



# QUALITATIVE MARKET STUDY

Needs and Opportunities  
in the East Loop Community Improvement District

2023

# STEADFAST CITY ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

## About Steadfast City

This study was conducted by a local third-party firm, Steadfast City Economic & Community Partners. Established with a profound commitment to catalyzing businesses, neighborhoods, organizations, and communities, Steadfast City is driven by a singular mission: to Develop Better.

This mission encompasses the pursuit of innovative approaches to address the diverse needs of businesses, real estate developers, cities, and non-profit organizations. Steadfast City possesses a unique proficiency in seamlessly integrating the realms of government, business, economic development, real estate, social initiatives, and philanthropy.

This holistic approach ensures the most harmonious and impactful alignment across sectors. The ultimate outcome is consistently marked by positive transformations in both economics and community dynamics, leading to superior results for our esteemed clients.



Steadfast city  
Economic & Community Partners



Phone  
314.949.1555



Website.  
[steadfastcity.com](http://steadfastcity.com)



Email Address.  
[developbetter@steadfastcity.com](mailto:developbetter@steadfastcity.com)



Office Address  
3407 S Jefferson Avenue  
Saint Louis, MO 63118

# INTRODUCTION TO THE CID

Established in 2016, the East Loop Community Improvement District (CID) aims to achieve measurable improvements in economic development, safety & security.



## GOALS

The East Loop CID focuses on establishing a welcoming and secure community by enhancing services, amenities, and physical infrastructure. The CID is committed to promoting and preserving the unique character and cultural vitality of the area while supporting the community through opportunity creation.

The East Loop CID hired Steadfast City to help identify the next steps that can be taken to improve the community's real estate and development mix and identify any major hurdles for developers and businesses, with a goal of developing a more attractive and sustainable community for future investment.

## PROCESS

The process for collecting and analyzing data began with having open and honest conversations between Steadfast City Economic & Community Partners and six commercial real estate brokers familiar with the City of St. Louis and the district and corridors that comprise the East Loop CID. These conversations provided valuable insight into the current status of the market for development along the corridor through a qualitative micro-market data analysis.

The collected data was then distilled into prominent themes, honing in on the prevailing conditions of the CID and the untapped potential for development. This information guided the creation of a comprehensive understanding of the CID's current state and fostered ideas for opening doors to a realm of promising growth prospects.

# CURRENT CONDITIONS

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## EXISTING ASSETS

Steeped in possibility and charm, the CID presents a captivating tapestry of attributes that define its character and potential, as identified through conversations with local commercial real estate brokers. Below are the current impressions and valuable assets, in order from most-mentioned to least-mentioned:

1. **Distinctive Identity:** Identified as a well-known business district with a unique character
2. **Diverse Heritage:** Preserves a rich historical background and embraces a diverse cultural heritage
3. **Cultural Vibrancy:** Fosters a dynamic and culturally mixed atmosphere.
4. **Pedestrian-Friendly Atmosphere:** Creates an environment that is accessible and convenient for pedestrians
5. **Academic Connection:** Benefits from proximity and access to the student population of Washington University
6. **Entertainment Offerings:** Provides existing draws and a variety of entertainment options

## GAPS AND NEEDS

Within the CID, there are discernible gaps and needs that require attention and, if managed appropriately, could present opportunities for greater business and community growth, as identified through conversations with local commercial real estate brokers. Below are the primary needs and threats to the district, in order from most-mentioned to least-mentioned:

1. **Crime Prevention:** Implementing security measures
2. **Perception of Safety:** Creating a safe and welcoming environment
3. **Enhanced Marketing:** Raising the profile or awareness for the District
4. **Property Upkeep:** Focused property maintenance
5. **Illumination and Safety:** Ensuring adequate lighting and security measures
6. **Parking Convenience:** Employee and customer parking facilities
7. **Realistic Pricing:** Fair expectations for property costs
8. **Enhancing Accessibility:** Bridging the east and west CID sections and defining the District

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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## OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities exist in sectors that have expressed interest as potential tenants, such as small and start-up businesses, boutique shops, mom-and-pop stores, and neighborhood retail establishments. Additionally, several retail types have the potential to greatly benefit the district, including service-oriented uses such as dry cleaners, grocery markets, hardware stores, and office supply stores. Other identified needs include a brewery/wine bar, pizza shop, breakfast restaurant, and entertainment venues. Moreover, infill opportunities emerge, possibly paving the way for multi-family development and office space for small/local businesses, further enhancing the district's vibrancy.

## ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS

### Promotion & Marketing

#### Action #1 - Elevate Brand Identity:

- a. Identify key stories and drivers that display the district's unique cultural and historical aspects that can be reflected in the branding.
- b. Collaborate with professional designers and marketers to create a cohesive and visually appealing brand identity that markets the district to local residents, visitors, key business decision makers, investors, and real estate brokers.
- c. Create a brand identity and continuity for the entire district that drives awareness to and elevates businesses and properties located on the "outskirts" of the Loop to ensure that all areas within the district are associated with the Loop.
- d. Ensure the branding highlights the diversity and multi-cultural identity of the area, resonating with niche development interests and all represented communities.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## **ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS**

### **Promotion & Marketing Continued**

#### **Action #2 - Strengthen Partnerships and Support Network:**

- a. Cultivate a strong partnership with Washington University, local incubators, and small business groups through regular meetings, receptions, or events and open communication channels. Work to connect these groups with existing tenants, developers, and property owners who are currently or may be interested in investing in the East Loop CID.
- b. Establish a dedicated working group consisting of representatives from these institutions and local stakeholders to discuss concerns, set common goals, and explore collaborative opportunities.
- c. Identify and promote available resources and support programs to encourage interest and investment in the corridor.

#### **Action #3 - Foster a Small Business Owner Community:**

- a. Establish a dedicated small business owner group within the district to foster collaboration and support among local entrepreneurs.
- b. Implement a mentorship program within the group to provide guidance and advice to newly located and start-up businesses, helping them thrive in the area.
- c. Organize regular networking events and workshops to facilitate knowledge sharing and strengthen bonds within the small business community.
- d. Leverage external small business support groups and organizations to assist existing or prospective entrepreneurs in the district.

#### **Action #4 - Launch an Online Resource Hub:**

- a. Create a comprehensive online resource bank that offers guidance and support to new businesses, with a specific focus on locally-owned and minority-owned ventures.
- b. Utilize social media platforms and the district's website to promote the resource hub and encourage widespread circulation among the community.
- c. Keep the resource hub updated regularly and encourage user feedback to improve its relevance and effectiveness.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## **ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS**

### **Promotion & Marketing Continued**

#### **Action #5 - Create a Centralized Available Property Database:**

- a. Establish a user-friendly online database that centralizes information about available properties within the district. This database could be a more complex platform that lives on the CID's website or a simple page with some imagery that links out to individual listings.
- b. Make the database easily accessible through the district's website and other relevant platforms.
- c. Develop a "property profile" template with organizational branding that can be used to promote specific available properties in the area.
- d. Promote the advantages of investing in the corridor, such as increased density and infill development, to attract potential developers and investors from the region.

#### **Action #6 - Create Comprehensive Property Prospectus Documents:**

- a. Develop well-crafted property prospectus documents that showcase the area's assets, unique features, and potential redevelopment opportunities.
- b. Ensure that these documents are easily accessible through the central database and also posted on regional inventory sites to attract potential investors and developers.
- c. Collaborate with real estate professionals and marketing experts to present the information in a compelling and visually appealing manner.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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## **ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS**

### **Physical Improvements**

#### **Action #1 - Improve Sidewalk and Parking Lot Lighting:**

- a. Conduct a lighting assessment in collaboration with local authorities and lighting experts to identify areas with inadequate lighting along sidewalks and within parking lots.
- b. Implement a well-designed and energy-efficient lighting plan to enhance visibility and safety for pedestrians and motorists.
- c. Explore the use of smart lighting solutions that adjust brightness based on foot traffic and time of day to optimize energy consumption.
- d. Communicate the improvements to the community to raise awareness about the district's commitment to enhancing safety and security.

#### **Action #2 - Launch Property Beautification Initiative:**

- a. Introduce a district-wide initiative focused on improving the curb appeal of vacant and potentially unkempt properties in the district, through collaborative efforts among local authorities, businesses, and residents.
- b. Organize regular community clean-up events to address litter and beautify public spaces, fostering a sense of pride and ownership among residents and businesses.
- c. Partner with local volunteer networks, schools, and community organizations to support and participate in maintenance efforts.
- d. Recognize and appreciate the contributions of volunteers and businesses through public acknowledgments and awards.



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS

### Physical Improvements Continued

#### Action #3 - Enhance Walkability and Pedestrian Safety:

- a. Conduct a thorough audit of all crosswalks and sidewalks within the district to identify areas with safety issues and poor conditions.
- b. Prioritize the improvement and repair of problematic crosswalks and sidewalks, focusing on high-traffic areas and locations near businesses and public amenities.
- c. Implement traffic calming measures in areas with heavy foot traffic to enhance pedestrian safety and encourage walkability.
- d. Involve the community in the decision-making process to gather input on priority areas for improvement and ensure that the enhancements align with the needs of residents and visitors.
- e. Focus on increasing the connectivity and walkability across the existing rail line, connecting the eastern and western sides of the CID.

#### Action #4 - Optimize Utilization and Appearance of Vacant Lots:

- Proactively identify and improve vacant lots within the district to maximize their potential use and benefit the community.
- Explore the possibility of implementing a grass-cutting program for vacant lots to enhance their appearance and reduce blight in the area.
- Consider utilizing vacant lots as temporary food truck areas or playgrounds to activate these spaces and create engaging experiences for residents and visitors.
- Evaluate the feasibility of transforming vacant lots into multi-functional community spaces for events, farmers' markets, or public art installations to enhance vibrancy and social interaction within the district.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## **ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS**

### **Physical Improvements Continued**

#### **Action #5 - Enhance Streetscaping Elements:**

- a. Develop a comprehensive streetscaping plan that fosters connection, accessibility, and consistency throughout the district.
- b. Implement cohesive wayfinding signage to improve navigation for both visitors and residents.
- c. Introduce a street flag program to add visual appeal and enhance the district's unique identity.
- d. Leverage St. Louis ArtWorks to elevate fixtures, planters, and more within the district, increasing community engagement and creating a consistent look and feel across the district.
- e. Seek feedback from the community during the planning process to ensure the streetscaping elements meet their needs and preferences.

#### **Action #6 - Promote Façade Improvement Program Utilization:**

- a. Educate tenants and property owners within the district about the City of St. Louis' façade improvement program, highlighting its benefits and eligibility criteria.
- b. Offer guidance and support to interested parties in navigating the application process and accessing available funding and resources.
- c. Showcase successful façade improvement projects as examples to inspire other property owners and businesses to participate in the program.
- d. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the program on the district's overall aesthetics and economic growth, sharing positive outcomes with the community and stakeholders.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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## **ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS**

### **Physical Improvements Continued**

#### **Action #7 - Develop Commercial Signage Standards:**

- a. Develop a comprehensive set of guidelines for commercial signage within the district, including alternative signage opportunities such as window decals, sidewalk stencils, uniform planters, and standardized awnings, all harmoniously incorporating the district's branding elements.
- b. Collaborate with local businesses and stakeholders to ensure the guidelines are practical and align with the overall branding and streetscape vision.
- c. Educate business owners about the benefits of consistent and aesthetically pleasing signage and visual connectivity and provide assistance in complying with the standards.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS

### Planning & Policy

#### **Action #1 - Implement Comprehensive Security Measures:**

- a. Collaborate with the local community, law enforcement agencies, and security experts to develop a comprehensive security plan for the district.
- b. Explore the expansion of the existing camera program to enhance surveillance and deter potential criminal activities.
- c. Engage residents in establishing a neighborhood watch organization to encourage community involvement in safety initiatives.

#### **Action #2 - Explore Tenant and Developer Incentive Programs:**

- a. Assess the feasibility and potential impact of implementing or enhancing a rent subsidy program or tenant build-out assistance program to attract businesses and developers to the area.
- b. Consult with economic development experts and local stakeholders to design incentive programs that align with the district's goals and resources.
- c. Promote these incentive programs to potential tenants and developers, highlighting the benefits of investing in the area.

#### **Action #3 - Undertake a Comprehensive Parking Strategy:**

- a. Collaborate closely with local stakeholders, urban planning experts, and business owners to formulate a comprehensive parking strategy.
- b. Conduct a parking demand study to accurately assess the parking needs of businesses, residents, and visitors within the district.
- c. Identify and promote parking best practices that align with the district's goals, including shared parking models to optimize space utilization, angled parking layouts for increased capacity, and designated pick-up and drop-off zones catering to ride-share and food delivery drivers.
- d. Engage in innovative thinking to create a dynamic parking framework that adapts to the evolving needs of businesses and patrons while enhancing accessibility and convenience.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

## **ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING IMPEDIMENTS**

### **Planning & Policy Continued**

#### **Action #4 - Collaborate with the City on Municipal Assistance:**

- a. Establish open communication and collaboration with the City to explore potential property tax abatement options and redevelopment areas.
- b. Advocate for additional municipal assistance that could support the district's growth and development goals.
- c. Work closely with City officials to ensure the policies and incentives align with the district's overall planning vision.

#### **Action #5 - Promote Large Development through Vacant Lot Consolidation:**

- a. Identify vacant lots suitable for consolidation to create larger parcels of land for larger development, such as a multi-family development.
- b. Facilitate discussions with property owners and developers to explore the potential of consolidating lots and streamlining the development process.
- c. Incorporate the City in discussions pertaining to zoning adjustments or incentives to encourage multi-family development that aligns with the district's vision.

#### **Action #6 - Engage Innovative Developers:**

- a. Encourage open and transparent conversations with developers who have shown interest in the area and have a track record of innovative projects.
- b. Foster a positive and supportive environment for developers to share their ideas and proposals for projects within the district.
- c. Evaluate proposals based on their alignment with the district's long-term vision, sustainability, and community impact.

# MOVING FORWARD

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## NOW

### PROMOTION & MARKETING

- Elevate Brand Identity
- Strengthen Partnerships and Support Network
- Foster a Small Business Owner Community

### PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Improve Sidewalk and Parking Lot Lighting
- Launch Property Beautification Initiative

### PLANNING & POLICY

- Implement Comprehensive Security Measures
- Explore Tenant and Developer Incentive Programs

# MOVING FORWARD

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## NEXT

### PROMOTION & MARKETING

- Launch Online Resource Hub
- Create a Centralized Available Property Database

### PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Enhance Walkability and Pedestrian Safety
- Optimize Utilization and Appearance of Vacant Lots
- Enhance Streetscaping Elements

### PLANNING & POLICY

- Undertake a Comprehensive Parking Strategy
- Collaborate with the City on Municipal Assistance
- Promote Large Development through Vacant Lot Consolidation

# MOVING FORWARD

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## LATER

### PROMOTION & MARKETING

- Create Comprehensive Property Prospectus Documents

### PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Promote Facade Improvement Program Utilization
- Develop Commercial Signage Standards

### PLANNING & POLICY

- Engage Innovative Developers



# SUMMARY

The ideas presented here provide a comprehensive look into the East Loop CID's existing conditions, needs, and prospects for growth, as identified through conversations with local commercial real estate brokers. Through this qualitative micro-market data analysis, there are identified key opportunities that can contribute to the district's advancement.

These opportunities encompass a variety of fronts for growth, including potential avenues for promotion and marketing, physical enhancements, and strategic planning and policy development with actionable insights across these three crucial categories. Under Promotion and Marketing, strategies are outlined to amplify the district's visibility and attract diverse businesses. Physical Improvements entail proposed enhancements to the district's infrastructure and public spaces. In the domain of Planning and Policy, targeted actions are delineated to facilitate responsible growth and community development.

The findings presented within this report, conducted by a third-party firm, Steadfast City Economic & Community Partners, offer a roadmap for leveraging the identified opportunities and addressing the East Loop CID's unique needs, ultimately fostering a vibrant and thriving district.

**SAMANTHA SMUGALA**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
(314) 339-3370  
DIRECTOR@THEDELMARLOOP.COM



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