System Akron Campus
- 29 I Promise HealthQuarters

**Other Resources**

-  Convenience Store
-  Supermarket
-  Library
-  Parks and Playgrounds
-  Post Office



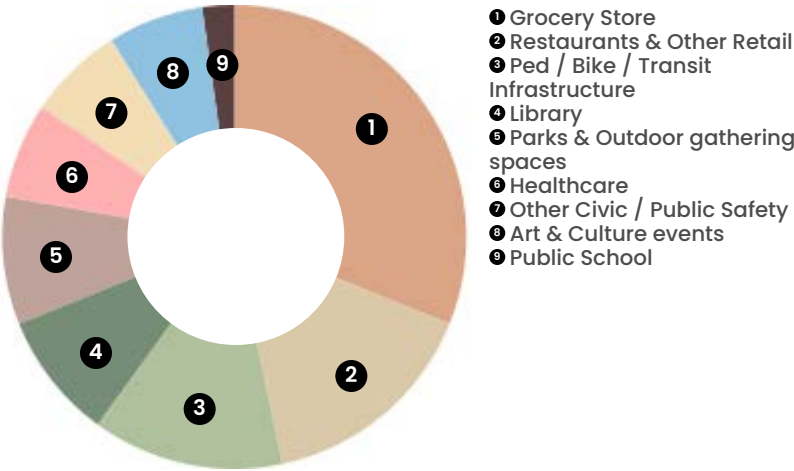


# Community Wellbeing: What We Heard

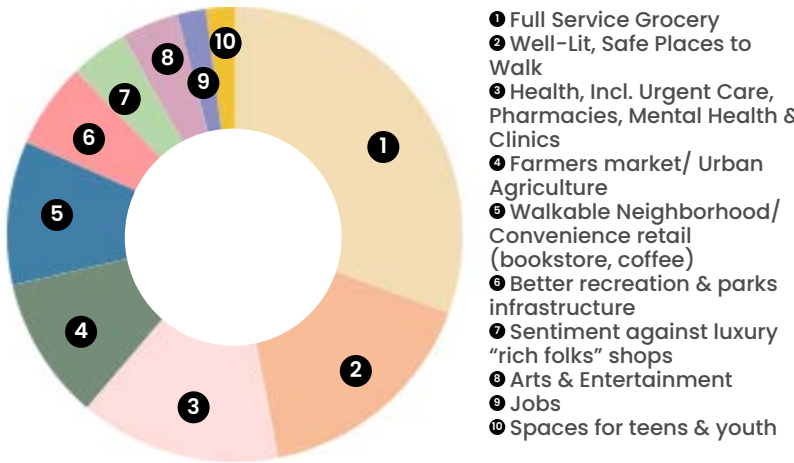
## Understanding Community Services Needs

In Open House #1, we posed a number of questions to the community about what services they rely on and what’s missing. Below are their responses.

What Kinds of Services Do You Rely On?

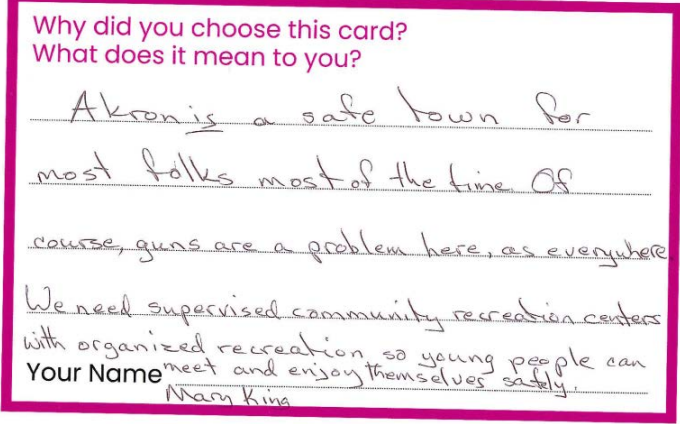


What’s Missing?



## Uncovering Other Dimensions of Community Wellbeing, Such as “Feeling Safe”

While “community needs” are a broad and amorphous category and can encompass everything from housing to jobs and recreation (topics covered in the rest of the Report), our conversations with the community at Open House #1 helped to reveal aspects of community needs that are less readily captured by data alone. In particular, the need to “feel safe” came up as a key aspect of community wellbeing.



Emerging Themes from Open House #1 Conversations around Community Needs

Emerging Theme		Community’s Own Words
Community Programs and Youth Safety	Emphasizing the need for supervised recreation centers, educational programs, and cultural initiatives to uplift youth and provide safe spaces.	“We need supervised community recreation centers with organized recreation so young people can meet and enjoy themselves safely.”
Creating Inclusive and Inviting Public Spaces	Highlighting the importance of designing welcoming spaces where everyone feels physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe.	“Physical, emotional, psychological safety... somewhere to relax.”
Safe Streets and Transportation	Concerns about traffic safety, advocating for crosswalks, narrower streets, and protected bike lanes to ensure pedestrian and cyclist safety.	“Cars speed, and we can’t cross safely. We need crosswalks! Narrower street!”
Addressing Police-community Relations	Addressing trust issues between law enforcement and Black communities.	“I chose this card because as a young Black man I worry about police due to all my life watching Black men be killed by white officers. Feeling safe to me means that I won’t have to be on edge wherever I go.”
Addressing Perception & Reality of Crime	Addressing safety concerns related to crime, gun violence, inadequate police response	



# Housing

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

**What kind of housing challenges are people facing?**

**What kind of housing is being provided?**

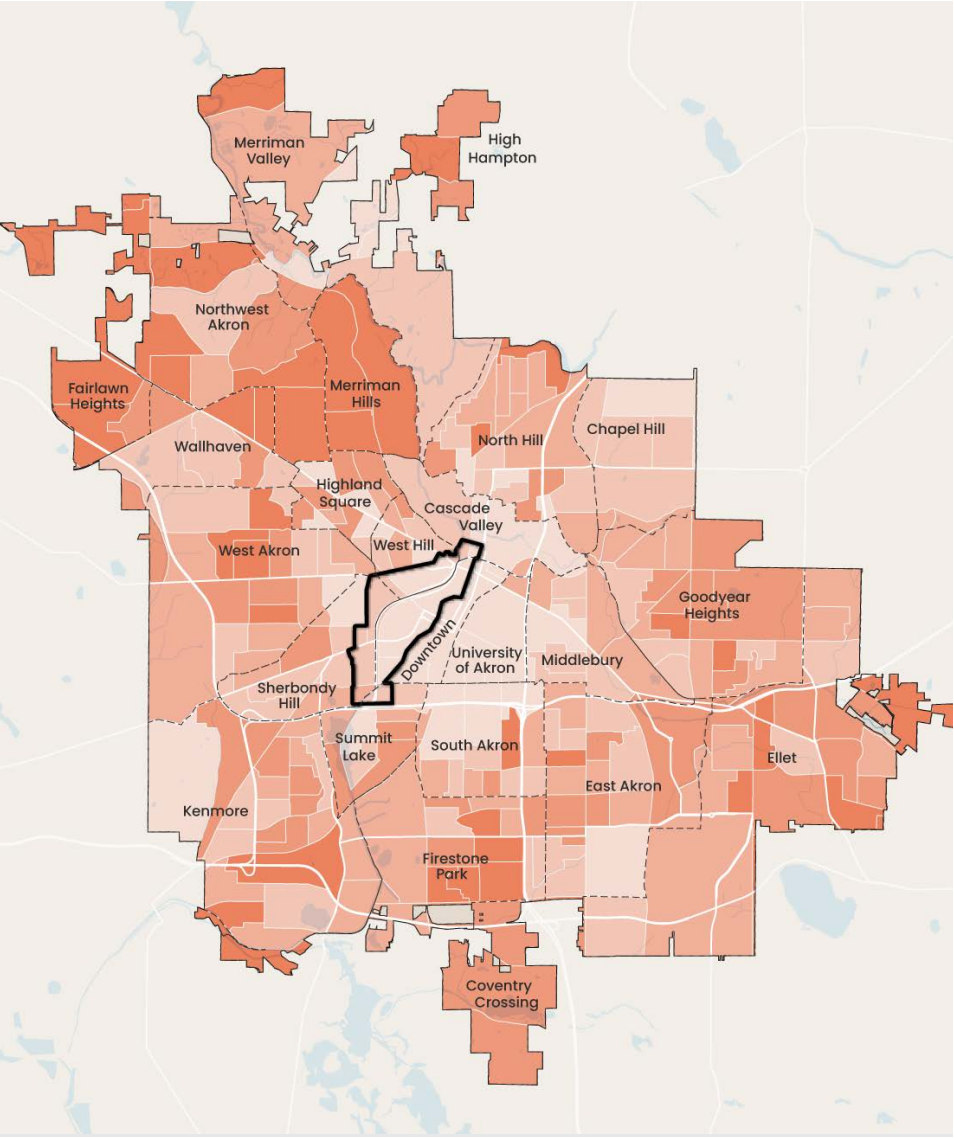
**Is there an additional need to improve people's lives?**



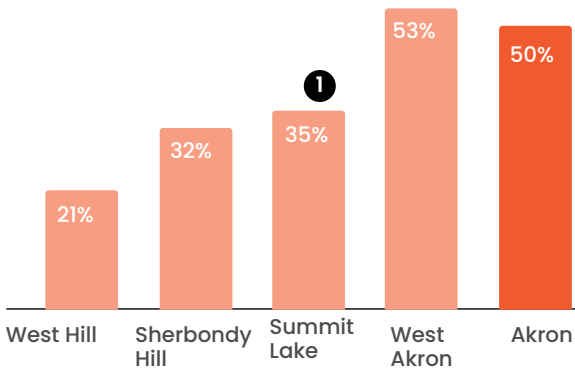
# Owner vs. Renter

Homeownership is a key way for households to build generational wealth. Historically, processes like redlining and predatory lending have stopped Black families from accessing fair homeownership opportunities, creating racial wealth gaps that are still felt today.

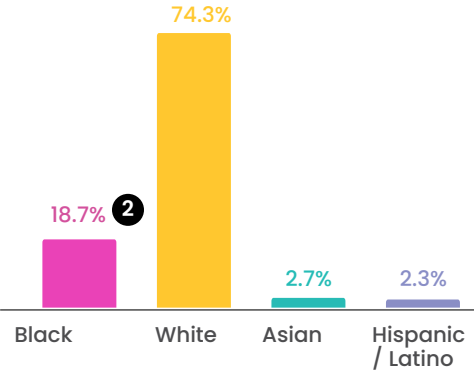
The Impact Area has comparably **low levels of home ownership** and a higher proportion of renters. The Impact Area is also **losing homeowner households**, at a faster clip than citywide. At the same time, the Impact Area’s share of renters is decreasing slightly (–1.8%) while the city’s share of renters has been rising (+5%).



HOMEOWNERSHIP RATES BY NEIGHBORHOOD



% OWNER-OCCUPIED HOMES BY RACE



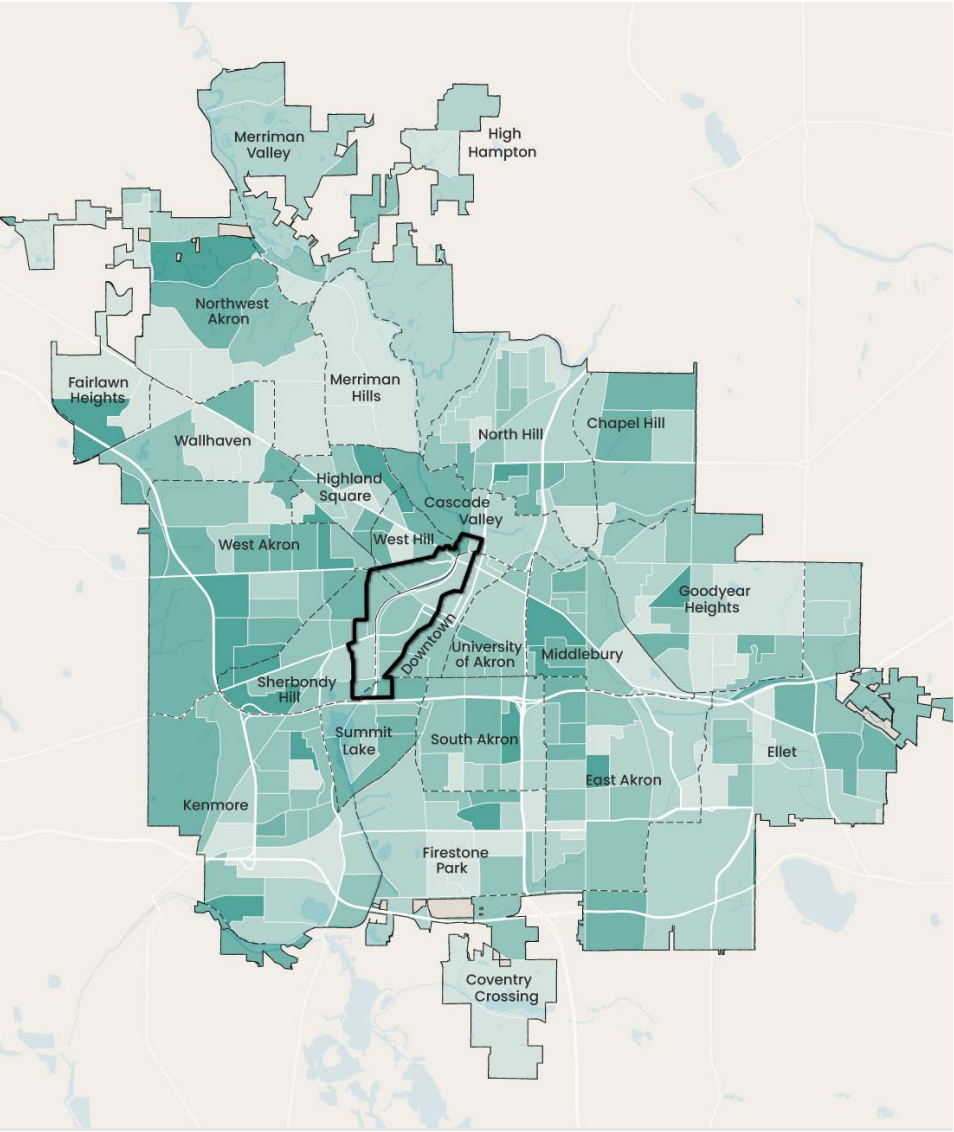
❶ Home Ownership Rates Are Generally Lower in the Impact Area...

❷ ...and Exhibit a Significant Racial Gap

# Housing Cost Burden

A significant number of households in Akron are “rent burdened”, meaning that they pay 30% or more of their household income on rent. Rent-burdened households exist across Akron, with a notable concentration in those neighborhoods affected by the Innerbelt.

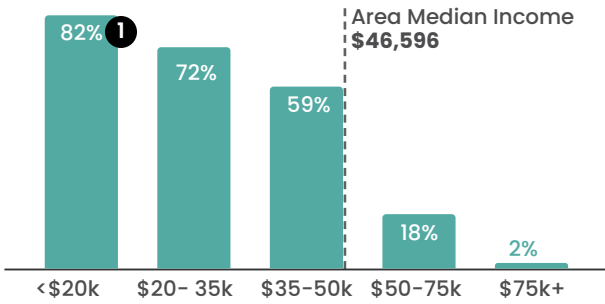
**Housing Cost Burden Is Higher in the Impact Area**  
Both renters and homeowners with a mortgage in the Impact Area experience higher housing cost burdens than citywide average. Notably, however, ownership cost (with a mortgage) is lower than median rent in the Impact Area.



RENT BURDEN BY INCOME BRACKET IN THE IMPACT AREA

The Impact Area experiences significant rent burden, especially among lower-income groups.

❶ For example, 82% of households making less than \$20,000 a year are rent-burdened. Most residents earning less than \$50,000 a year struggle with rent burden.



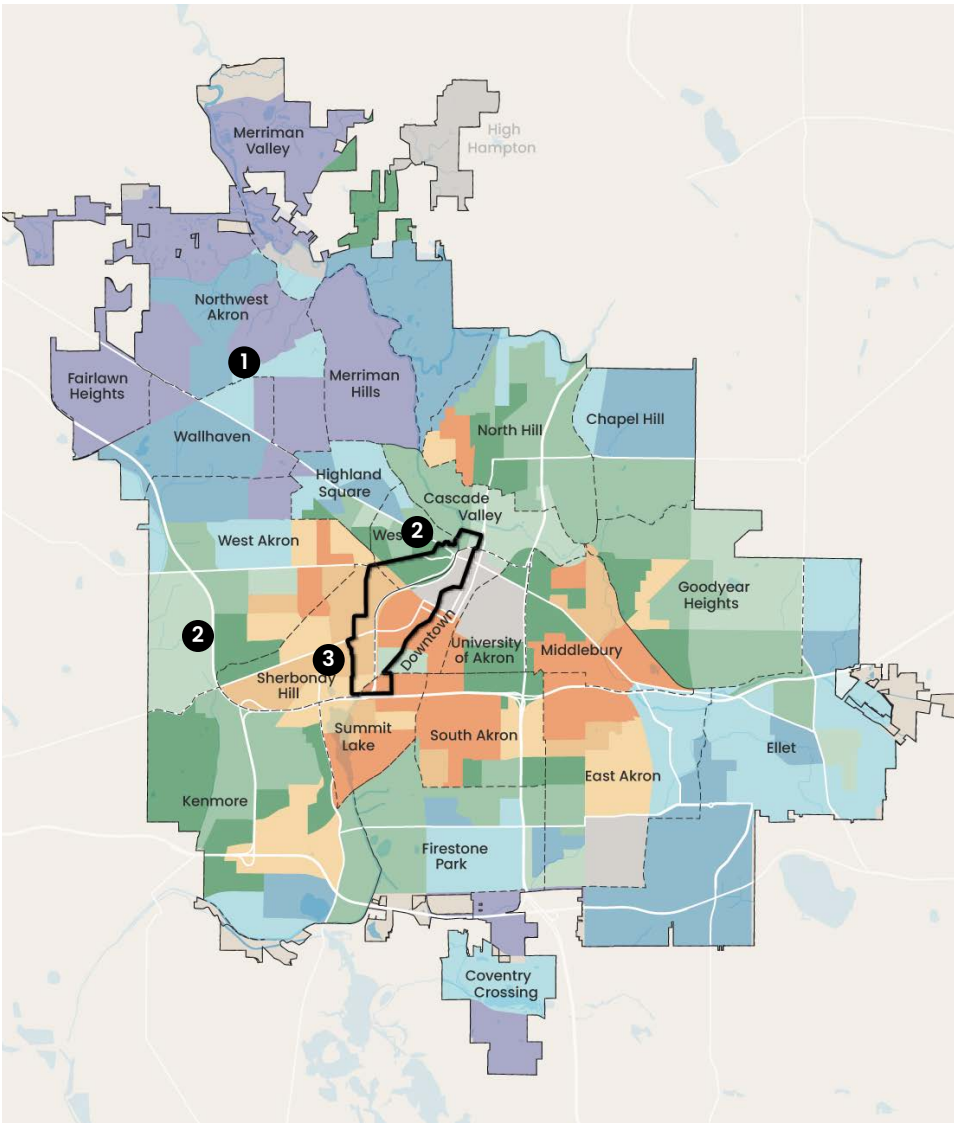


# Housing Market Health

Much of the housing market in the Impact Area can be characterized as a “stressed” market. Between 2015 and 2022, the total number of housing units in the Impact Area decreased by 8%, a faster clip than citywide.

The 2023 Market Value Analysis (undertaken as part of Akron’s 2024 Housing Action Plan) classified census block groups in Akron into distinct market

types based on a number of market indicators, such as median sale price, % foreclosures, % vacant parcels, owner occupancy, and % rentals with subsidies. Based on this analysis, much of the Study Area (especially the neighborhoods of Sherbondy Hill and Summit Lake) falls into the “stressed” category, characterized by a high % of vacant parcels, relatively high rate of foreclosures, and low home sale prices.



### HOUSING MARKET TYPE ANALYSIS

Based on the 2024 Housing Action Plan for Akron Market Value Analysis

● Market Type A

● Market Type B

● Market Type C

● Market Type D

● Market Type E

● Market Type F

● Market Type G

● Market Type H

● Market Type I

○ Insufficient Data

Strong

Middle

Stressed

### SPATIAL TRENDS IN MARKET TYPE, 2017–2023

● Strong

Most of Akron’s “strong” markets are located in the northwest and southeast.

● Middle

Much of West Hill and the areas of West Akron around I-77 are “middle” markets. Many of these areas were classified as “stressed” under the previous 2017 study.

● Stressed

Large areas of West Akron, Sherbondy Hill, and Summit Lake continue to be “stressed” markets.

## Housing Market Dynamics Mirror Broader Inequities

Comparing indicators of housing market health with demographic and socioeconomic indicators reveals clear patterns of housing segregation. The “stressed” areas in and around the Innerbelt have a significantly higher percentage of Black residents, who are much less likely to have college degrees and much more likely to experience poverty.

	Population	Black, Non-Hispanic	Youth (Under 18)	Bachelor or Greater	Families in Poverty	Median Sale Price	Foreclosed Houses	Vacant Parcels	Owner Occupied	Rentals with Subsidy
A	21,709	9%	19%	56%	4%	\$252,836	0%	8%	83%	6%
B	24,526	25%	19%	24%	18%	\$152,241	1%	7%	35%	20%
C	33,467	14%	19%	26%	8%	\$129,716	0%	9%	72%	7%
D	10,106	42%	19%	18%	27%	\$104,100	1%	25%	53%	88%
E	45,484	27%	23%	13%	16%	\$86,409	1%	11%	59%	16%
F	25,038	34%	22%	13%	29%	\$66,258	3%	13%	26%	18%
G	13,501	51%	24%	9%	23%	\$59,369	2%	23%	62%	43%
H	8,310	70%	28%	8%	36%	\$43,777	4%	25%	37%	96%
I	15,560	49%	25%	8%	30%	\$39,538	5%	23%	35%	25%



# Housing Development

The majority of Akron’s housing stock is single-family, townhomes, and low-rise apartments. While there are a number of high-rise subsidized housing buildings that date from the urban renewal era, more recent initiatives have either been smaller scale or involved the rehabilitation of older high-rise buildings.

In addition to larger initiatives, like the I-Promise housing and Edgewood Village, there are a number of smaller parcels owned by AMHA in West Akron and Summit Lake.

## Single Family Housing



Five Points Homes  
Owner Occupied - Market Rate



Edgewood Village Family Housing  
Rental - Affordable - Single Family & Townhomes



Aspire at Auld Farms  
Owner Occupied - Market Rate

### EXAMPLES OF NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS IN AKRON

A mix of different housing typologies are being developed in Akron, from detached-single family units to large, multi-family structures.

## Townhomes & Condos



Kindy Sue Apartments  
Rental - Market Rate - 4 Apartments

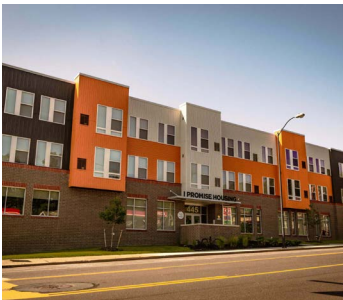


Cascade Village  
Rental - Affordable - 49 Townhomes



Georgetown Condos  
Owner Occupied - Market Rate

## Multi Family Housing



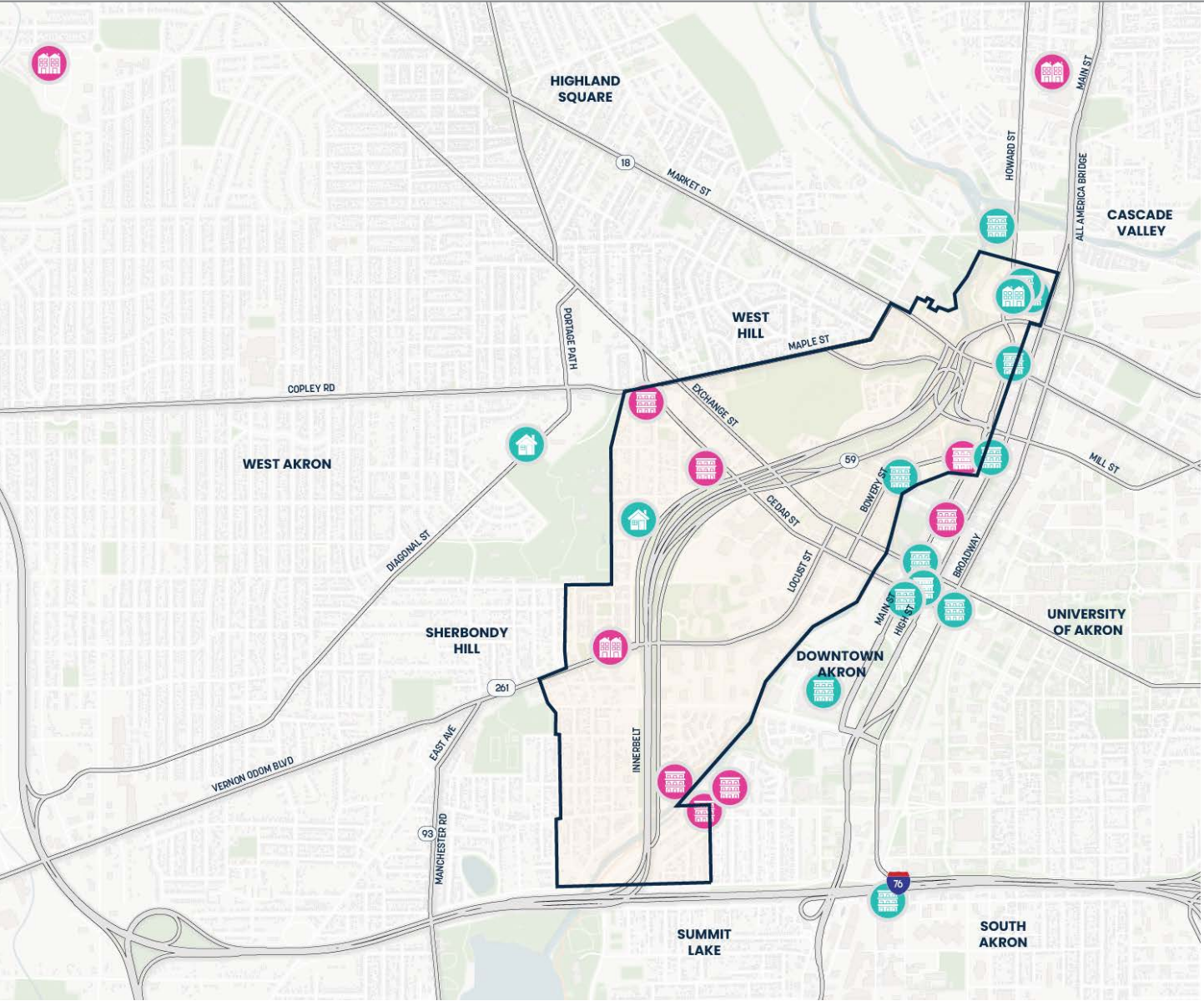
IPromise Apartments  
Rental - Affordable - 50 Apartments



Canal Square Lofts  
Rental - Renovation - Market Rate - 79 Apartments



Mayflower Manor  
Rental - Renovation - Affordable - 233 Apartments



### (ABOVE) RECENT HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL AKRON

#### Housing Typology

- Single Family
- Townhomes & Condos
- Multifamily

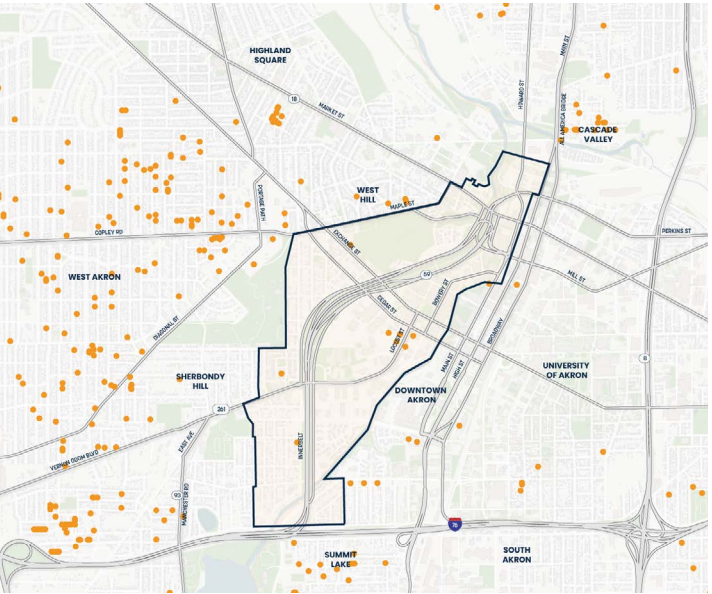
#### Housing Affordability

- Subsidized
- Market Rate

### (RIGHT) AKRON METROPOLITAN HOUSING AUTHORITY (AMHA) PROPERTIES

AMHA owns a significant number of parcels in West Akron and Summit Lake.

- AMHA Parcels

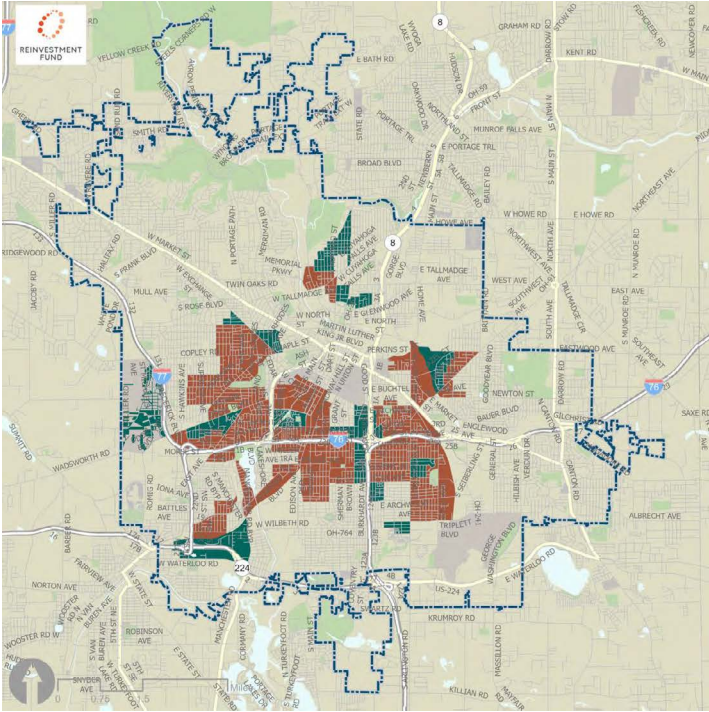




# Priority Areas & Opportunity Sites

The 2024 Akron Housing Strategy places a focus on housing quality and neighborhood stabilization for a significant portion of the neighborhoods around the Innerbelt and in West Akron. In order to spatialize the opportunities and challenges at a more detailed level we identified City-owned parcels, vacant parcels, and parcels with a high level of tax delinquency.

A significant number of parcels immediately to the west of the Innerbelt, in the neighborhoods of Sherbondy Hill and West Akron, are tax delinquent, indicating homeowner distress. A significant proportion of the smaller residential lots in this area are vacant, indicating land that could be better utilized.

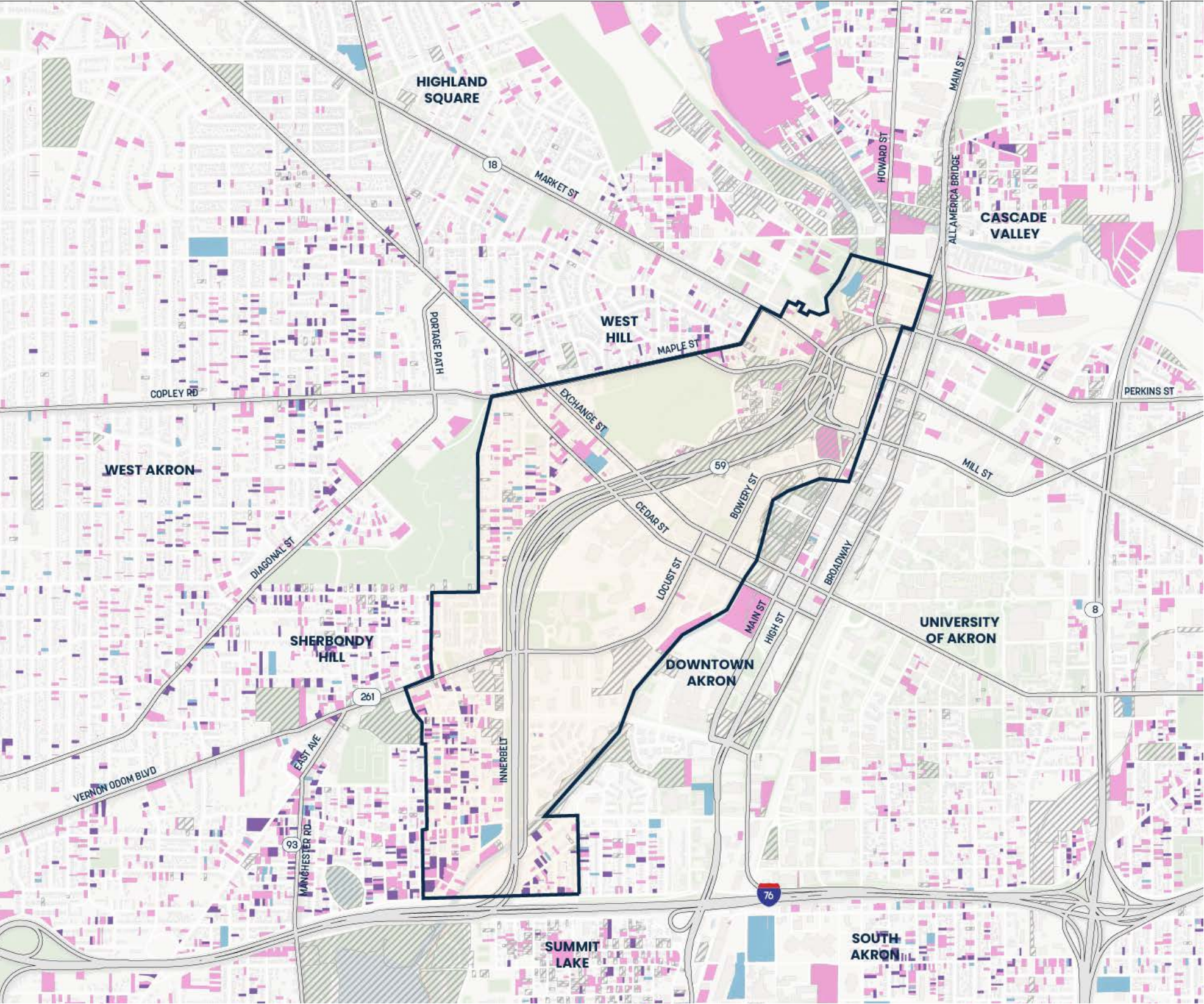


(Left) Housing Priority Areas from the 2024 Akron Housing Study

- Legend
- Focus on Preservation of Affordability
  - Focus on Housing Quality and Neighborhood Stabilization

(Right) Priority Areas & Opportunity Sites

- Legend
- ▨ City-Owned Property
  - Vacant Property
  - Owes \$25k+ in Taxes
  - Vacant & Owes \$25k+



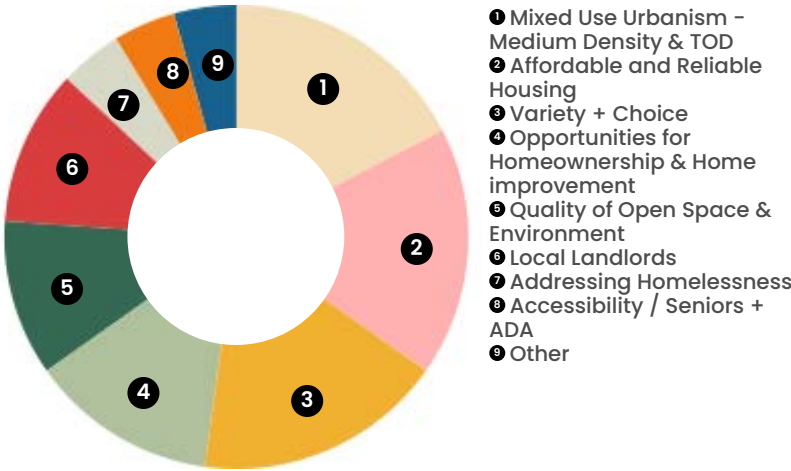


# Housing: What We Heard

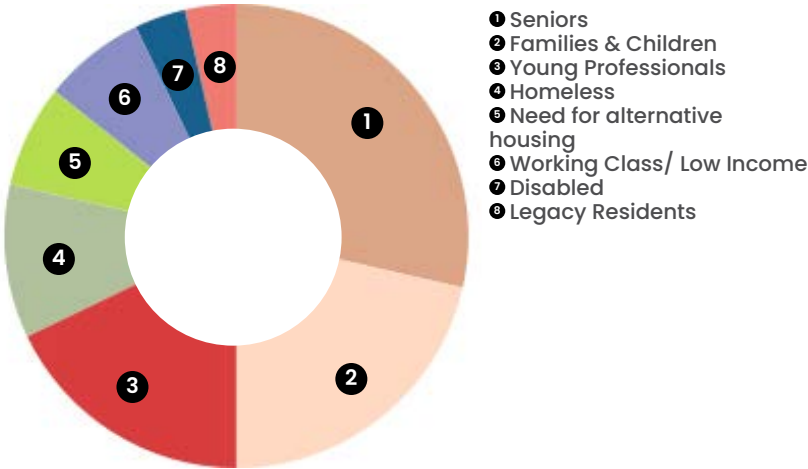
## Understanding Overall Housing Needs

In Open House #1, we posed a number of questions to the community about what services they rely on and what’s missing. Below are their responses.

What does Good Housing for Akron Look Like?



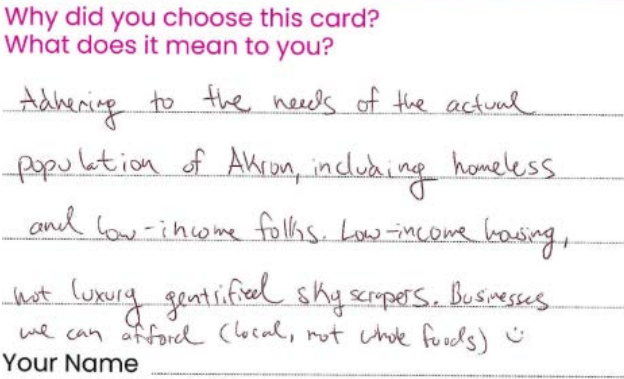
Who is Struggling to Find Housing?



## Uncovering Other Dimensions of Housing, Such as “Housing Insecurity”

Housing affordability was one of the most themes brought up by the community. There is a clear need for affordable housing across the demographic spectrum – from families to the elderly.

The conversation around housing did not focus on simply building more housing. It raised a need for mechanisms that address systemic inequities, including tenant rights, homeownership access, displacement of Black communities, and services for the homeless



Emerging Themes from Open House #1 Conversations around Community Needs

Emerging Theme		Community’s Own Words
Desire for Affordable Housing That’s Truly Affordable	Desire to see affordable housing in the Innerbelt area, especially for those displaced by its original construction, but also concerns that what’s defined as affordable housing isn’t truly affordable.	“There’s opportunity to provide affordable housing in the Innerbelt area – especially to those who lost so much when it came thru.”
Homelessness and Housing Insecurity	Need for services and housing for homeless and housing-insecure populations, as well as concerns about how the city handles these issues.	“The homeless of Akron are human beings and not nuisances that can be moved around. We need to look after the needs of our brothers and sisters.”
Repair for Historic and Systemic Housing Inequities	Acknowledgment of systemic issues like redlining and displacement that have disproportionately affected Black communities, with calls for reparation-like housing solutions.	“So, there has to be an honest conversation about the systemic inequitable practices (i.e. redlining, loan/funding inaccessibility, etc.) that caused foreclosure, blight, abandonment in the community.”
Need for Senior Housing	Desire for more senior apartments with good access to healthcare and amenities.	“More senior apt... why? Because good access to hospitals.”
Housing Security	Emphasis on housing as a fundamental right, with calls for inclusive policies ensuring all residents have access to secure and safe housing.	“All people should have access to safe and secure housing. EVERYONE means everyone. No restrictions on who can be eligible for homes..”
Preventing Gentrification and Displacement of Black Communities	Concerns about whether new developments will be affordable and accessible to Black communities, calling for inclusive planning.	“Please do not price out our community. Is it affordable to the Black community? Whatever is built, who is it for?”
Tenant Rights and Homeownership Access	Calls for safer affordable housing, better pathways to homeownership, and stronger tenant protections.	“Safe & Affordable housing. A better onramp to homeownership. A way to allow tenants to advocate for improvements.”



# Housing: Key Takeaways

## A tight rental market is putting pressure on rental affordability in the Impact Area.

The tight rental market in the Impact Area is characterized by low vacancy rates and rising rents. Since 2015, the average rental vacancy rate in the Impact Area has dropped to a very low 1.6% (vs. 3.6% citywide), whereas median rent has gone up 30% (approximately ~\$200/month).

Increases in income have failed to keep pace with rent. Since 2015, income for the median renter is up less than 20% (vs. over 50% citywide). This has contributed to significant renter cost burden: 65% of renters in the Impact Area are housing cost burdened (defined as those who spend 30% or more of their income on rent).

## Similarly, there is a cost burden issue for homeowners in the Impact Area.

There is pressure building in the homeownership market as well. Homeownership vacancy is low, and homeownership costs are rising, though much more slowly as a result of fixed long-term financing. There is a higher share of lower-income homeowners in the Impact Area compared to the city at large, and 40% of homeowners are housing cost burdened (defined as those who spend 40% or more of their income on homeownership costs), compared to 25% for the city at large.

## There is potential housing market-driven displacement.

Between 2015 and 2022, all of the population decline in the Impact Area is attributable to a decrease in its Black population (while the white and Hispanic/Latino populations have both slightly increased). This change, put in the context of the aforementioned challenges in the housing market, may underlie the community sentiments around gentrification and displacement.





# Economy

GUIDING QUESTIONS

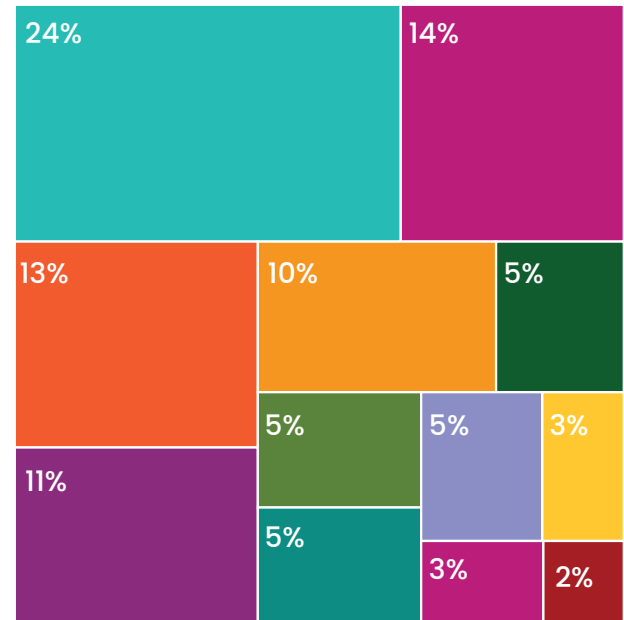
**What are residents’ level of access to economic opportunities?**

**What might be standing in the way of economic opportunities?**



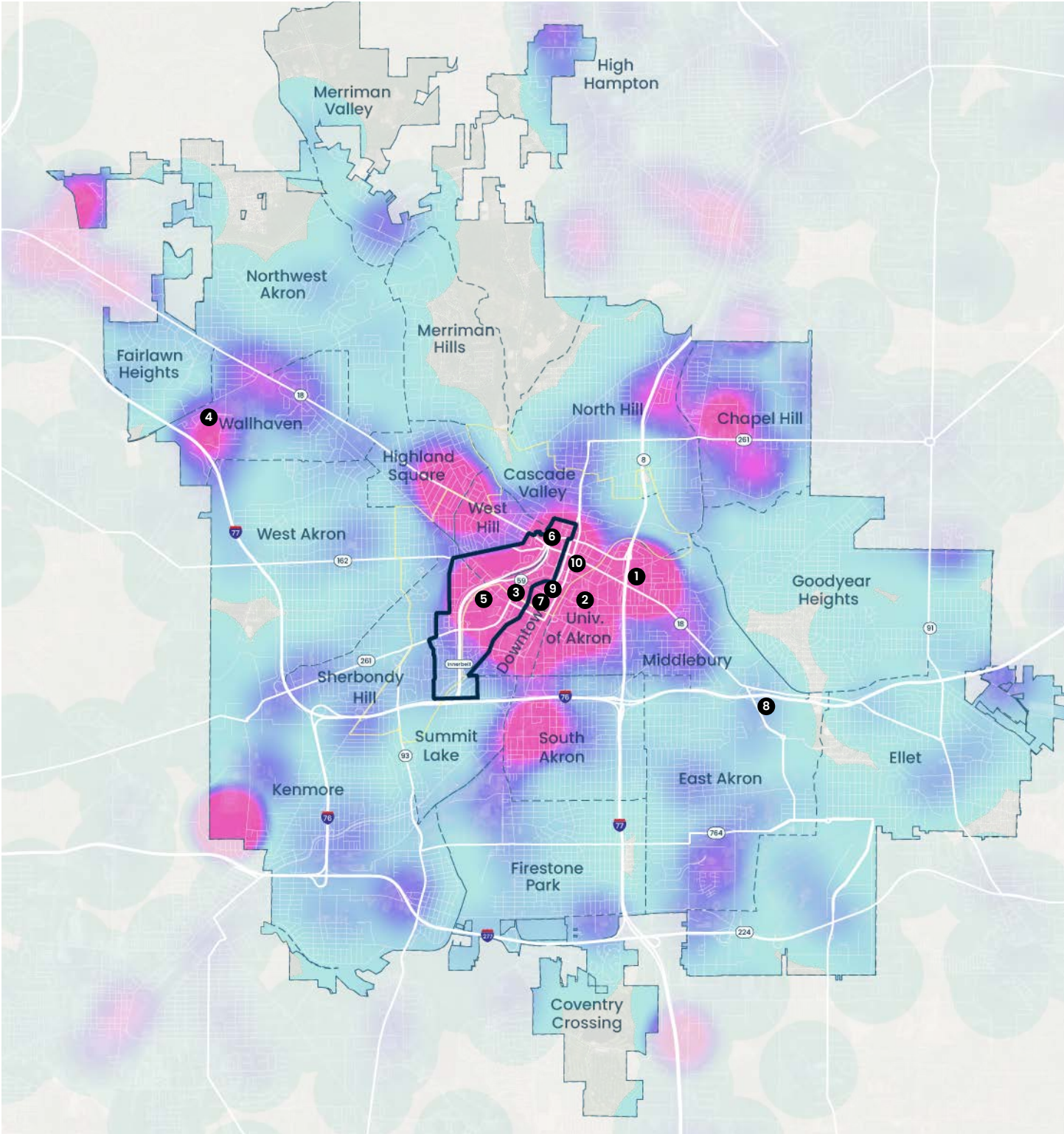
# Employment Overview

Akron’s economy is shaped by the innovative industrial legacy of the “**Rubber Capital of the World**”, as well as by the move towards “**Eds and Meds**” experienced by many peer post-industrial cities. Today, the largest employment groups by industry are Education, Health Care, and Social Assistance (24%), followed by Manufacturing (14%), and Retail Trade (13%). Among its 10 largest employers are three hospitals/health care systems, University of Akron, FirstEnergy, Goodyear, and the City and the County. Spatially, most of these jobs are located within and east of Downtown, as well as in a number of suburban locations.



EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

- Education, Health Care, Social Services
- Manufacturing
- Retail
- Professional Services
- Transportation and Warehousing
- Financial Services
- Other Services
- Public Admin
- Food and Entertainment
- Construction
- Wholesale
- Information



THE TOP 10 EMPLOYERS IN AKRON

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1 Summa Health System<br>8,609 employees       | 6 Cleveland Clinic-Akron General<br>4,779 employees | 9 Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company<br>2,954 employees |
| 2 University of Akron<br>5,933 employees       | 7 Akron Public Schools<br>4,544 employees           | 10 City of Akron<br>2,406 employees                 |
| 3 Akron Children’s Hospital<br>5,773 employees | 8 Summit County<br>3,323 employees                  | 11 Signet Jewelers<br>2,094 employees               |
| 4 FirstEnergy<br>5,538 employees               |   |   |

Job Locations of People Living Around the Innerbelt

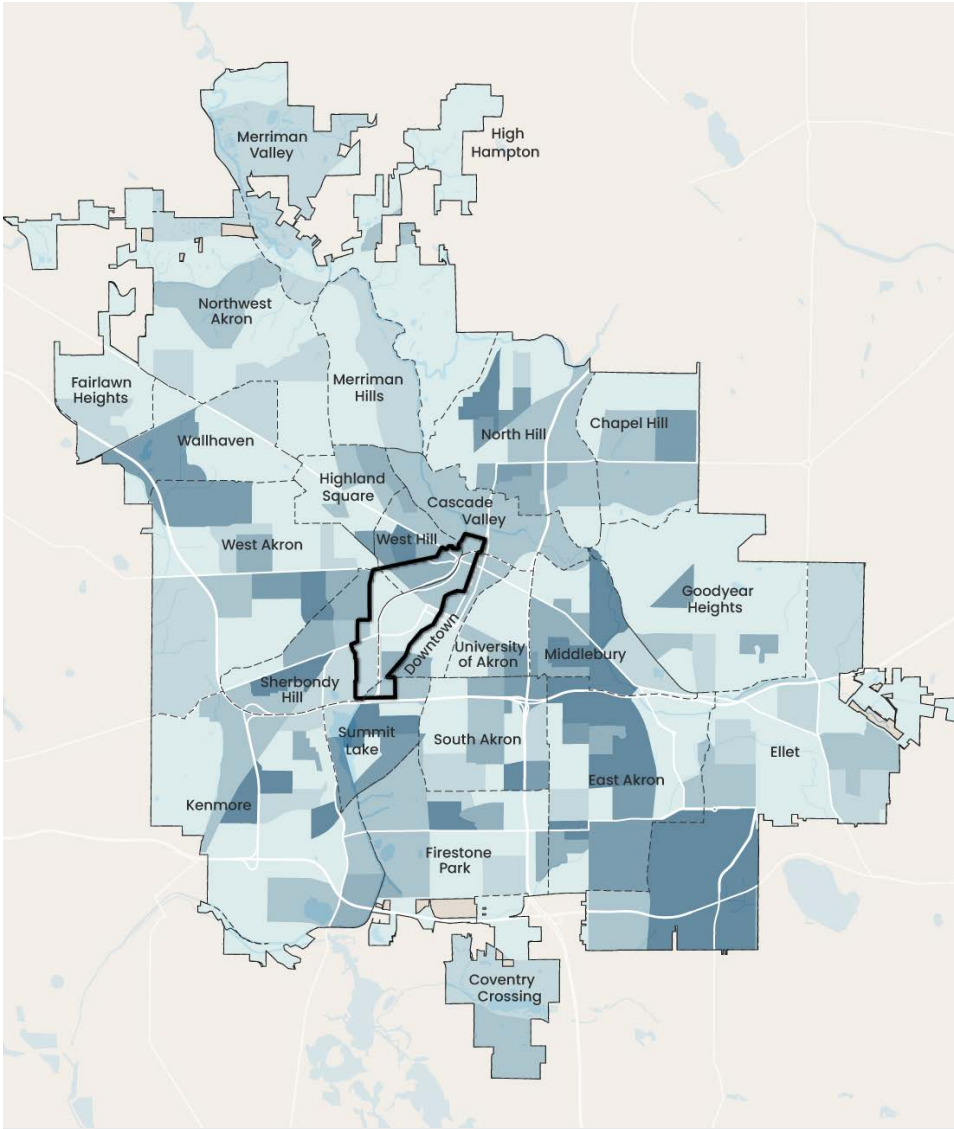
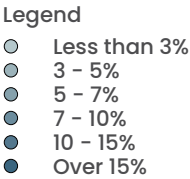




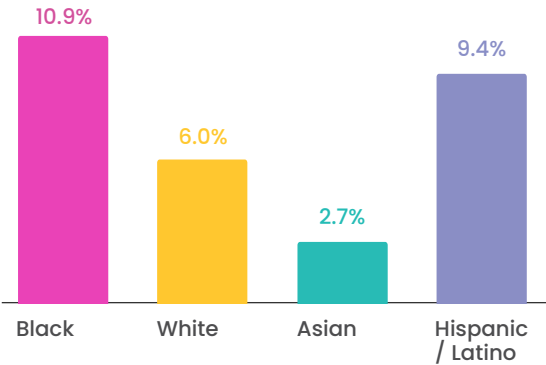
# Unemployment

Unemployment within the impact Area is 10%, 2.3% higher than the citywide average of 7.7%, despite the proximity to a number of Akron’s largest employers.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



Unemployment Rates by Race in Akron

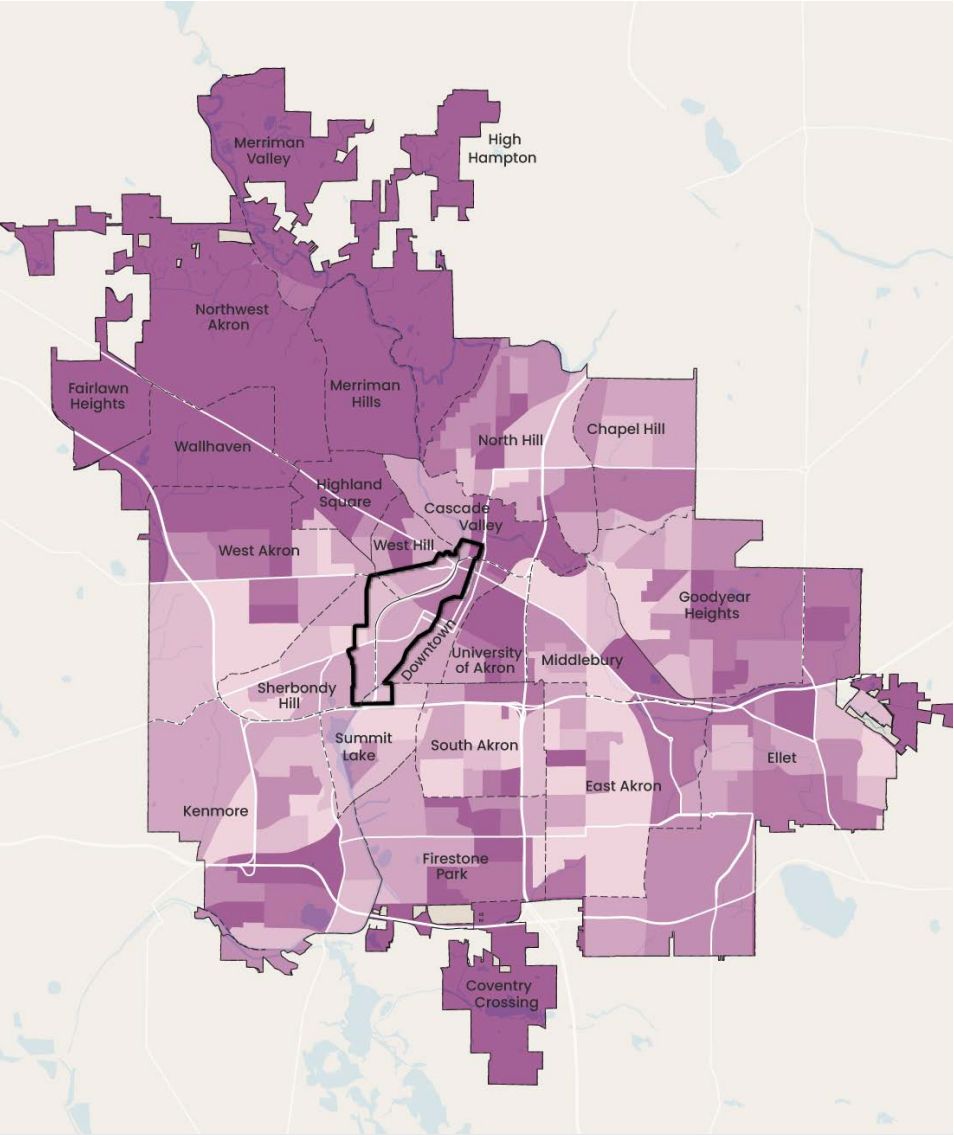
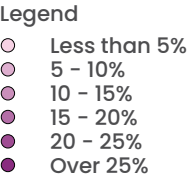


# Educational Attainment

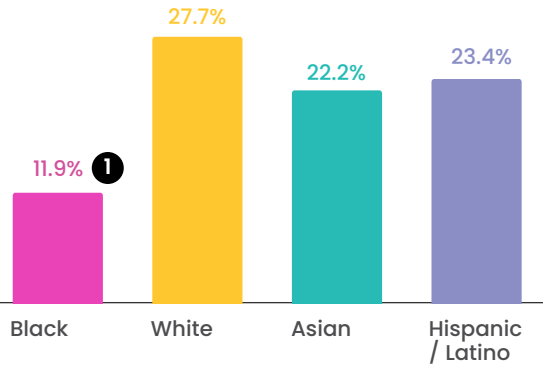
In Akron at large and the Impact Area in particular, residents experience significant educational and skills barriers to good jobs.

Only 23% of Akron residents over 25 have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, notably lower than the national average of 37%. Only 11% of Akron’s Black residents have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to the national average of 26%.

% POPULATION WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER



% OF BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER BY RACE



Significant Racial Disparities in Educational Attainment

Black residents of Akron face the greatest educational barrier to good jobs. Only 11.9% of Black residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 23% city-wide.

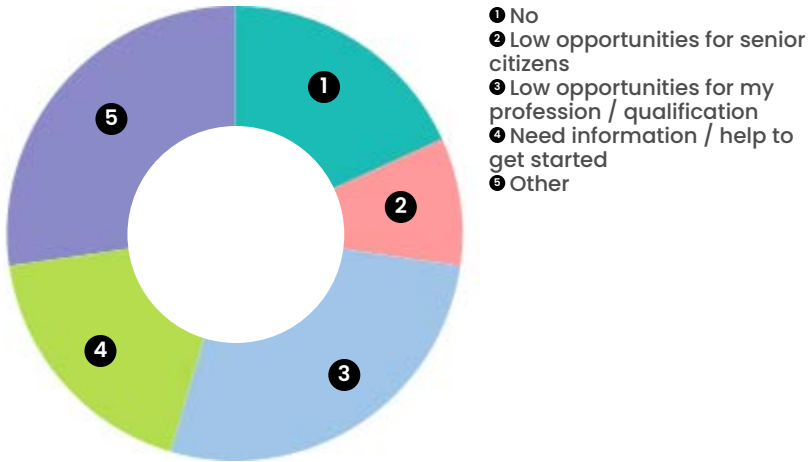


# Economy & Job Opportunity: What We Heard

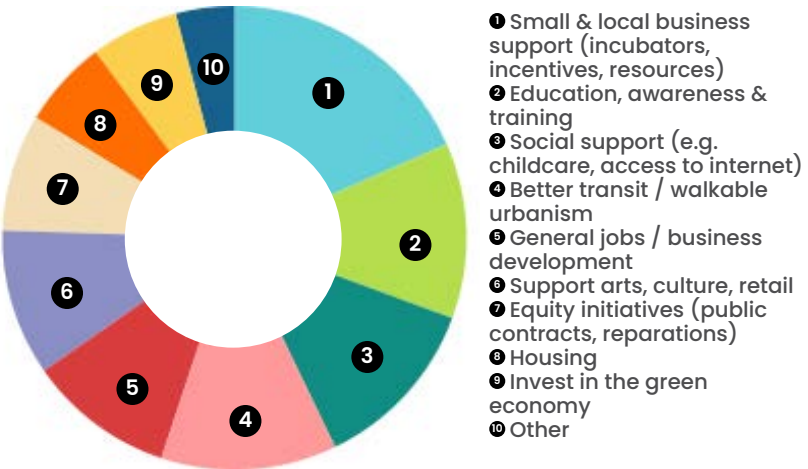
## Understanding Access To Job Needs

In Open House #1, we posed a number of questions to the community about what services they rely on and what’s missing. Below are their responses.

Do you feel excluded from Economic Opportunities?



What can we do to make Akron More Prosperous?



## Uncovering Other Dimensions of Economy, Such as “Business Support Resources”

While “job creation” is a broad term that can encompass everything from attracting national employers to supporting the legacy industries that made Akron a boomtown in the early 20th century, conversations with the community revealed a need to build up from the community. Specifically, the need to invest in local Black-owned entrepreneurship and to address the loss of generational wealth-building caused by the Innerbelt.

Why did you choose this card?  
What does it mean to you?

DUE TO SYSTEMIC RACISM & URBAN RENEWAL BLACK PEOPLE WERE DISPLACED AND LOST WEALTH. BUILDING WEALTH IS A WAY OF RECONCILIATION THAT CAN LEAD TO A VIBRANT AKRON

Emerging Themes from Open House #1 Conversations around Community Needs

Emerging Theme		Community’s Own Words
Restoring and Building Generational Wealth	Addressing the loss of generational wealth due to urban renewal and systemic racism, with calls for strategies to rebuild and support wealth creation in affected communities.	“The old Innerbelt stopped a generation of people from passing on generational wealth. The reason the area around the Innerbelt is so impoverished is from the lack of generational wealth..”
Expanding Job Opportunities and Economic Mobility	Emphasizing the need for job creation, living wages, and reliable public transportation to provide access to economic opportunities for Akron residents.	“Ensuring that jobs are within proximity with living wage..”
Supporting Local and Minority-Owned Businesses	Encouraging investment in local businesses, particularly Black-owned and minority-led enterprises, to revitalize economic activity and create employment opportunities.	“A thriving Black business district served the family along what’s now the Innerbelt. Intentional opportunities must be made available to Black-owned, Black-led businesses to re-establish the once vibrant business community.”
Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development	Creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem with business support resources, flexible leasing options, and opportunities for small businesses to test and grow.	“Support cottage businesses. Short lease pop-up market. Gives opportunities to those starting small with little investment.”
Revitalizing the Innerbelt for Business and Economic Growth	Reimagining the Innerbelt as a thriving economic hub by attracting businesses, encouraging commercial development, and drawing in visitors.	“Because without business, there is no revival. Open the Innerbelt to the south & east to bring people in! Jobs, jobs jobs!..”



# Mobility & Infrastructure

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How are people near the Innerbelt getting around the city today?

What is the state of infrastructure around the Innerbelt?

Where are the spots that need attention for safety?



# Roadway Hierarchy

Main Street, High Street, and Broadway form a strong north-south spine that anchors the Downtown Street grid, serving as a commercial main street, transit corridor, and a direct connection to the Interstate Highway system. West of the Innerbelt, there are no similarly strong north-south connections that tie together neighborhoods.

Market Street and Exchange Streets provide strong east-west connections from Highland Square and West Hill through downtown and serve as commercial corridors. The east-west corridors from Sherbondy Hill and West Akron, however, were disconnected by the footprint of the Innerbelt and Opportunity Park Renewal districts.



1 Innerbelt Highway



2 Main St. - Broadway



3 Secondary St. - Bartges Street

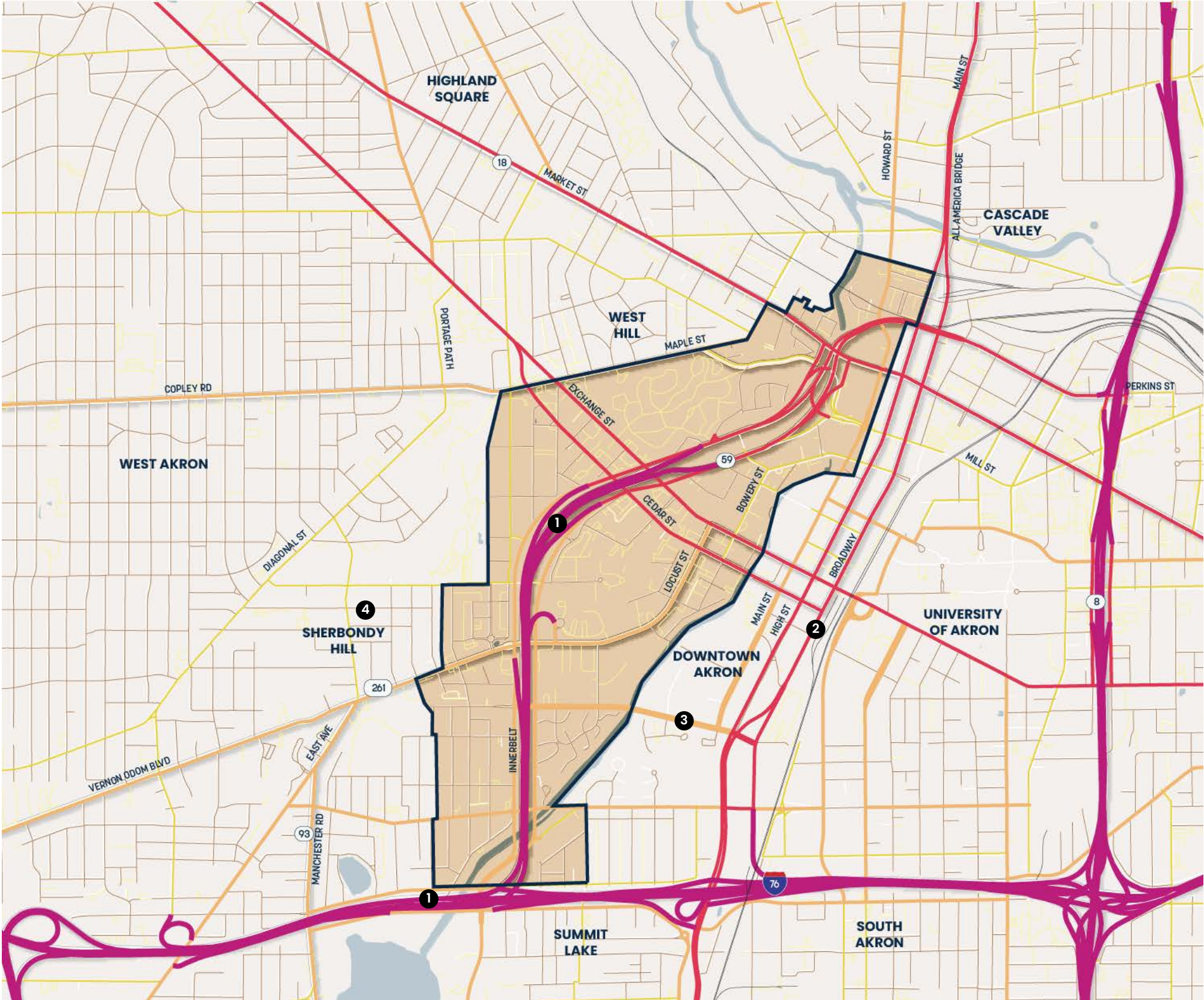


4 Tertiary St. - Easter Avenue

**ROAD HIERARCHY AROUND DOWNTOWN AKRON**

Legend

- Expressways
- Boulevards, Avenues and Main Streets
- Secondary Streets
- Tertiary Streets





# Roadway Jurisdiction

Within the study area, the following roadways are state routes that will require coordination with ODOT on potential improvements:

- **SR 59:** the remaining portion of the Innerbelt, Dart Ave, Rand Ave, and Perkins Street
- **SR 18:** Market Street
- **SR 162:** Maple Street/Glendale Avenue
- **SR 261:** portions of Exchange Street, Cedar Street, Main Street, and Broadway Street

ROADWAY JURISDICTION

Legend

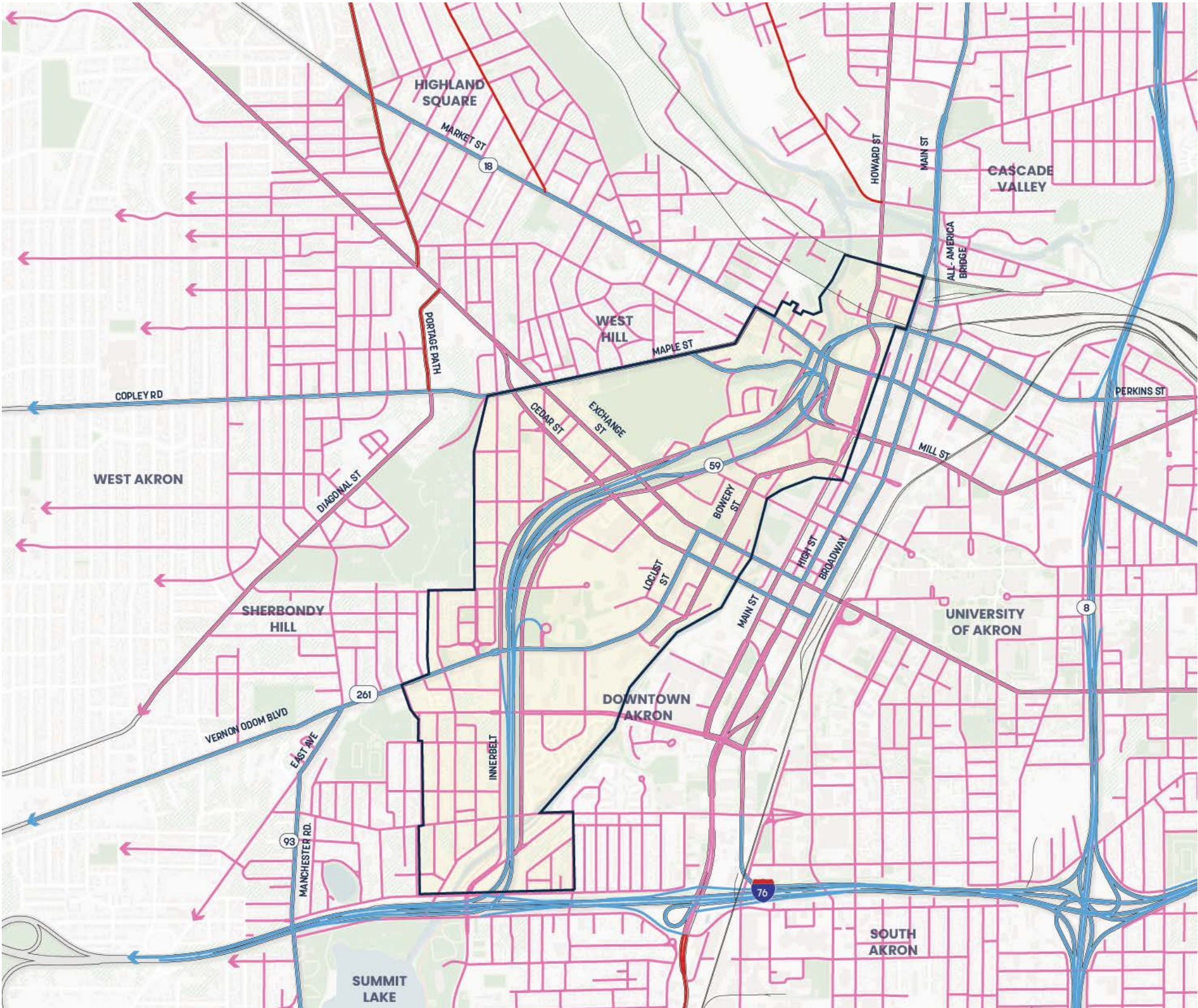
State or Federal

Municipal

Why Roadway Jurisdiction Matters

In Ohio, State or U.S. routes within a corporation's limits are maintained by that municipality. Local routes, including residential streets, are maintained by the city, village, county, or township, depending on where the route is located.

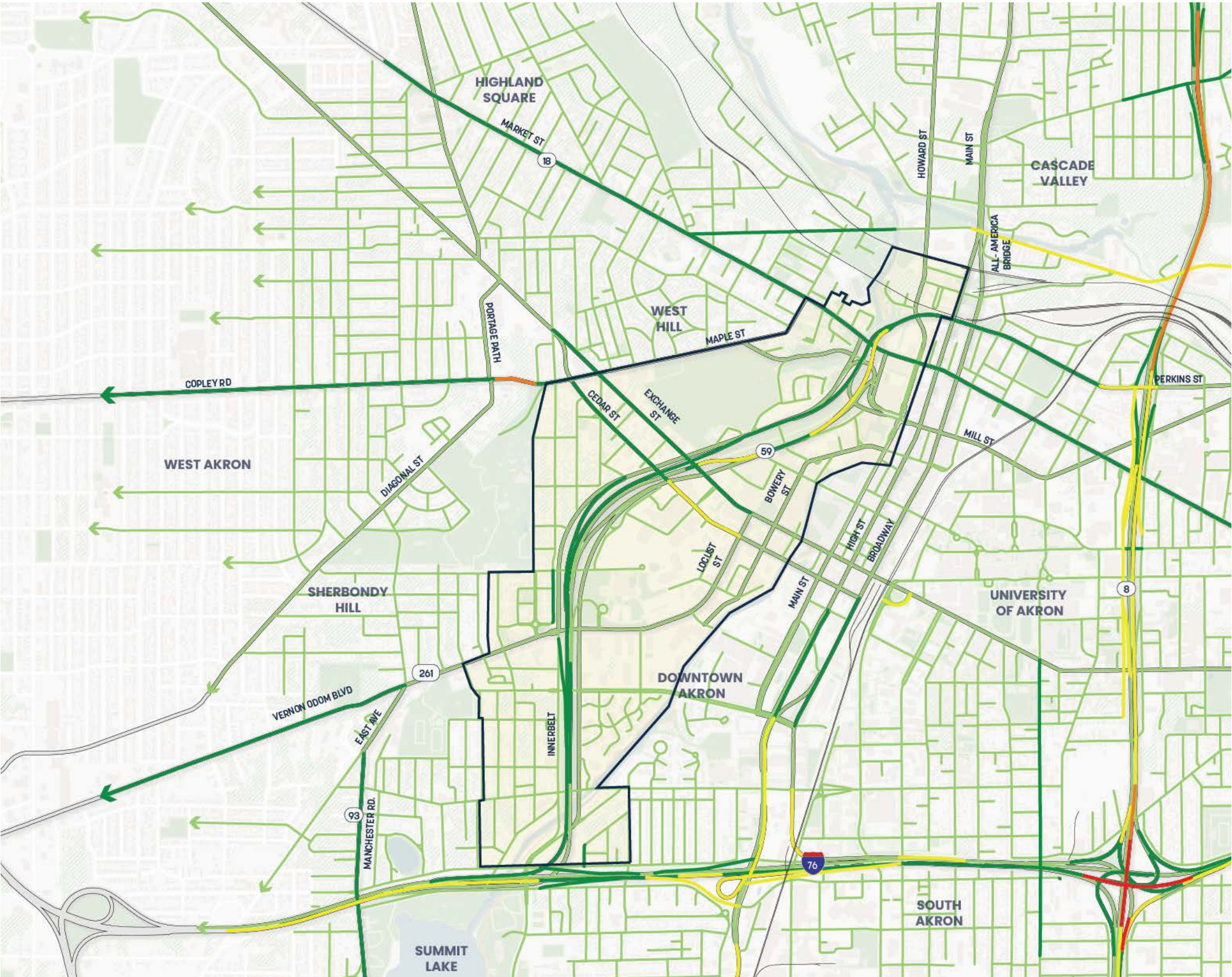
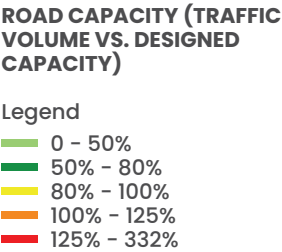
When pavement on state and U.S. routes within local jurisdictions reaches the end of its life, ODOT contributes along with locals to major resurfacing or reconstruction. This work is no longer considered maintenance, but falls under preservation. Per the Ohio Revised Code, to provide consistency, ODOT is responsible for longline pavement markings - like lane lines and edge lines - and regulatory signage - like speed limit and stop signs - regardless of corporation limits. ODOT is also responsible for full replacements of bridges along state and U.S. routes when it's needed.





# Roadway Capacity

Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) is a metric used to understand how busy a road is. Analyzing traffic volumes in the Study Area with the available AADT volumes from ODOT's Transportation Information Mapping System, none of the study area was found to be over capacity with the existing traffic volumes and only a few locations were found to be near capacity. The existing street network has capacity to continue reallocating vehicular space to other modes, such as wider sidewalks, protected bike facilities, or dedicated transit lanes.

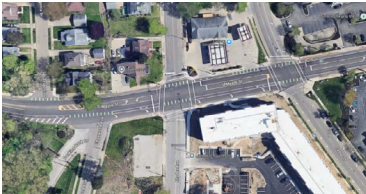




# Roadway Safety Analysis

A street’s design gives cues to who is and who is not welcome into a space. To bring neighborhoods back together Akron needs inclusive streets, for they are the largest part of the public realm and the backdrop to our day-to-day lives. The layout of the Innerbelt site makes

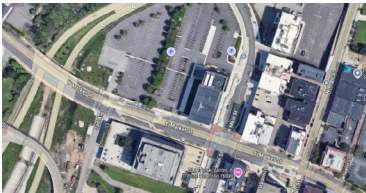
it difficult to navigate due to the disconnected ramps, one-way streets, and elevation differences. While there is available capacity on the existing roadways, mobility is improved when connections are intuitive for all modes of transportation.



**1 South Maple at Cedar St.**  
This is a confusing urban intersection where many streets intersect at different angles. In 20xx the City did xxx to improve pedestrian and bike safety



**2 Towpath Train Crossing**  
The trail crosses South Street mid-block between exits to I-76. In 20xx, a HAWK beacon was added to improve pedestrian safety. (Or: Despite the presence of a HAWK beacon, this remains a dangerous intersection)

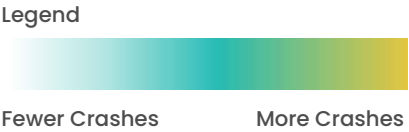


**3 North Main at Market St. and at MLK Boulevard**  
North Main @ Market St and @ MLK Boulevard is a transition area between the higher speed Innerbelt and the more pedestrian oriented Downtown streets. In 20xx, crosswalks were upgraded to become more visible

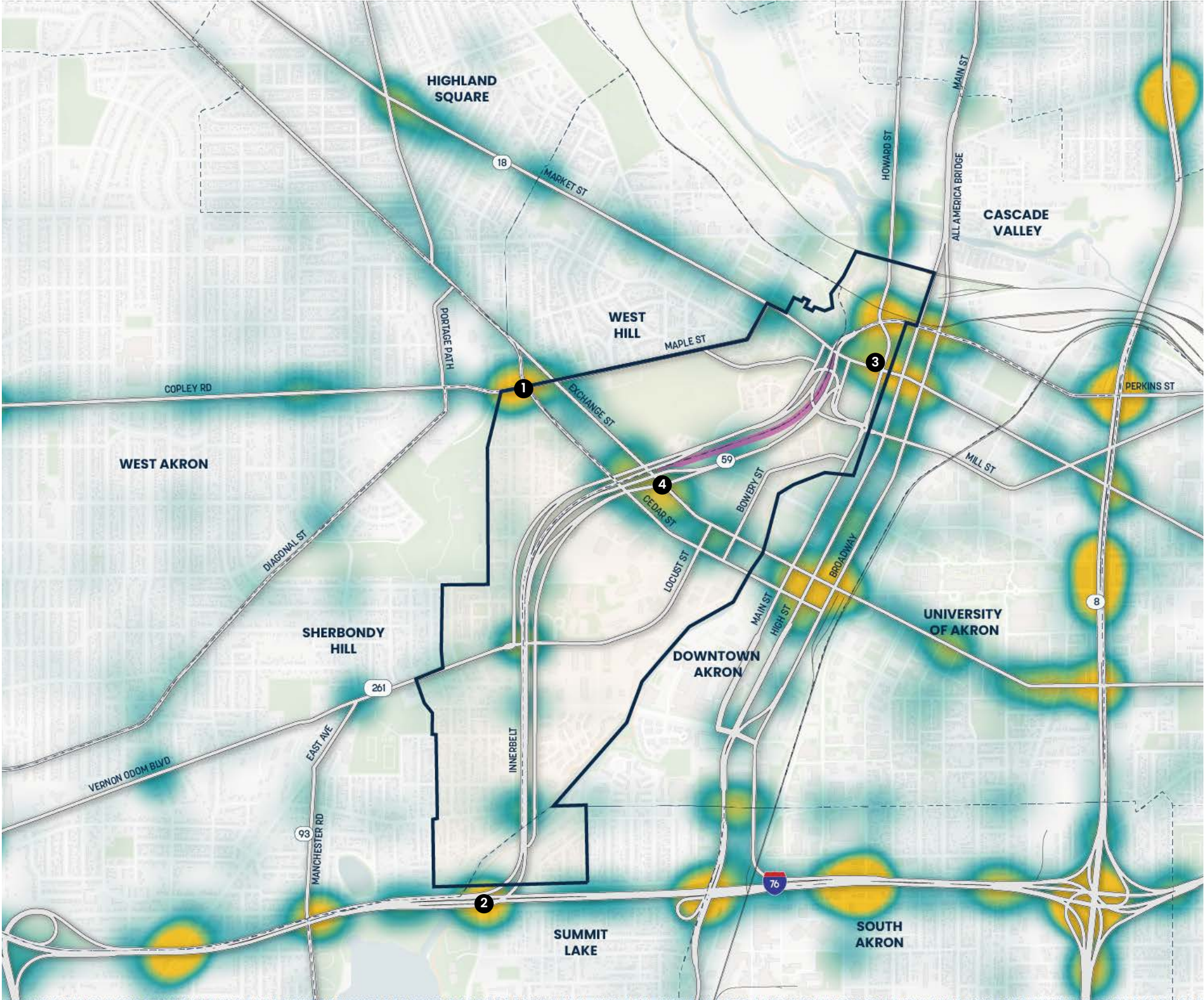


**4 Exchange St. at Innerbelt 59**

AREAS THAT HAD RECURRING CRASHES WITH INJURIES BETWEEN YEAR 2012-2022



Note: project info to be updated





# Pedestrian and Bike Infrastructure

Akron, Ohio, boasts a diverse network of bike facilities that cater to cyclists offering opportunities to explore the city’s lush green spaces and historical landmarks. The city has made significant strides in enhancing its transportation infrastructure by integrating a micro-mobility (scooter) network, complementing existing transit options and promoting sustainable travel.

The city also features a well-connected trail system, offering scenic routes for biking, hiking, and recreation. While north-south connectivity is robust for bike paths and trails, the Innerbelt remains an impediment to connectivity. Opportunities exist to enhance east-west links and

develop a continuous commuting and recreational corridor, ensuring greater integrated accessibility throughout the area. However, opportunities exist to redevelop east-west links that include visual interest and pedestrian amenities that would incentivize greater pedestrian comfort and connection to regional facilities.

The study area has sidewalks along at least one side of every non-limited access street. The sidewalk widths vary but most range between 4-6’. Pedestrian connections across the Innerbelt are poor due to narrow widths, lack of pedestrian amenities, and deteriorating sidewalk conditions.



❶ Towpath trail bridge is one of the few comfortable pedestrian/bike connection above across the former Innerbelt site.

TRAILS & BICYCLE FACILITIES

Legend

Separated Two-way Bike Lanes

On-Street Bike Lanes

Under construction

Rubber City Heritage Trail

Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail

Northside Train Station Connector

Freedom Trail

Summit Bike Share Stations





# Transit

Akron’s metro connectivity, managed by the METRO Regional Transit Authority, offers reliable bus services across the city and its surrounding areas. The network effectively bridges neighborhoods divided by the Innerbelt, with bus frequencies ranging from 15 to 60 minutes, depending on the route and time of day. Locations along the former Innerbelt site with fairly strong service - like Market, Exchange, and Cedar Streets - could present opportunities for infill development.

However, the availability of 15-minute bus frequencies is limited, particularly for critical East-West connections. Commuters traveling between neighborhoods like West Akron or Sherbondy Hill and Downtown Akron have limited services available.

METRO completed a BRT feasibility study in 2023, highlighting three proposed BRT routes:

- W Market-RKP-E Exchange-S Arlington
- State-Howard/Main-RKP-S Arlington
- Wooster-Kenmore-RKP-S Arlington

All three routes would traverse Downtown Akron along the edge of the study area. The W Market route would also travel directly through the study area. Key elements of these proposed BRT routes include 10-minute frequencies, neighborhood and enhanced stations with multimodal connections/amenities, and exclusive running ways.



1 W Thornton St. at Williams Tower



2 Opportunity Pkwy at Akron-Canton Regional Food Bank



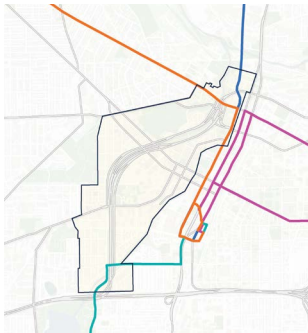
3 W Exchange St. at Akron Children's Hospital



4 W Market St at Akron Public School

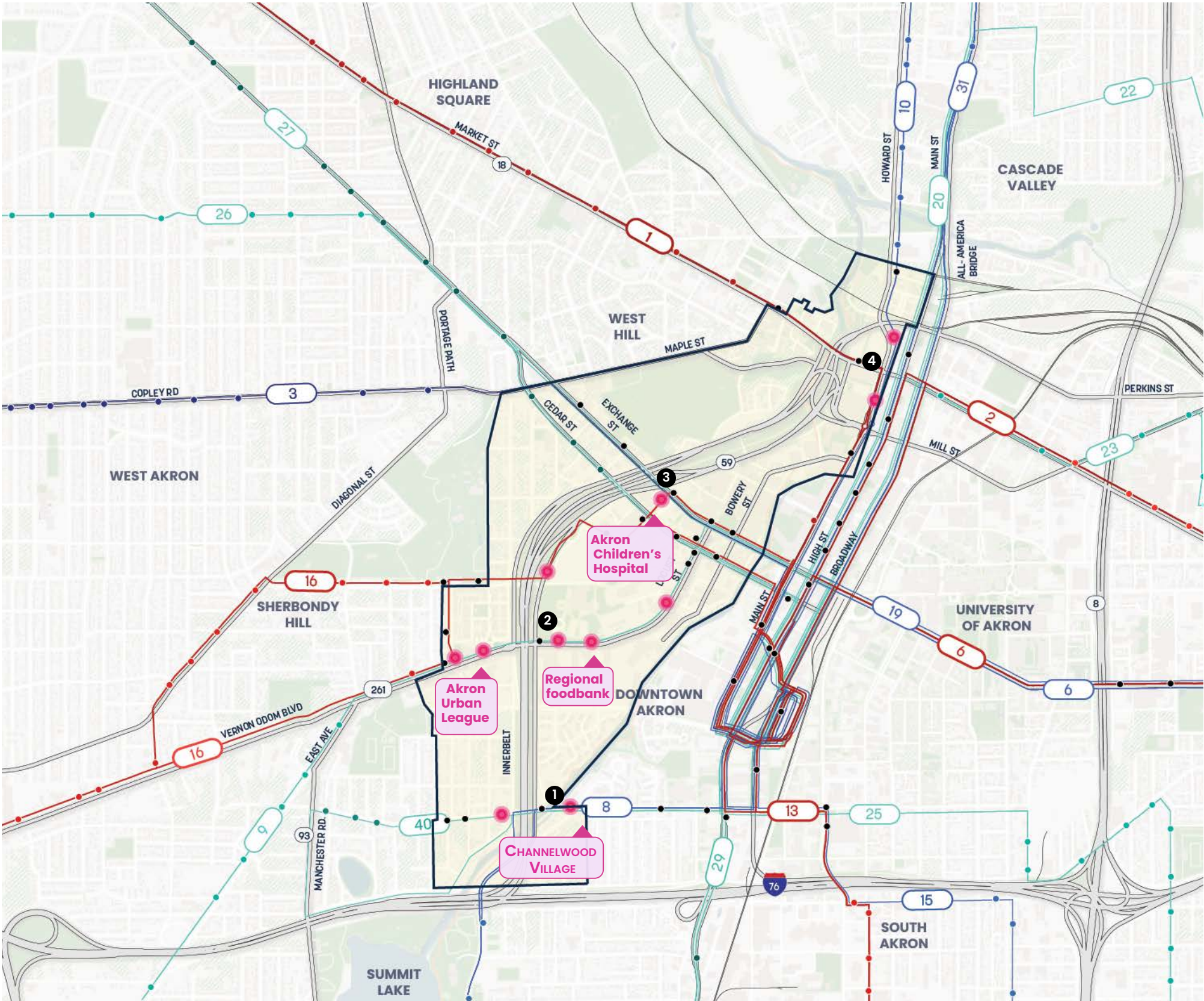
### (RIGHT) CURRENT METRO SERVICES

- Legend
- Bus Stops with >5k Annual Boarding
  - Bus Lines (15 min Frequency)
  - Bus Lines (30 min Frequency)
  - Bus Lines (>60 min Frequency)



### PROPOSED BRT ROUTES

- W Market BRT line
- C Falls BRT Line
- Barberton BRT Line
- Arlington BRT Line



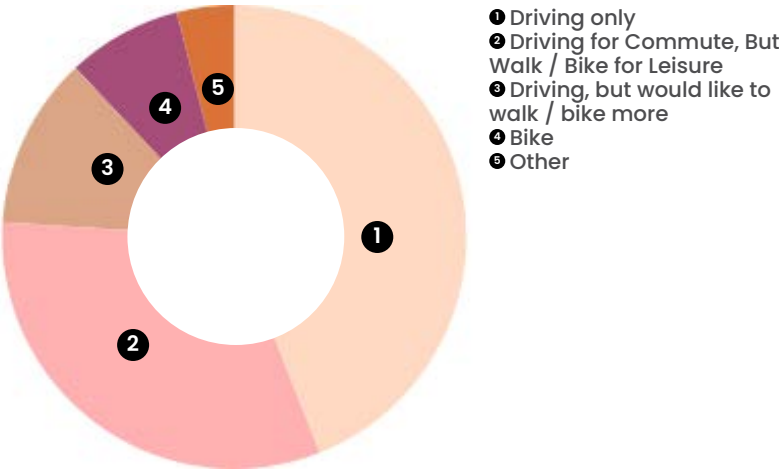


# Mobility & Infrastructure: What We Heard

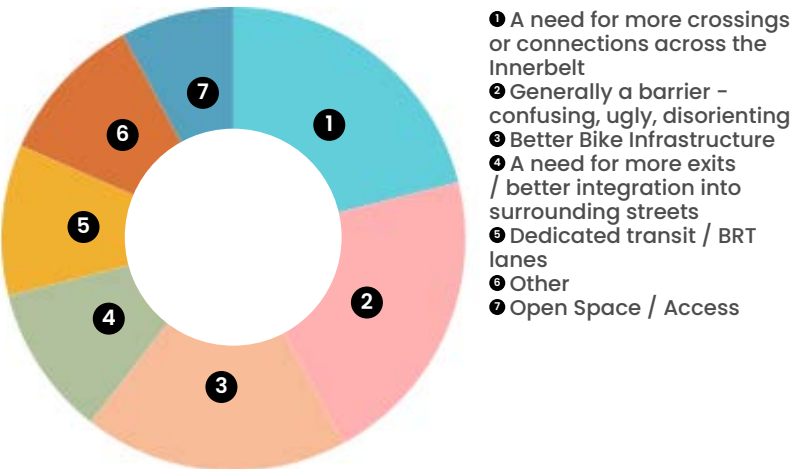
## Understanding Transit & Mobility Needs

In Open House #1, we posed a number of questions to the community about what services they rely on and what’s missing. Below are their responses.

Where do you Travel and  
How do you Get There?

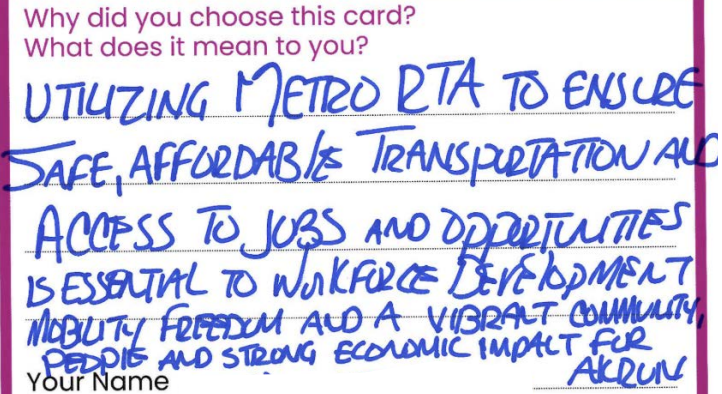


Travel and Commute  
Challenges



## Uncovering Other Dimensions of Mobility and Infrastructure, Such as “Safe and Well-Lit”

A top theme heard from the community was the need for diverse and safe transportation options. The barrier created by the Innerbelt is unpleasant and inconvenient. It decreases the ability and comfort level for many to walk or bike in the area even with regional infrastructure like the Towpath. The conversations focused on how improving these connections for all modes of transportation will encourage the community to engage and thrive.



Emerging Themes from Open House #1 Conversations around Community Needs

Emerging Theme		Community’s Own Words
Reconnecting Communities Separated by Highways	Desire to create more connections between neighborhoods, particularly where highways have divided communities.	“The highway separates people (hbhs) and places (downtown, east side). Residents past and present deserve better. More connections -> more movement -> more people -> more life!”
Desire for Walkable Innerbelt Redevelopment	Calls to redevelop the Innerbelt into a walkable, bike-friendly area that enhances connectivity to downtown and the towpath; emphasizes walkability’s multiple benefits, from economic development, social cohesion, health, and access to nature	“Having the Innerbelt area be walkable would be huge. Great opportunity to tie into towpath and have bike trails that run through downtown.”
Multi-modal Options	Advocating for better bike lanes and transit options alongside improved sidewalks and green spaces.	“I walk and bike everywhere, so more robust transit and bike lanes are very important to me. I would love to see BRT-lanes, more regional bus connections, regional rail (METRO owns the tracks to Canton and Hanson) plus generally more improved sidewalks and green space.”
Safer and Well-Lit Walking and Biking Infrastructure	Concerns about lack of safe, well-lit infrastructure for walking and biking, with calls for more than just painted lanes.	“The city as a whole is lacking in safe, well-lit, bike/walkability infrastructure. More than just paint!! The Innerbelt space could serve as a vital connection between Downtown/ neighborhoods.”



# Mobility: Key Takeaways

## The Innerbelt and Urban Renewal areas present significant east-west connectivity challenges.

The Innerbelt represents significant connectivity challenges between neighborhoods like Sherbondy Hill on the one hand, and downtown on the other. Key east-west connections between the two are disrupted not only by the construction of the Innerbelt itself, but also by Urban Renewal areas and superblock redevelopments with internal street networks. Disconnected ramps, one-way streets, and elevation differences further contribute to difficult navigation.

## Connectivity improvements should incorporate more balanced transportation modes.

While driving remains the predominant way to get around the city, many residents have expressed a desire to bike and walk more. Expanding options for walking, cycling, and transit is key to addressing the connectivity issues caused by the Innerbelt. These improvements also offer broader benefits, including economic development, social cohesion, public health, and access to nature.

Although the City has invested in bicycle infrastructure and pedestrian safety in

recent years, more work remains. The Study Area has sidewalks on at least one side of every non-limited access street, but pedestrian connections across the Innerbelt are poor due to narrow widths, lack of amenities, and deteriorating conditions. Similarly, non-separated bike lanes on high-speed streets like Dart and Rand Avenues can deter less experienced cyclists.

Fortunately, opportunities exist within the existing street network to create a more balanced transportation system. Many streets have the capacity to reallocate vehicular space for wider sidewalks, protected bike lanes, or dedicated transit lanes.





# Environment & Open Space

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

**Where do people around the Innerbelt gather today?**

**What is the state of green infrastructure around the Innerbelt?**

**What kind of open spaces are around the study area?**



# Open Space Network

The historic Ohio and Erie Canal runs along the edge of the planning area, connecting Cascade Valley and Summit Lake. These two large natural spaces bring nature into the heart of Akron and frame the north and south edges of the study area.

The Towpath Trail, along the Canal, creates a strong north-south connection and links together a string of urban parks that provide spaces for reflection, recreation, and events in Downtown Akron.

While West Akron has a number of community oriented parks and historic open spaces, access to the network of urban open spaces along the Ohio and Erie Canal is obstructed by the former Innerbelt site.

OPEN SPACE TYPES

Legend

Urban Parks & Plazas

Nature-Based

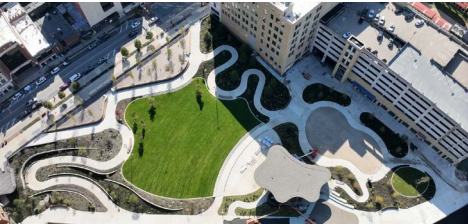
Recreation & Community

Inactive Green Spaces

Towpath Trailheads / Key Access Points

Private / Limited Access Open Spaces

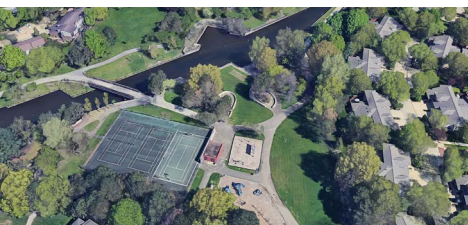
Urban Parks & Plazas



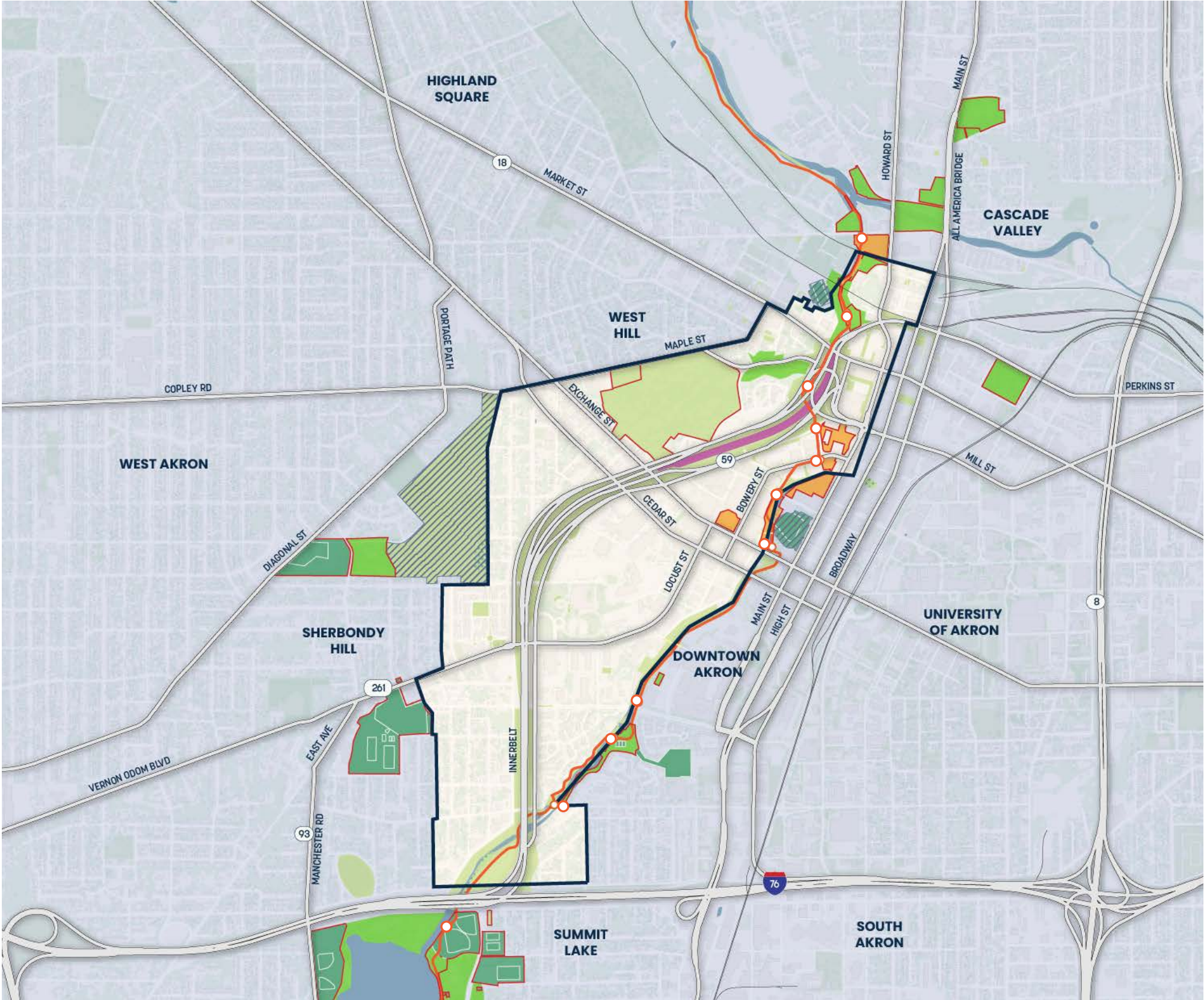
Nature Based



Recreation & Community



Recreation & Community





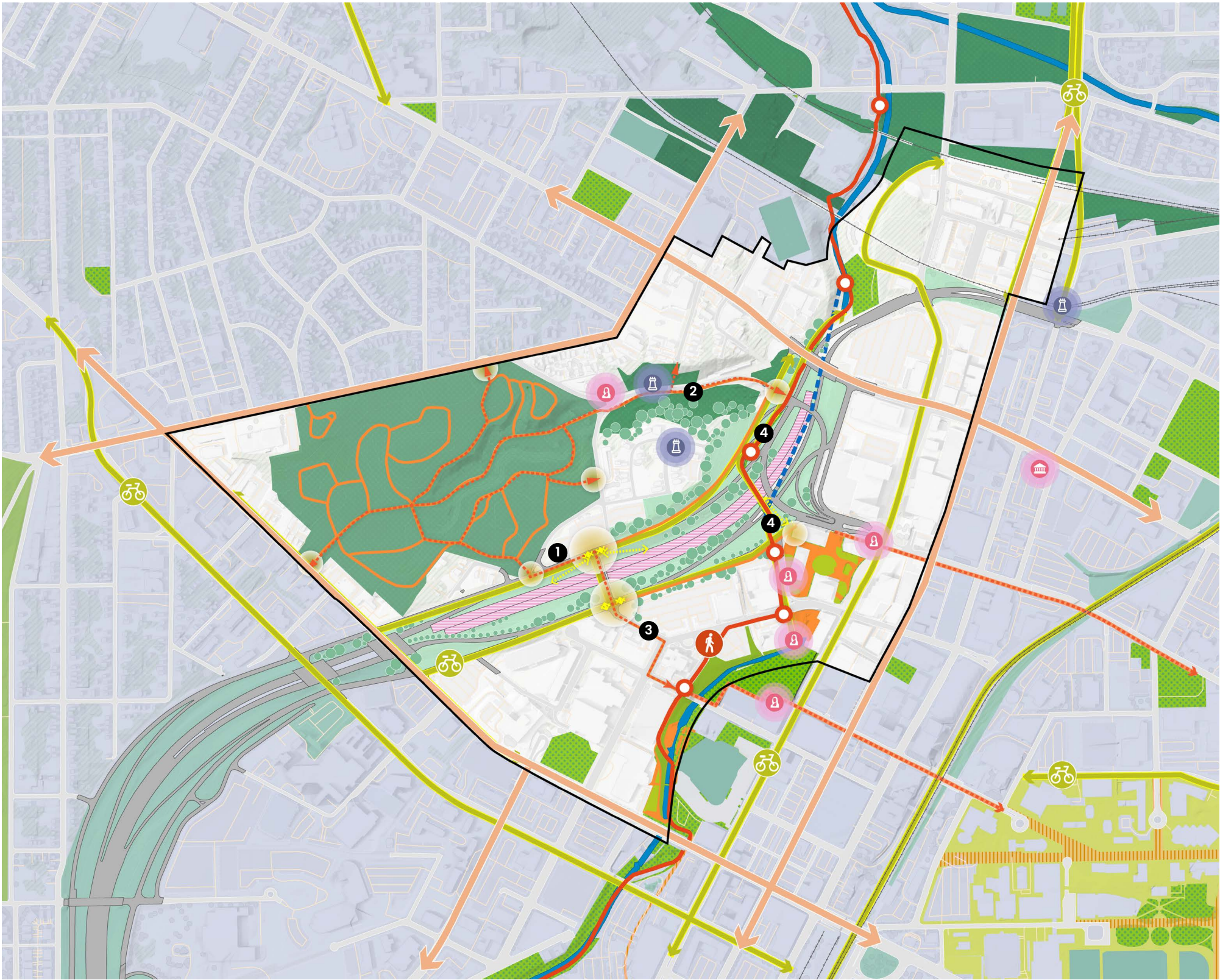
# Connections to the Innerbelt

Today, frontage roads, ramps, and steep topography make access to and across the Innerbelt difficult and dangerous. There are a number of opportunities to create and strengthen connections to landmarks, trails, and adjacent open spaces. These opportunities can inform the location of both short- and long- term strategies.

ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES TO THE INNERBELT

- Legend
- Potential pedestrian access points to Innerbelt
  - Potential pedestrian connection to Innerbelt
  - Other key pedestrian connections
  - ROW buffer
  - Paved connection
  - Towpath trail
  - Access to Towpath trail
  - Access to Open Space
  - Major vehicular connections
  - Bikelanes
  - Main pedestrian connection

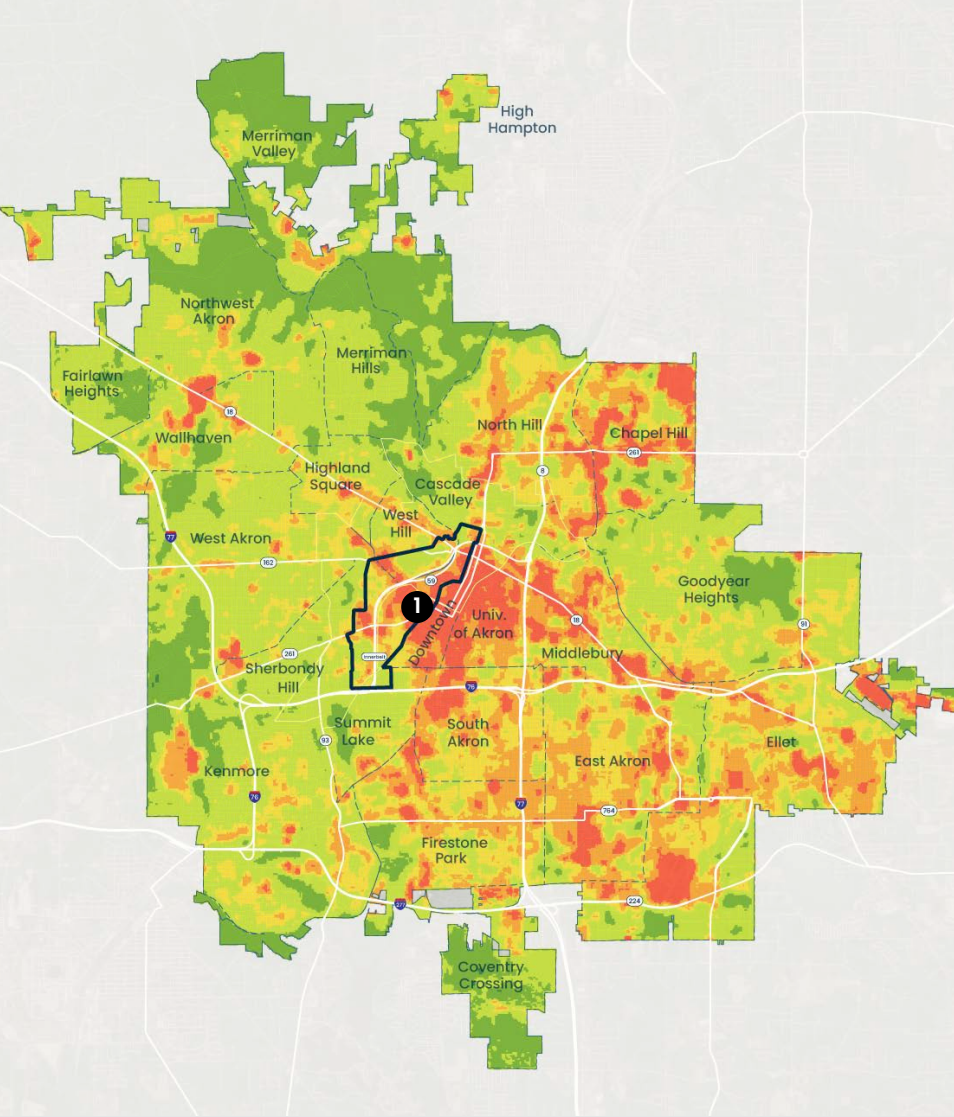
- 1 Glendale Cemetery
- Opportunities to connect to the entrances and pathways of the Cemetery
- 2 Glendale Steps & Park
- An historic landmark and open space that is in need of repair
- 3 Locust & State Street
- Bridge the Innerbelt and provide potential connections through downtown and to the University of Akron
- 4 Towpath Trail
- Currently passes over the Innerbelt, but presents and opportunity to access future improvements on the former Innerbelt site





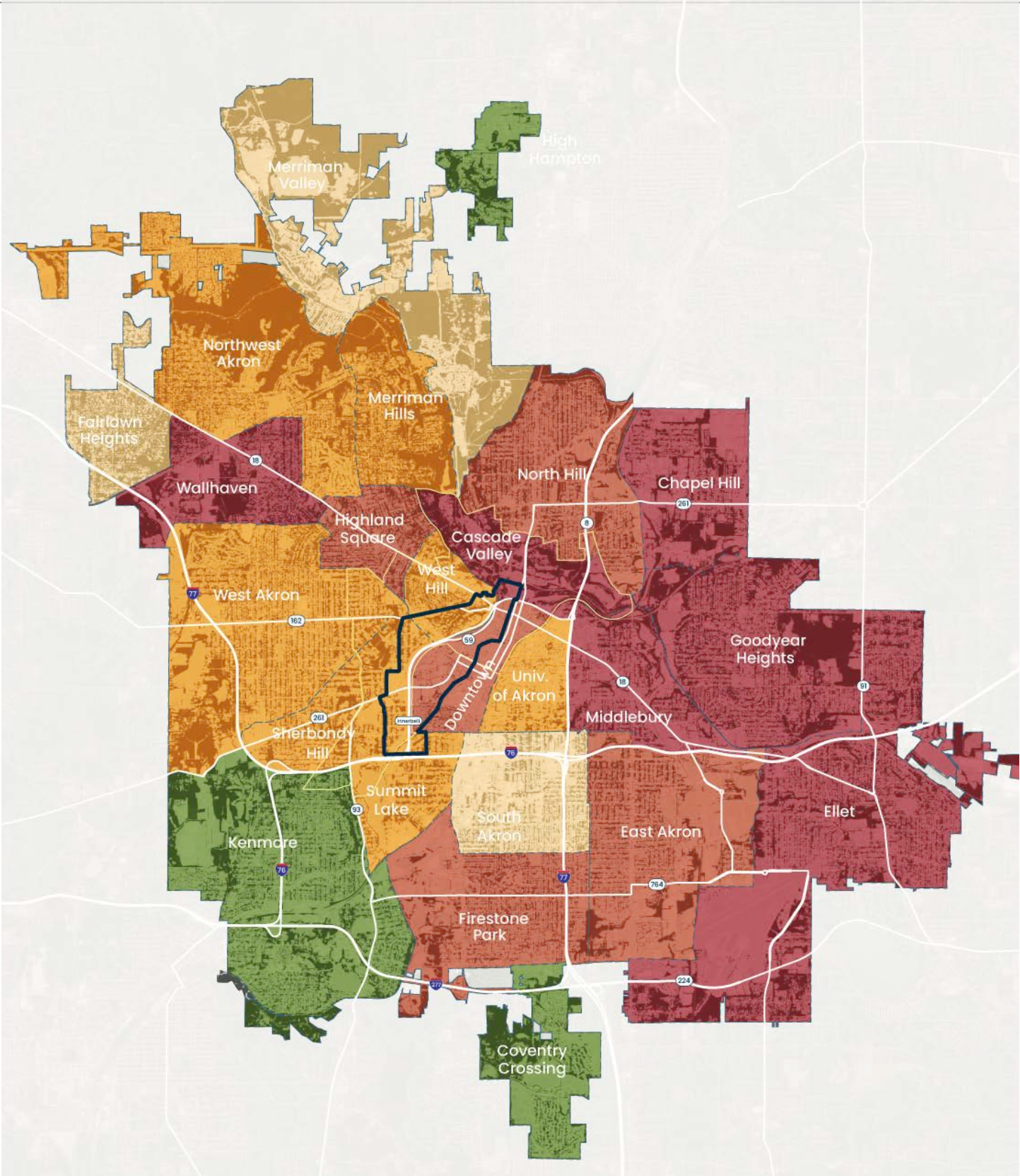
# Environmental Justice

The health of a city’s natural systems has a significant impact on quality of life and health outcomes, providing spaces for recreation, managing stormwater, and mitigating extreme temperatures in the summertime. The relative lack of open space and tree canopy in Downtown Akron and areas around the Innerbelt means that summer temperatures are significantly hotter than in greener, outlying parts of the city.



**1 URBAN HEAT ISLANDS**

“Urban Heat Islands” are areas where a lack of tree cover and vegetation and a concentration of impervious surfaces (e.g. parking lots) lead to higher temperatures, which can be particularly dangerous for vulnerable populations. Parts of the Study Area are urban heat



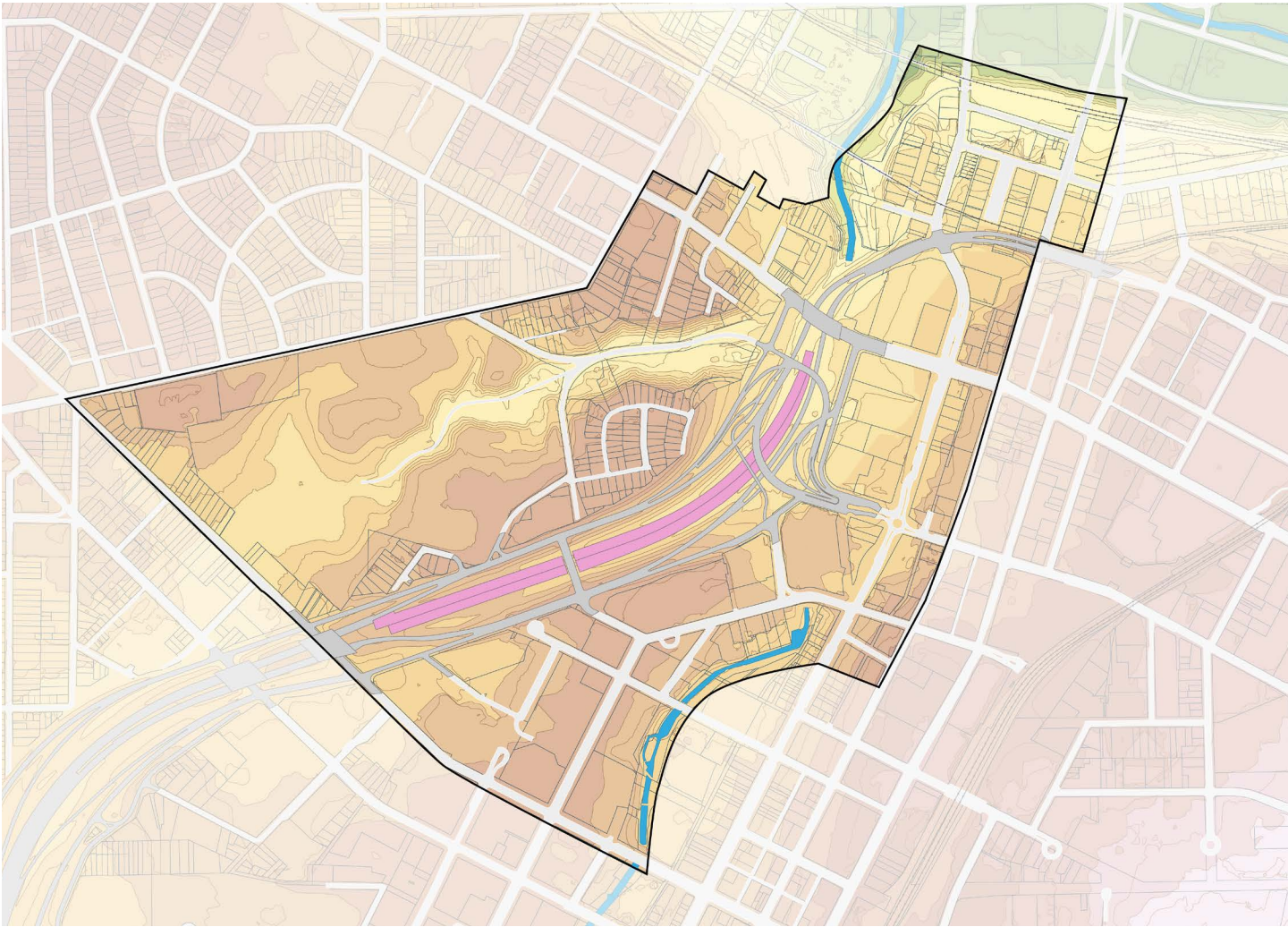
CHANGE IN TREE CANOPY COVERAGE, 2011-2018

- Greater than 9% Decrease
- 6 - 9% Decrease
- 3 - 6% Decrease
- 0 - 3% Decrease
- 0 - 4% Increase



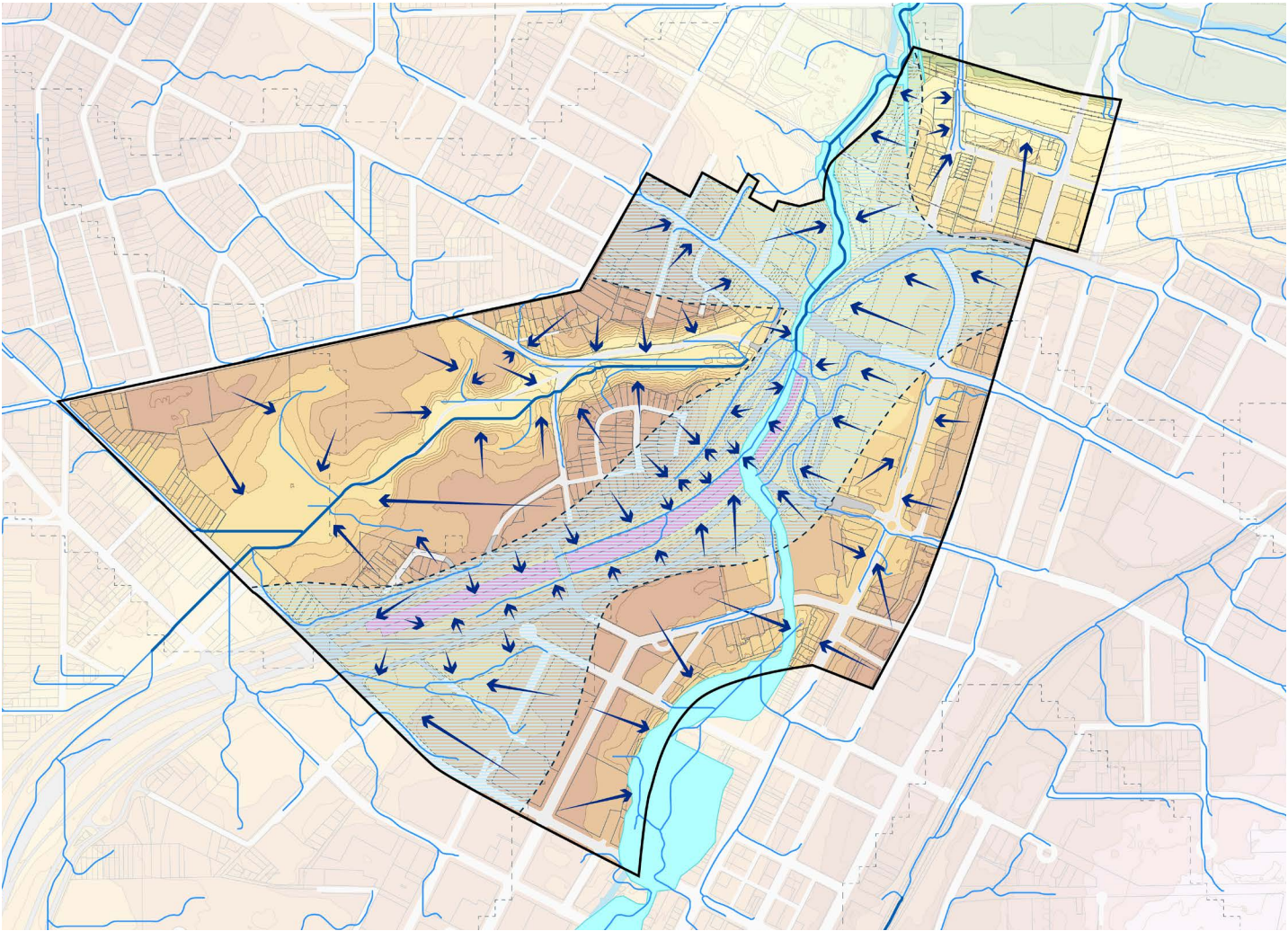
# Elevation and Waterflow

The former Innerbelt Site is a low-point in Akron’s hilly geography and receives surface water from the adjacent higher neighborhoods – Glendale Cemetery, West Hill, and Downtown Akron. The site itself slopes to the north and drains towards the Little Cuyahoga River valley.



ELEVATION & SLOPE

- Slope: 0-5%
- Slope: 5-10%
- Slope: 10-20%
- Slope: 20-30%
- Slope: 30% and greater



WATERFLOW TREND AROUND THE INNERBELT

- Study Area
- Innerbelt Decommissioned
- Innerbelt watershed
- Conveyance
- FEMA flooding area

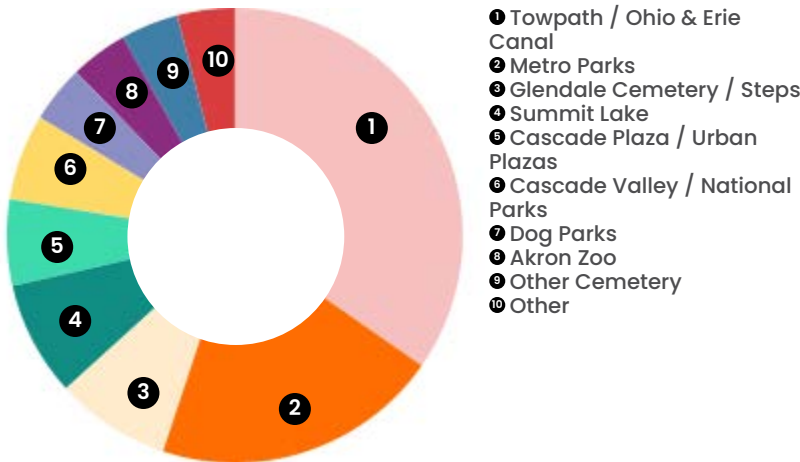


# Open Space: What We Heard

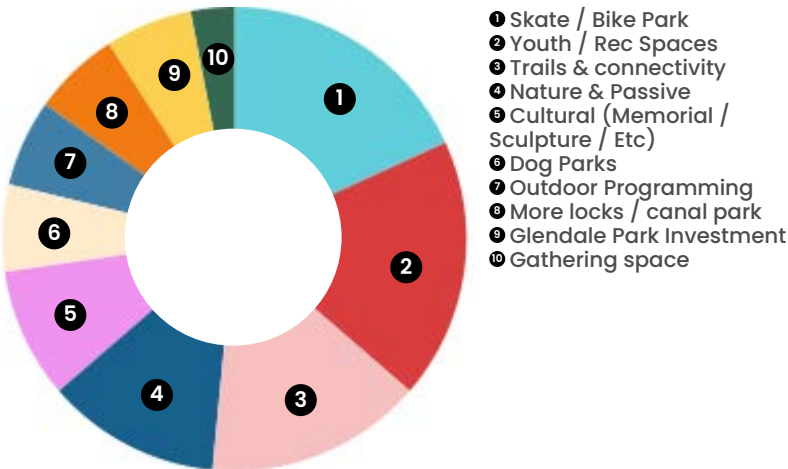
## Understanding Open Space Needs

In Open House #1, we posed a number of questions to the community about what services they rely on and what’s missing. Below are their responses.

Where do you go to experience nature in Akron?



What’s missing and what would you like to see?



## Uncovering Other Dimensions of Environment and Open Space

Conversations with the community unearthed the need to consider open space within the broader ecological and socioeconomic context of Akron. Specifically, the opportunity to integrate green spaces with new urban development and role that open space can play in strengthening communities.

Why did you choose this card?  
What does it mean to you?

I'D LIKE TO SEE THE CANAL CLEANED UP

WE LIVE NEAR CANAL PARK & WALK THAT AREA

DAILY. THE CANAL IS FILLED WITH TRASH, ALGAE ETC.

LIKE TO SEE IT CLEANED UP.

Your Name GREG VICK

Emerging Themes from Open House #1 Conversations around Community Needs

Emerging Theme		Community’s Own Words
Green Infrastructure and Sustainability	Advocating for sustainable urban development, including green infrastructure, regenerative design, wetlands for climate mitigation, and permaculture principles.	“Sustainability/ Regenerative Design: Green infrastructure. Green roofs (see Toronto and green guide) Native plants, permaculture, eco-mindful in all ways!
Creating Accessible and Safe Green Spaces	Calls for expanding parks, nature trails, and green areas to ensure safe, welcoming spaces for recreation, mental well-being, and community engagement.	“We need access to quality parks and nature-- for wellness/ safety quality of life IN the city not just outlying wealthier areas. Everyone needs this.”
Urban Revitalization with Nature Integration	Emphasizing the need to blend green and vibrant spaces with downtown development, connecting neighborhoods through walkable and bike-friendly nature corridors.	“Development around the Innerbelt space is very urban/downtown feel. Including ‘green’ and ‘vibrant’ as a guide to reclaiming this area will resonate with much of the Towpath development in the area.”
Environmental Restoration and Cleanup	Prioritizing environmental cleanup efforts, including canal restoration, wetland expansion, and initiatives to improve water and air quality.	“I’d like to see the canal cleaned up. We live near Canal Park and walk that area daily. The canal is filled with trash, algae, etc. Like to see it cleaned up.”
Sustainable Transportation and Reduced Car Dependency	Advocating for improved bike infrastructure, public transit, and walkable urban areas to reduce car dependency and promote environmental sustainability.	“To be a competitive city, we need to reframe car dependence. We should have a major road that improves bike infrastructure, improves public transportation, and makes it so people can truly live here without a car.”



