



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

## Planning Division

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**To:** City of Madison *Economic Development Committee*  
**From:** Greater East Towne Planning Team  
Rebecca Cnare, Linda Horvath, Kirstie Laatsch, Ryan Jonely, Chris Wells, Bill Fruhling  
**Date:** **January 19, 2022**  
**Subject:** Greater East Towne Area Plan Adoption (Legistar ID #68802)

**Proposed Action:** RETURN TO LEAD WITH THE RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL TO THE PLAN COMMISSION for adoption of the Greater East Towne Area Plan as a supplement to the Comprehensive Plan.

### Background

The City of Madison has been concurrently planning for the futures of both the Greater East Towne Area and the Odana Area. The Common Council adopted the Odana Area Plan on September 9, 2021. The Greater East Towne Planning Area (GETAP) is roughly bounded by the Wisconsin and Southern railroad tracks on the south, East Washington Avenue on the north, Interstate I-90/94/39 on the east, and Mendota Street on the west.

The Comprehensive Plan identified the area as one of the City's growth priority areas that should transform from the current auto-oriented character to a higher density mixed-use center along the future Bus Rapid Transit route. Undertaking this planning effort will also help the area adapt to the changes and challenges the retail sector has been experiencing since the 1990s, which the COVID-19 pandemic further complicated.

Planning Division staff believe that this Plan will promote a variety of new development that could help East Towne Mall thrive, as it will encourage thousands of new residents and commercial uses in underutilized areas within the planning boundary. In fact, growth projections show that 2,500+ units could easily be built in the next 15-25 years, while still leaving capacity as continued redevelopment occurs for more than 9,500+ dwelling units in the long term. In addition, the proposed street network will make it easier for more people to get to the mall from multiple locations, and across the country, malls have taken advantage of new retail trends and adjacent developments to re-imagine themselves by redeveloping parts or all of the existing mall structure. This Plan allows the mall to be flexible to respond to those trends over time.

There have been many public participation activities throughout the planning process. These activities were adapted to seek input and feedback during the pandemic, and to intentionally include communities that are traditionally underrepresented in planning processes. For example, there was a series of eight meetings with the **Black, Latino, and Hmong Chambers of Commerce** in which participants focused on wanting to ensure the area becomes more welcoming to all residents and businesses. Another focus was the necessity of proactive economic development to help grow businesses owned by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities.

A general theme that emerged from public participation is the feeling that the City should not wait for

private redevelopment to occur based purely on market conditions. Rather, it should be proactive in trying to diversify the area through assisting in the development of local businesses. A summary of public participation activities and input is available on the [project website](#).

A cross agency team also completed a ***Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI) Analysis*** on the draft Plan in October 2021. The purpose was to guide the Plan in creating equitable business and housing opportunities within the planning area for BIPOC communities and people living with lower incomes. Two of the most discussed unintended consequences during the analysis were the increased costs of rent for commercial and residential space that typically occur with redevelopment, and the likely possibility of displacement that follows. These consequences are more likely to have negative impacts on people living with lower incomes and people from BIPOC communities.

### **Economic Development Recommendations**

The Planning Division worked closely with Economic Development Division staff to draft the Economy and Opportunity recommendations. Input from public participation activities and the RESJI analysis significantly informed the recommendations. A general theme is to work in partnership with BIPOC communities to create a more equitable economy that they have more capacity to participate in and benefit from. Recommendations begin on [page 30 of the draft Plan](#) and are summarized below:

1. Conduct an equity-based market study of the area to ensure that people who have been traditionally excluded are included in redevelopment, ownership, entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities.
2. Expand the reach of the Commercial Ownership Assistance program to more areas of the city to help local entrepreneurs of color obtain forgivable loans that they can use to transition from renting to owning commercial property.
3. Concentrate employment and commercial uses in areas that best relate to existing and planned future transit, infrastructure, and other amenities.
4. Support development of business incubators and accelerators, with lower-cost space, shared resources, and expertise needed to help grow local businesses.
5. Explore creation of a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District to fund non-assessable infrastructure, such as ped/bike improvements, new streets, and storm water management improvements; affordable housing; business incubators; and other economic development initiatives.
6. Explore creating a new improvement district, or other tools to help make public spaces more welcoming to all Madison residents.
7. Consider marketing strategies to draw employment to the area as it recovers over the long-term.
8. Allow flexibility for future uses to adapt and reuse existing retail spaces.
9. Strive to preserve affordable commercial space outside major redevelopment areas.
10. Explore a commercial rental assistance or guarantee program to help small and emerging businesses, particularly BIPOC-owned, afford space in areas where rent increases may occur.
11. Continue building relationships with and supporting economic development partners, especially those with ties to BIPOC communities, to help them grow opportunities for entrepreneurs to locate in the Greater East Towne Area.
12. Consider creating a cultural inclusion plan for developers that would provide guidance on promoting a diverse mix of tenants.