Between November 4 and 10, 2015 neighborhood workshops were held at locations throughout the City of Battle Creek. These workshops were coordinated with the City’s Neighborhood Planning Councils (NPC) and open and marketed to all members of the public. As part of ongoing outreach efforts in support of the Battle Creek Master Plan, the neighborhood workshops allowed for more detailed discussion of issues and opportunities as they pertain to specific areas of the community. Each meeting included an overview of the planning process and concluded with a workshop where participants were asked to voice their opinions regarding the future of their local neighborhood and the City of Battle Creek as a whole.

The following is a summary of the neighborhood workshops that highlights overarching themes and topics discussed with members of the Battle Creek community. The following neighborhood groups volunteered to hold a workshop:

- NPC 1 Post Franklin
- NPC 2 North Central
- NPC 3 Central (Coburn/Wilson)
- NPC 4 Northeast (Fremont/McKinley)
- NPC 5 Urbandale
- NPC 9 Rural Southwest
- NPC 11 Minges Brook/Riverside

For more information on the specific boundaries of each NPC, visit the Neighborhoods Inc. website (www.nibc.org) and click on the “Neighborhood Planning Councils” tab in the upper right-hand corner.

*It should be noted that the comments, observations, projects, and actions cited in this summary are not to be interpreted as recommendations of the Master Plan and do not represent City policy.*
Priority Issues & Concerns

The workshop featured a guided group discussion where participants were asked to identify five key issues confronting their specific neighborhood. After reviewing the collective list of issues identified by the group, participants were then asked to rank their top three issues. While numerous topics were discussed, key themes emerged across all neighborhood meeting which were consolidated into the following central concepts:

Blight

The issue of blight was a central concern widely discussed at all neighborhood workshops. Participants noted the dilapidated nature of properties in Battle Creek, including rundown structures, overgrown yards, and code violations. Residents believe that a higher number of rental properties and absentee landowners are linked to poor property maintenance. Residents from many workshops supported stricter code enforcement related to property maintenance, hoping this will reduce the frequent and often persistent violations that can take extended periods of time to remedy.

Blight was further connected to the growing prevalence of vacant land and structures, particularly in residential neighborhoods. In many areas, poor upkeep of empty houses has resulted in demolition, converting compact neighborhoods into spare groups of homes. While most neighborhood workshops discussed vacant homes, others, particularly NPC 3, mentioned commercial and industrial properties which have remained unoccupied. Community members argued that blight has resulted in depreciation of home values, blocked against investment in the City, and caused a growing lack of pride in both local neighborhoods and Battle Creek as a whole.

Issue of particular concern in:

- NPC 1
- NPC 2
- NPC 3
- NPC 4
- NPC 5
- NPC 9

Crime & Safety

Concerns regarding crime and safety in Battle Creek were common at workshops, pertaining to both police and fire department operations. Most neighborhood residents discussed an increase or perceived increase in crime, including drug and theft issues. While neighborhoods closer to Downtown Battle Creek more frequently mentioned issues with drug abuse, even more rural neighborhoods like NPC 9 listed crime issues such as breaking and entering. Residents called for better funding, allocation of officers, and increased patrolling for the police department. In some neighborhoods, attendees were concerned with the response times from emergency response organizations. NPC 1 largely discussed the potential closing of Fire Station 3 located in that neighborhood, which could increase response times for the area which is located to the south of an active railroad line and east of I-194.

Issue of particular concern in:

- NPC 1
- NPC 2
- NPC 3
Economic Development
The need for greater economic development was discussed at a number of neighborhood workshops, largely pertaining to the need for more local businesses and employment opportunities. Residents in NPC 1 noted a lack of stores, particularly for convenience and everyday items. Some participants were concerned their neighborhoods, and others, were becoming food deserts. Other workshops, particularly NPC 2 and NPC 5, noted high vacancy for commercial spaces and hoped to see greater business growth. Small business and entrepreneurship were emphasized, particularly in NPC 3 with frequent reference to potential opportunities in vacant spaces along Capital Avenue and near the Downtown. Similarly, attendees in NPC 4 also discussed the need for greater retail options, including local small business. Participants called for greater job growth and programs to prepare local residents and youth for employment. While many of the neighborhood workshops wanted to see new growth and development, NPC 9 highlighted the importance of manageable growth and the preservation of agricultural land. NPC 9 participants called for a dedicated plan or approach to growth that would eliminate sprawl and sporadic residential expansion.

Issue of particular concern in:

- NPC 2
- NPC 5
- NPC 9

Commercial Corridors
For some neighborhood workshops, the topic of economic development was connected to major commercial corridors in the City. Discussion pertained not only to the need for additional businesses to fill numerous vacancies, but also the need for physical improvements and repairs. NPC 1 and 11 mentioned Columbia Avenue while NPC 9 and 11 mentioned Beckley Road, in both cases participants cited a desire for the development of a dedicated plan or vision for the corridors. Other workshops also discussed the corridors more generally, often due to the lack of commercial businesses within their own neighborhood, thus requiring residents to travel to these corridors for essential goods and services. Participants hoped to see improvements to sidewalks, roadways, dilapidated structures, greater code compliance, and an overall more attractive appearance for vital commercial corridors. NPC 9 respondents also discussed problems with traffic safety and speeding along local streets and major commercial corridors.

Issue of particular concern in:

- NPC 1
- NPC 9
- NPC 11
Programs & Local Resources
Residents felt that new programs and local resources should be developed to offer greater assistance in the community. NPC 5 residents indicated that a lack of youth activities and programs was potentially resulting in adolescent illegal activity. Programs to keep students engaged or prepare them for secondary education and employment were desired. In addition, participants wanted to see more programs geared toward adults and preparing residents for employment. In NPC 2, attendees emphasized the need for a program or set of programs that could help adults get a fresh start on their life and career.

Issue of particular concern in:
- NPC 2
- NPC 4
- NPC 5

Education
The current condition and future of schools in Battle Creek was a consistent point of discussion. Residents felt that various school facilities require new extensions or improvements to better meet neighborhood needs. Participants in NPC 11 mentioned various improvements they felt would raise the quality of schools in that neighborhood. NPC 4 respondents noted that a perception of poor quality schools across the City could decrease Battle Creek’s ability to attract new families. At most workshops, though particularly in NPC 5, residents were concerned for the future of public school facilities in their local neighborhood and unsure of the how the school system should or will change in Battle Creek.

Issue of particular concern in:
- NPC 4
- NPC 5
- NPC 11

Projects or Actions
In response to the list of issues identified during workshop discussion, participants were asked to name specific project or actions that would improve their neighborhood and the Battle Creek community overall. The list of recommended actions are listed below, sorted by NPC

Projects & Actions shared by Multiple NPCs
- Require strict code compliance for property maintenance (NPC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11)
- Maintain and repair local roadways (NPC 1, 3, 5, 9, 11)
- Incentivize property maintenance through loan or grant programs (NPC 1, 2, 4, 5)
- Address crime, safety, and drug issues (NPC 1, 4, 5, 9)
- Offer low interest loans for home maintenance (NPC 1, 2)
- Demolish old or abandoned houses (NPC 1, 2)
NPC 1 Post Franklin
- Address issues of blight
- Resurface local streets
- Improve entry points into the area using landscaping, public art, community events, and yard screening
- Establish gateway entrances into the Downtown
- Leverage land banks to expand parks
- Offer site improvement grants for residents
- Create more single family housing
- Maintain upkeep on City owned properties and landscapes
- Keep Fire Station 3 open or if closed, open a new fire station in the neighborhood
- Provide necessary funding for police and fire protection
- Improve neighborhood safety through increased police patrolling
- Facilitate regular resident engagement projects
- Expand community gardening programs and promote involvement
- Host neighborhood cleanup events
- Leverage Post/Franklin Neighborhood as an asset

NPC 2 North Central
- Build new homes on empty lots, including affordable housing
- Establish a plan for creative use of vacated land
- Develop educational programs for homeowners regarding property maintenance
- Incentivize owners and occupants to buy and invest in the neighborhood
- Encourage new business development on Michigan Avenue
- Beautify the Michigan Avenue corridor
- Attract a small grocery store that sells fresh fruit to the area
- Open a neighborhood café for seniors
- Develop a splash pad or sprinkler park for kids
- Trim trees and remove dead trees
- Facilitate job growth
- Address flooding issues
- Develop programs for youth development
- Facilitate more neighborhood-city collaboration
- Facilitate city-financed community projects
- Promote "goings-on" in the neighborhood

NPC 3 Central
- Encourage façade improvements to make buildings more attractive for new businesses
- Market and publicize important commercial corridors
- Clean up commercial corridors, recruiting the help of local businesses
- Support local businesses and entrepreneurs
- Sweep all streets in the neighborhood
- Recognize and promote volunteering
- Hold regular neighborhood workshops and meetings
NPC 4 Northeast
- Repair and update street lights
- Create a “buyers guide” for new homeowners
- Provide funding for historic preservation and rehab of historic buildings
- Ensure equity between neighborhoods
- Establish clear visions for vacant land along Cherry Street, Van Buren Street, and Calhoun Street
- Regulate declining properties
- Develop a new zoning code
- Eliminate zoning barriers to mixed use opportunities
- Increase community engagement for residents
- Establish a customer service approach to running the City
- Facilitate better coordinated crime prevention

NPC 5 Urbandale
- Require better maintenance of vacant houses
- Rehab vacant houses
- Create an abandoned structure ordinance
- Allow longer period for homeowners to bring houses into compliance
- Facilitate economic growth
- Maintain Fell Park
- Develop a neighborhood-centered “Mini-City Hall” and activity center
- Increase the number of youth activities
- Develop programs for adults and those looking to make a “fresh-start”
- Increase communication within the community to spread knowledge about local resources
- Address drug-abuse issues
- Coordinate with Sprout-Food Community Enterprises to bring them to the community

NPC 9 Rural Southwest
- Review and add sidewalks along important roadways and routes
- Widen Beckley Road to allow/include larger sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes
- Beautify Beckley Road
- Control growth and expansion
- Increase neighborhood police presence

NPC 11 Minges Brook/Riverside
- Repair sidewalks and remove weeds
- Add new sidewalks where necessary, such as along Gethings Road to connect with 24th Street
- Make improvements to Columbia Road, in particular bury overhead utility lines
- Create a Beckley Road business plan
- Address compliance issues regarding drive way parking for private homes
- Improve the appearance of residential areas and their “curb appeal”
- Maintain existing and develop new parks
- Improve the drop-off area for elementary schools
- Include a gymnasium and cafeteria at each elementary school
Assets & Strengths

As the Master Plan moves forward, the key strengths and assets of the community should be regarded as items to be maintained and built upon. Participants identified the following strengths and advantages that make Battle Creek a great community:

Assets & Strengths Shared by Multiple NPCs
- Parks and recreational facilities (NPC 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11)
- Schools (NPC 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11)
- Engaged community (NPC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Diverse population and culture (NPC 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Community resources like Neighborhood Inc. Battle Creek and the NPCs (NPC 1, 2, 4, 5)
- Tree lined streets (NPC 3, 4, 9)
- Kellogg's Inc. (NPC 1, 2)
- Police Department (NPC 1, 2)
- Fire Department (NPC 1, 2)
- Historic character (NPC 1, 2)
- Variety of Churches (NPC 2, 3)
- Low crime (NPC 3, 4)
- Historic & architecturally appealing homes (NPC 2, 4)
- City bus routes (NPC 1, 4)
- Walkability (NPC 3, 4)
- Small businesses (NPC 3, 5)

NPC 1 Post Franklin
- Fire Station 3
- Post/Franklin School and playing fields
- Post Foundation
- Women Co-Op
- Post Cereal Plant
- Community Action Inc.
- Recreational opportunities
- Post Park, Hamilton Park
- Post-Franklin Community Gardens
- Oakhill Cemetery
- Mike's Place-Church
- Trinity Lutheran
- Neighborhood grocery store-Main Street Market
- Dairy Queen
- Full-service gas station
- Residents/families
- Volunteerism
NPC 2 North Central
- Central location
- Land
- Wealth
- Homes that were built to last
- Home ownership
- Lighting infrastructure
- Clean streets
- Fire station
- Federal Center
- Family Health Center
- Hospital
- Businesses
- Activities for all ages
- Community pride
- “Everyone knows most everyone”
- Clean downtown

NPC 3 Central
- Bound by main corridors
- Bike lanes
- Sprout Urban Farm
- Washington Heights-a lot of available land
- Nice residential neighborhood
- Older well-maintained homes
- Retail entertainment
- Infrastructure
- Low crime
- “Locals looking out for locals”
- Opportunities for locals

NPC 4 Northeast
- Proximity to downtown
- Accessibility
- Bikeability
- Greenspace
- Quaker Park, Irving Park, Piper Park
- Linear trail
- Fremont Garden
- Affordable quality housing
- “Very livable”
- Mix of owner-occupied and renter occupied housing
- Kellogg Community College
- Hospital
- YMCA
- Art Center
- Transit access
- Private and public investment
- Commerce
NPC 5 Urbandale
- Stable Neighborhood
- Well-maintained homes
- Leila Arboretum
- Linear Park
- Kalamazoo River
- Local restaurants
- Few fast-food restaurants
- History
- Clean area
- Safety
- Quiet area
- Receptive leaders

NPC 9 Rural Southwest
- Rural atmosphere
- Wildlife
- Woodland Nature Preserve
- Scenic trails for hiking and biking
- North Country Trail
- Linear Park (community asset)
- Library
- Medical facilities
- Large residential lots
- Proximity to shopping
- Restaurants
- Major Roadways

NPC 11 Minges Brook/Riverside
- Location
- Accessibility, especially to I-94
- Proximity to amenities
- Affordable
- Stable neighborhood - Not transitory
- Good home and yard maintenance
- Size of residential lots
- Infrastructure
- Sidewalks on main roads
- Well-maintained roads
- Riverside Park
- Linear Park (community asset)
- Proximity to shopping and entertainment