When we travel to another city, we are drawn to that “must visit” district. It’s a place where we take and feel the pulse of the city. A unique place that somehow epitomizes the character of the city in the way it weaves together its distinctive features. Its people and commerce. Its history and ambition. Its culture and cuisine. Its landscape and architecture. All of these combine to create a compelling energy and rhythm that inhabits us when we visit this place. We move to its music; and when we leave we feel that we’ve experienced something that makes this city unlike any other.

We are poised to make it happen. In a 20-block area of southwest Detroit. Between the Riverwalk and Corktown. Amid the Gateway to Canada and the bustle of Mexicantown. Along the Vernor corridor and the trestles leading to the historic Michigan Depot. This is an area that is primed to capitalize on its progress, choreograph its past, and catalyze its promise.

This is an area that is distinctively Detroit—in its diversity, history, culture, and lay of the land. And this could become that “must visit” place, where the pulse of the city beats strong and we are drawn to the lively rhythm. We imagine an eminently walkable place where people of all ages and ethnicities mingle, listen to live music, savor the local cuisine at restaurants, shop for items in specialty stores, buy fresh local produce, appreciate the work of area artists, stroll to the river and connect to the Riverwalk, and feel energized by the teeming variety that a dynamic urban setting can offer.

In this 20-block venue, significant infrastructure investment has already been made, and important pieces are already in place. The area is on the verge of becoming that vibrant locale which Detroit needs to hearten its spirit and spur its revival. The development project is called “Mexicantown: Vernor/Bagley Vista” or “Vista,” for short. Vista will not only serve as a key destination spot. It will link and invigorate nearby neighborhoods that are already regarded as some of the most stable and viable communities in the city.

We invite you to learn more about this emerging vision and exciting project. This prospectus provides an overview of the Vista plan and describes how the community itself is driving it. Most of all, it offers an opportunity to see how individuals and families will experience the venue—and move to its music.
Mexicantown: Vernor/Bagley Vista

Mexicantown: Vernor Bagley Vista is an urban design community-based project that focuses on a 20-block area surrounding the I-75 and Vernor intersection in Southwest Detroit.

The project has brought together over 75 individuals representing various interests, organizations and cultures of the neighborhood. In addition, many neighbors and regional stakeholders have also participated in the collaborative effort to brainstorm what could happen along Vernor and Bagley to better serve the residents, regional visitors and international visitors of Mexicantown. The main intentions of the project that were voiced by the stakeholders were to (1) Link Mexicantown to surrounding systems and neighborhoods (2) Promote a multi-cultural neighborhood and (3) Encourage the triple bottom line (walkability and sustainability).

The project has evolved over a six month period including many workshops, focus group meetings and on site investigations. The plan that has resulted from the process is a plan that focuses on creating stronger connections to Corktown and the Riverfront through landscape and aesthetic improvements, to encourage and amplify the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of the neighborhood with public art and incubator space, to encourage a social atmosphere through public events, farmers markets, and light streets, and lastly to develop Vernor and Bagley with businesses so as to encourage pedestrian movement along the street.
“Food, Art & Music bring us together”

- Mexicantown Stakeholder
The project has brought together over 75 individuals representing various interests, organizations and cultures of the neighborhood.

The Mexicantown: Vernor/Bagley Vista used a nationally recognized Neighborhood Engagement Workshop (NEW) process developed by the Detroit Collaborative Design Center. This process empowers neighborhood residents to renew their communities. Workshops bring a mix of stakeholders including community residents, youth, business owners, local government representatives, etc. to the same table to discuss neighborhood assets and needs. The NEW process guides participants in actualizing their own creativity to solve problems. While other models tend to do most of the work and move on, the Design Center leaves the tools behind in the minds and hands of the participants.
Stakeholder Group Participation
555 Gallery, 100 points of Light, City of Detroit, City of Windsor, COMPAS, Congress of Communities, Continental Rail Gateway, Corktown Business (Salon) Owner, Corktown Residence Council, Donavon’s Pub, Green Links, Hacienda Mexican Foods, Honey Bee Market, La Sed, Living Arts, LISC, Matrix Theater, Mexican Village Restaurant, Mexicantown Residents & Youth, Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, MI Municipal League, SDDC, Slows Restaurant, Southwest Detroit Development Collaborative, Southwest Housing Solutions, Southwest Solutions, The Tortilla Factory, University of Detroit Mercy, Urban Landscape, WARM, Wayne State University, West Grand Blvd. Residents, West Grand United for Progress, Whitdel Arts
During the Neighborhood Engagement Workshop process a variety of Driving Forces and Project Intentions were identified and prioritized to guide the design and development process.

**Driving Forces**

- Diverse and Active Population
- Dynamic Arts Culture
- Active Businesses and Non profits

**Project Intentions**

1. **Connection/Collection**
   - Link to surrounding systems and neighborhoods

2. **Triple Bottom Line**
   - Promote sustainability and walkability

3. **Multi-Cultural District**
   - Encourage development to amplify the uniqueness of all cultures

**Range of Users**

**Range of Development**

**Create a Brand**

**Progressive Technology**

**Introduction**
MDOT has invested $230 million in the Gateway Project to ease traffic and upgrade the I-75/I-96 Ambassador Bridge connection.

100,000 vehicles per day travel through the I-75/I-96 corridor interchange (MDOT).

The Bagley St. Pedestrian Bridge, the first cable-stayed pedestrian bridge in Michigan, is a $5 million investment aiming to reconnect business districts and neighborhoods on both sides of I-75.

88,000 vehicles per day and 6,101 trucks per day travel the local roads (MDOT).

10,000 vehicles per day travel through the local roads (MDOT).

The Ambassador Bridge is North America’s busiest international border crossing.

25% of all trade merchandise between the U.S. and Canada passes over the Ambassador Bridge.

Southwest Detroit’s five main business districts, including Mexicantown, are home to 140 restaurants, 30 bakeries, and 25 grocery and specialty food stores. (SDBA)

“[Mexicantown] is a place of creativity and culture.”

- Mexicantown Stakeholder
The project builds up the "street wall along Vernor and Bagley while...

Project Vision

Key

- Residential (single family houses)
- Residential (multi-family apartments)
- Commercial (retail, service, restaurants)
- Commercial (offices)
- Institutional/Cultural
- Mixed Use
- Industrial
- Green Space
- Focus Area

Design Intentions

- Food, Music & Art
- Fusion
- Green Zone
- Link People, Places and Ideas
- Experience of the Senses
- Amplify Existing Talents
- Foster development to promote food, music and art, bringing all cultures together
- Combine cultures and ideas for a unique experience
- Build a business district that encourages environmentally friendly actions
- Create opportunities for an exchange of people and ideas
- Encourage development to include smell, touch and sound
- Fashion development and programming plans to the talents of the residents
- Defined by the focus group

Focus Area

Vernor & 24th Street

03

Neighborhood Locale

02
They are coming; we will build it.

still allowing for urban places for people to meet during day-to-day activities.
18th & Vernor

18th and Vernor is a gateway into Mexicantown and a lively connection to the surrounding neighborhoods, making this Monday morning a great start to the week. The Vernor VIAduct (at the intersection of Vernor and 18th) is a fun and safe route for kids to travel on their way to school. They can pick up breakfast in the new cafe on the corner or a snack in the new health-mart under the VIAduct where new incubators have opened. Many teens take their skateboard and hit the skate park in Roosevelt Park before class, even though it makes them a little late! Others ride the bus, walk or drive through the Vernor VIAduct. The early risers are seen getting in their run or bike ride around the Green Loop before work. No matter where you are going, or the time of day, the Vernor VIAduct intersection is a fun and active place expressing the dynamic and culturally-rich neighborhood of Mexicantown.
Connecting Corktown with Mexicantown.
On A Saturday Evening

On Saturday evening, the plaza adjacent to the Bagley Street Pedestrian Bridge is energized with local vendors, residents, and visitors. The smell of local food wafts through the air, ethnic music plays in the background, street performers entertain crowds, and people of all ages gather to socialize, shop, stroll, and absorb the local flavor of the neighborhood. Neighbors flock to The Mercado Cultural Square to enjoy music and friends almost every weekend—it’s the only one of its kind in the area. A young couple also enjoys The Mercado Cultural Square for the convenience of being able to have a great dinner in the neighborhood and then finish the night by walking to the square to listing to music. Kids love The Square as a place to run free, buy treats from local vendors and play in the new water feature that emits mist, watering the plants and grass in the square. The combination of entertainment and location makes this a great neighborhood social space, in the heart of the community, and a local destination for neighbors.
On a Saturday evening, "Market & Music" sure brings in a lot of people! "Our neighbor's band should play here next weekend!" "Whoa! Look at the water!"
An Afternoon in Mexicantown

It’s Friday, late afternoon, and people are out and about. There is food, art, and plenty of social spaces to wind down. Residents on their way home from work stop and meet their friends for a quick conversation on the benches that line the tempting restaurants along Vernor. A visiting family from Canada has stopped into Mexicantown to visit the Vernor/Bagley strip after seeing the large “Mexicantown” sign when crossing the Ambassador Bridge. The family enjoys walking around and looking at the art displayed in the storefronts. They decide to grab a bite to eat before heading back on the road again. There are many choices of cuisine—from African to Italian to Middle Eastern to Mexican to American—it is hard to choose! They decide on a new Middle Eastern cafe where, from the dining area, you can watch people pass by on the streets and artists at work in the studio next door. The energy is high and everyone is excited about the positive vibe that fills the streets of Vernor/Bagley/Vista.

Welcoming Scene

Vernor & I-75 Exit Ramp

Connect east and west along Vernor with bike lanes,
business development and arches designed by local artists.
Lunchtime
Lunchtime on Vernor has never been so convenient and exciting! The once open lots along Vernor are now activated with food vendors from all over the city. Students, tourists and business people flock to these locales to get a quick bite to eat or just hang out. Over time, tables and chairs have been put out creating social hot spots in the neighborhood. And when people are not at the locale, the detailed murals on the ground plane continue to give these spaces character. Now when walking down Vernor there is more to look at, more aromas to smell, and more people and activities to engage in.
A Place where people meet during day-to-day activities.
Next Steps