

Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District

From 107th to 115th along S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago



Roseland Theater Building at 113th Place in Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

OVERVIEW

Roseland's South Michigan Avenue Commercial District is the commercial center and heart of this Far South Side community, located approximately 15 miles from downtown Chicago. Situated on a hilltop ridge, the corridor extends between 100th Street and the viaduct just south of 115th Street, with the central core of the existing commercial district located between 110th and 115th Streets. Once referred to by local residents as "The Avenue," the street's viability as a commercial corridor began to deteriorate and fade in the mid-1970s. Over the decades, some historic buildings have been remodeled and

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Address: From 107th to 115th on S. Michigan Avenue

Architect: Various

Date: c.1887 to c.1930

Style: Chicago Commercial Vernacular

Neighborhood: Roseland

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Historic postcard of Roseland Theater Building at 113th Place in Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Paul Petraitis

covered with new facades, and many other notable and significant commercial buildings, which further helped to define the district, have been lost to demolition. However, it is important to protect, restore and reuse the remaining structures, many of them noteworthy in their overall design and materials. This would honor the legacy and history of this remarkable community and encourage a holistic approach to further promote economic revitalization along the South Michigan Avenue commercial corridor.

HISTORY

The Roseland community was established with settlements in 1849 by Dutch immigrants mainly from the villages of Eenigenburg and Schoorl in the Netherlands. The initial group of early Dutch settlers traveled to America on a ship called the *Massachusetts of Boston*. While journeying from France to New York, an outbreak of Asiatic cholera impacted the ship, with 17 members of the original 64 passengers succumbing to their illness. After arriving in Buffalo, New York, they headed to Chicago via steamer ship through the Great Lakes and disembarked at the docks along the Chicago River. They traveled a series of roads southward from the city center and settled in the unincorporated Calumet Region. The initial settlements were perched on the west ridge of Lake Calumet and located near the Grand Calumet and Little Calumet Rivers. The region was part of the Lake Michigan watershed and included areas of vast prairies and wetlands. Noting the geography of their settlement along a natural ridge, the early Dutch settlers referred to this area as the "High Prairie" and were later to be known as "the Hollanders of High Prairie."

The initial settlers, now remembered and honored as the "Nine Founding Fathers of Roseland" included Johannes Ambuul, Jakob and Pieter De Jong, Klaas and Pieter Dalenberg, Jan Jonker, Cornelis Kuyper, Jan Ton and Leendert van der Sijde, along with their families. They purchased land along an "old Indian Trail," also known as "Chicago-Thornton Road," "Holland Settlement Road" and "High Road," which later became South Michigan Avenue in Roseland. Further settlement came in 1852 with the establishment of the Michigan Central Railroad and the Illinois Central Railroad in the area to the east and the Calumet (later known as Kensington) Station,



113th Place corner on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

which later became part of a vast switching yard for the trains. In 1860, the administration of President Abraham Lincoln appointed the first postmaster for the area and named the post office Hope, Illinois.

Dutch residents of Roseland supported President Abraham Lincoln, vowing to help the Union, where possible, during the American Civil War from 1861-1865. According to the book *Down An Indian Trail in 1849: The Story of Roseland*, "It is well known that [Kornelius/Cornelius] Kuyper's home was a station on the Underground Railroad and that he was a valuable member of that organization. As an Abolitionist and local Magistrate, he helped many fleeing slaves, seeing that they were safely conducted to the home of [Roseland settler] Jan Ton on the Little Calumet River, thence to Hammond, Indiana, Tremont, Indiana, Detroit, Michigan, and finally Canada."

Other important Roseland figures in the Underground Railroad included Charles Volney Dyer (1808-1878), who was a prominent abolitionist and "Stationmaster," hosting many freedom seekers, along with the Dalton Brothers (Charles and Henry) and both Jan/John Ton (1826-1896) and his wife Aggie Vander Syde-Ton, who resided on a farm on the north bank of the Calumet River from 1859 to 1867.

Colonel James Bowen (1822-1881), known as "The Father of South Chicago," was a real estate developer who became the first president of the Calumet and Chicago Canal Dock Company in 1873. He suggested the area be renamed "Roseland" because of the abundance of beautiful flowers, roses and gardens that had been planted by the Dutch settlers. Bowen renamed other nearby areas including Kensington (formerly called Calumet/Calumet Station), Riverdale and Burnside in 1873. In 1880, Bowen sold thousands of acres of land to the Pullman Land Association for the Pullman Car Works, also referred to as the "Chicago Works of the Pullman Palace Company."

In 1883, 4,000 acres of land became the planned industrial town of Pullman, which was established by American Industrialist George Mortimer Pullman (1831-1897) for the manufacturing of passenger railroad cars. The town of Pullman was planned for a site just east of Roseland, and was designed by architect Solon Spencer Beman (1853-1914) and landscape architect Nathan Franklin Barrett (1845-1919). The Town of Pullman was opened with much fanfare and was a model industrial town, where factory workers lived in nearby residences built, controlled and

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Historic Photograph of the State Theater at 110th Place in Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District c.1970 © Paul Petraitis

operated by Mr. Pullman and the Pullman Company. However, some workers and their families felt limited by Pullman's strict control on commercial offerings in Pullman, which secured nearby Roseland as a popular destination. South Michigan Avenue in Roseland became an alternative to the limited businesses and services available in nearby Pullman within the Beman-designed Pullman Arcade Building (demolished in 1927) and Market Hall (partially extant following multiple fires). With this new industrial town of Pullman nearby, Roseland and its commercial districts including South Michigan Avenue thrived. Both Pullman and Roseland were annexed into the City of Chicago in 1889.

Roseland was integrally connected to Pullman from the early days. Roseland was a well-established community at the time of Pullman's construction, and it offered goods and services in addition to restaurants and saloons, which were frowned upon by Mr. Pullman in pursuit of his idyllic and picturesque company town. In later years, when Pullman itself faced challenges in the 1930s through the 1960s and its neighborhood's reputation appeared to fade, Roseland once again provided relief and resources to support its neighboring community.

However, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the town of Pullman was once again recognized, honored, and given National Register designation, followed by a Chicago Landmark designation, for its architectural, labor and Civil Rights history and links. It was designated the Pullman National Monument in 2015 and is expected to draw many additional tourists with this designation, along with the reinvestment of private developers and the National Park Service in the community.

Roseland and historic South Michigan Avenue, along with neighboring Pullman, have the opportunity to again assist and support each other toward redevelopment projects. Pullman as a National Monument will attract many visitors, expected to be in the hundreds of thousands over the course of a year. Roseland, which since the 1970s has seen significant demographic changes and extreme disinvestment, can rely on Pullman to some extent with a draw of visitors' tourism dollars and a place to visit as part of a Pullman-Roseland destination.

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110th Street corner on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

The First Reformed Church of Roseland was for many decades a centerpiece of the early community, beginning in about 1855. It was rebuilt in brick by the early Dutch settlers or “Hollanders” in 1887, with Jan Kleinhuizen and Hendrik De Jong as the contractors. Located at 107th and Michigan, the new church (still extant) replaced an earlier frame church adjacent to the immediate north. As the community transitioned rapidly from predominantly Caucasian to predominantly African-American in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Dutch Reformed Church Building became the Lilydale Progressive Missionary Baptist Church in 1971.

Early houses, including the 1849 home of Cornelis Kuyper (demolished) mentioned earlier as part of the Underground Railroad, stood just south of 103rd and Michigan Avenue. Another early house, belonging to Pieter Boone at 10057 S. Michigan Avenue c. 1870 (still extant), and part of a later wave of Dutch immigrants, was constructed from locally made De Jong Brick and is among the earliest structures of Roseland. Both the First Reformed Church of Roseland, now Lilydale Church, and the Boon House should be considered for Chicago Landmark designation and protection.

As jobs left the steel mills, auto plants and the Pullman Car Company, the decline of the Roseland community and surrounding areas began to accelerate. Roseland and nearby communities suffered from white flight fueled by illegal real estate block-busting. Racial violence occurred in the past, dating back to August of 1947 when African-American veterans and their families moved into the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) Fernwood Park Housing Development at 104th and Halsted. Similar events occurred in Altgeld Gardens, a CHA development, further south.

The once-thriving commercial corridor along South Michigan Avenue began a long period of decline. Many stores went out of business and vacant buildings deteriorated due to deferred maintenance. The lack of new replacement stores led to an increase in vacancy and discouraged reinvestment from property owners. After years of deterioration, some buildings were boarded up, abandoned, and in some cases, demolished. Interventions from the City of Chicago were either inadequate or ineffective and were unable to reverse the downward trend.

The strength and dedication of block clubs throughout the neighborhood has been a foundation for increased stabilization of housing stock and the strengthening of community networks.



110th Place on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

THREATS

A significant number of historic buildings along South Michigan Avenue in Roseland have been lost over the past 50 years, and much of what remains is in vulnerable condition. Without the necessary investment and maintenance, the surviving historic buildings are at risk of demolition by neglect.

Since 2015, Preservation Chicago has worked closely with the Greater Roseland Chamber of Commerce to conduct neighborhood surveys and tours with local youth, supported by the One Summer Chicago program, Phalanx Family Services, and 9th Ward Alderman Anthony Beale.

In the summer of 2019, Roseland community members and Preservation Chicago conducted an electronic survey of buildings and parcels along South Michigan Avenue between 103rd and 116th Streets. This mapping and data collection work was conducted with community residents and volunteers through a survey initiative of Preservation Chicago.

Much of the historic fabric along Michigan Avenue that has been lost has been replaced by vacant land and parking lots. Demolition has caused significant impact to the streetscape between 100th and 110th Streets, however, south of 111th Street the streetscape still retains much of its historic fabric along with a collection of viable and legacy businesses. The overall current condition of many of the existing commercial buildings ranges from fair to poor. The electronic survey data helps to identify and quantify vacant parcels, vacant buildings, building condition, and buildings with historic character.

Sadly, during the course of planning and surveying properties along South Michigan Avenue, the iconic Gately's People's Store was lost to fire in June 2019, another reminder of the fragility of these buildings and the urgency to develop effective strategies for revitalization. We have identified least 12 historic buildings along the Michigan

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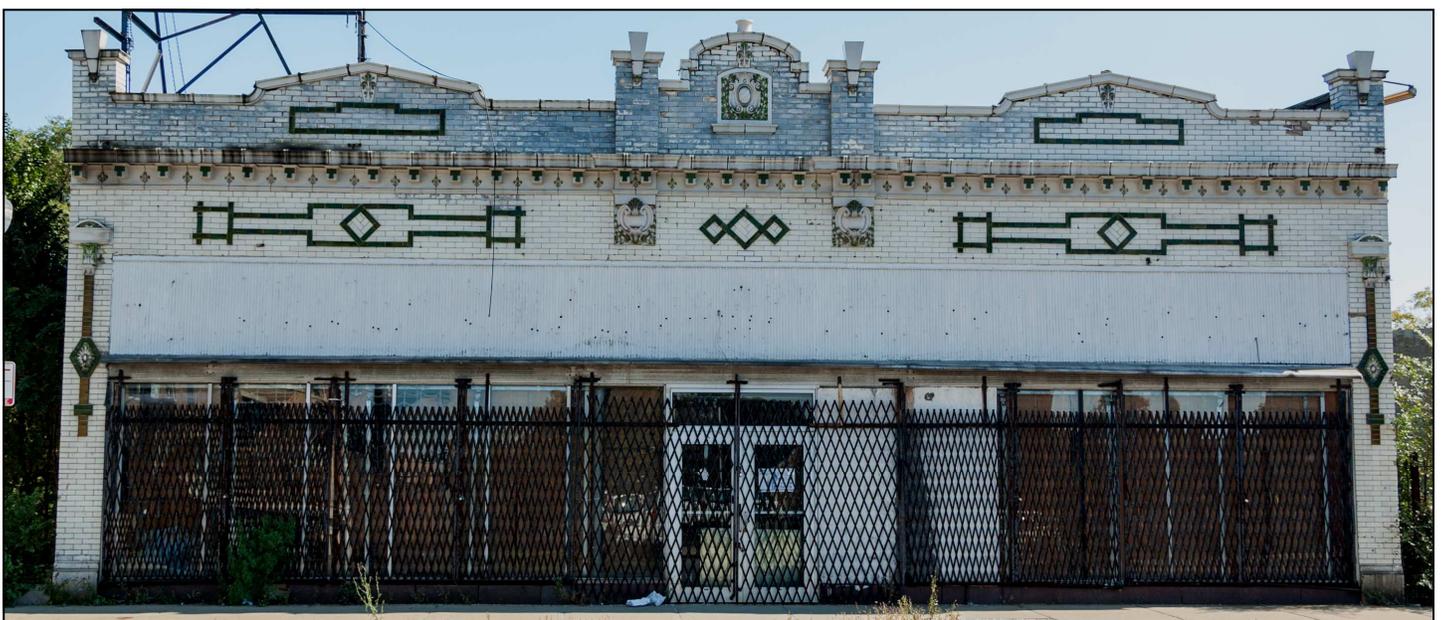
Building at 11015 S. Michigan Avenue demolished circa 2012 © Eric Allix Rogers

Avenue corridor that are in extremely vulnerable condition. In February 2020 just prior to publication, two historic structures along South Michigan Avenue were lost to emergency demolitions due to life safety and public safety concerns.

Approximately 30 historic properties were identified as in good or excellent condition by volunteer surveyors, which could be models for other historic buildings along the commercial corridor.

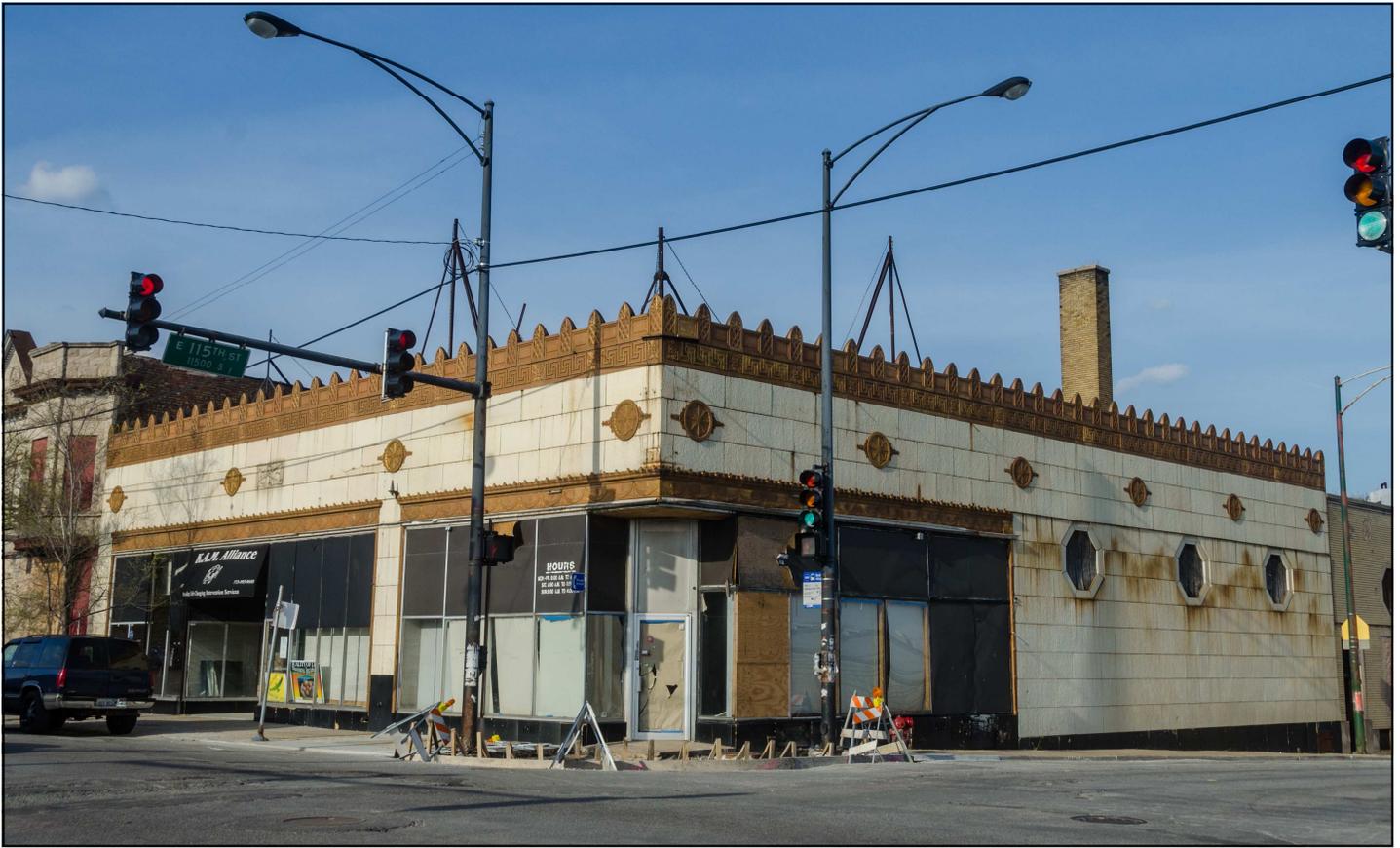
There are several vibrant legacy businesses along the corridor, including Ware's Ranch Steakhouse at 11147 S. Michigan and Old-Fashioned Donuts at 11248 S. Michigan Avenue.

This commercial corridor once met the shopping and consumer needs of surrounding communities including Pullman, Kensington, Rosemoor, West Chesterfield, Roseland Heights, Chesterfield, Fernwood, Gano, Burnside, West Pullman, Riverdale and Altgeld Gardens. With revitalization happening in the area, especially to the immediate east in the Pullman National Monument District, this is an opportune time to invest the financial incentives, energy and resources into reviving Roseland's commercial corridor.



110th Place on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

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115th Street corner on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers



112th Street corner on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

RECOMMENDATIONS

Historic preservation can be a powerful tool for economic development along Michigan Avenue. The number of historic buildings along South Michigan Avenue in Roseland exceed those recorded in the Chicago Historic Resource Survey (CHRS) completed in the 1990s, and more than 60% of those properties are in fair to poor condition. Of the original 17 orange-rated buildings listed in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey, only 12 remain today. Within days of publication, another historic building on South Michigan Avenue was lost to emergency demolition following a roof collapse. Without swift and effective investment, the deterioration and demolition will continue.

Chicago has an extraordinary opportunity to invest in the South Michigan Avenue commercial corridor between 107th and 115th Streets which should include specific plans to revitalize the existing historic buildings and to redevelop vacant lots so they enhance the historic character of the commercial district.

Prior to the National Monument, visitors to Pullman numbered approximately 15,000 annually. With 300,000 visitors expected to visit the Pullman National Monument annually as per published estimates, the community of Roseland and the City of Chicago has a great opportunity to capitalize on those visitors by investing in its historic buildings, enforcing building code violations, and sensibly developing vacant parcels along the commercial corridor.

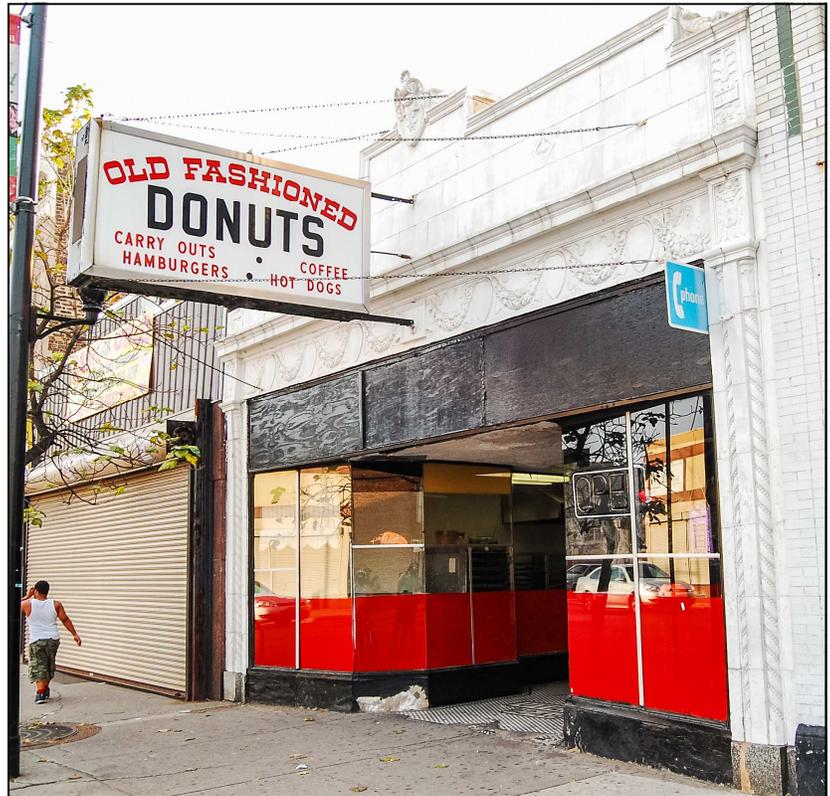
Priority should be focused on the preservation of existing historic structures and legacy businesses. Beautiful facades are obscured beneath subsequent remodelings. The restoration of these key historic buildings along South Michigan Avenue has the potential to inspire and catalyze a wider revitalization along the commercial corridor.

PlaceEconomics, a national organization that conducts local preservation impact studies, notes that historic preservation is an effective tool to stimulate commercial revitalization, encourage heritage tourism, increase property values, and generate additional jobs and incomes. Investing in historic buildings is a proven strategy to create more positive economic impact. PlaceEconomics' research has determined that heritage tourists spend more for food/beverage, shopping, recreation, lodging, and transportation in comparison to average visitors.

The creation of new Pullman-Palmer Park Landmark District would serve as bridge for heritage tourism, effectively drawing tens of thousands of visitors from the Historic Pullman Monument into Roseland and onto South Michigan Avenue. Additionally, it would create awareness, protections, and additional funding sources for significant commercial buildings, churches, schools, and greenspaces in Roseland with strong connections to George Pullman and the Pullman National Monument.

To more fully tell the story of George Pullman and experience of Pullman workers, it's essential to recognize George Pullman's historic role in shaping the development of Roseland. Pullman owned significant tracts of land on the west side of the Illinois Central tracks which were at street-level at that time and more visually connected and integrated to the Town of Pullman. These future parklands were on axis with the Town of Pullman, specifically the Administration Building and Hotel Florence along 111th Street.

Pullman played a role in the creation of the two large green spaces along 111th Street in Roseland which became Palmer Park and the park-like campus of the former Pullman Manual Training School, later known as the Gregor Mendel High School and now known as Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy.



112th Street on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

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112th Place block on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers



114th Place block on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers



Roseland Theater Building at 113th Place in Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers

Pullman bequeathed \$1.2 million in 1897 for the Pullman Free School of Manual Training which was constructed in 1915 and designed by architect Frank Jobson. Palmer Park was designed by the Olmsted Brothers and the Palmer Park Fieldhouse was designed by D.H. Burnham and Company. Pullman donated land for the Pullman Branch Public Library at 11001 S. Indiana Avenue. He also donated land for the two churches designed by Solon S. Beman, architect of the Town of Pullman, specifically Elim Lutheran Church from 1888 at 11310 S. Forest Avenue and the magnificent Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Church from 1890 at 11300 S. King Drive in Roseland. In addition, there are several early frame churches linked to the Dutch settlers that front Palmer Park and the Brooks Academy grounds. The former Pullman Bank Building at 400 E. 111th Street with its beautiful limestone façade and columned corner entry served as the headquarters of the Pullman Bank until the 1970s.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS for Roseland's South Michigan Avenue Commercial District

1. Award façade improvement grants or low-interest building restoration loans designed to allow greater availability to new and existing building owners.
2. Create funding options for local investors to acquire and revitalize vacant buildings.
3. Assistance of the Cook County Land Bank Authority to make troubled properties available to responsible investors.
4. Increase financial and capacity support for local community organizations and chambers of commerce.
5. Establish a Landmark District, individual Landmarks, or a Neighborhood Character District to honor, restore and protect the historic character of Michigan Avenue. Neighborhood Character Districts are a new tool being created by the City of Chicago to protect the scale, massing, volume, setback and characteristic features of a neighborhood.
6. Encourage responsible building stewardship through greater enforcement of building code violations.
7. Invest in new construction on vacant parcels which contribute to the overall historic character of the commercial corridor.

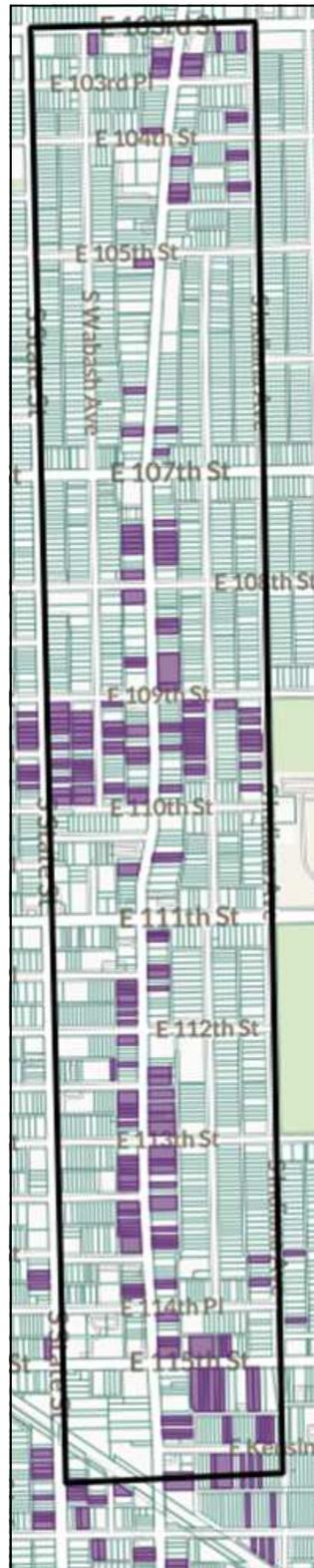
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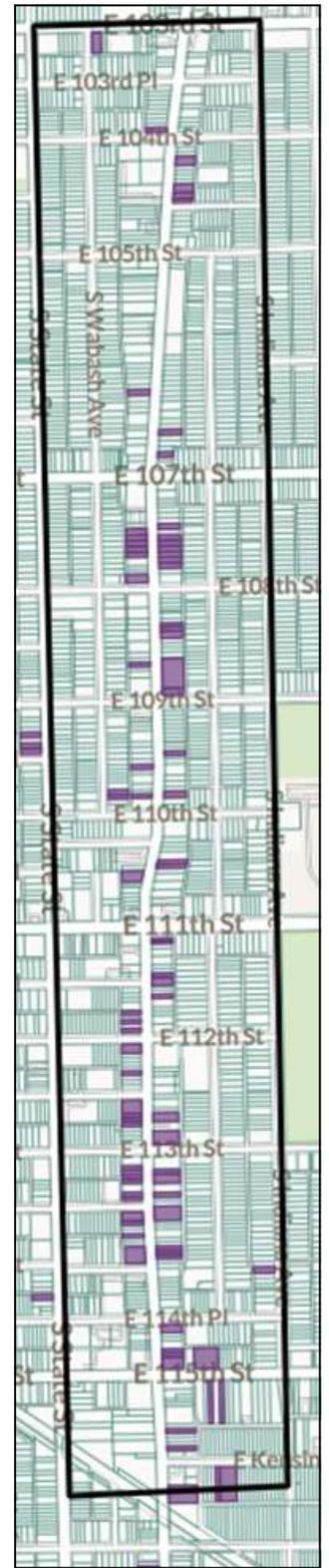
Roseland Commercial District
Survey Figure A:
Vacant Parcels



Roseland Commercial District
Survey Figure B: Vacant or
Likely Vacant Buildings



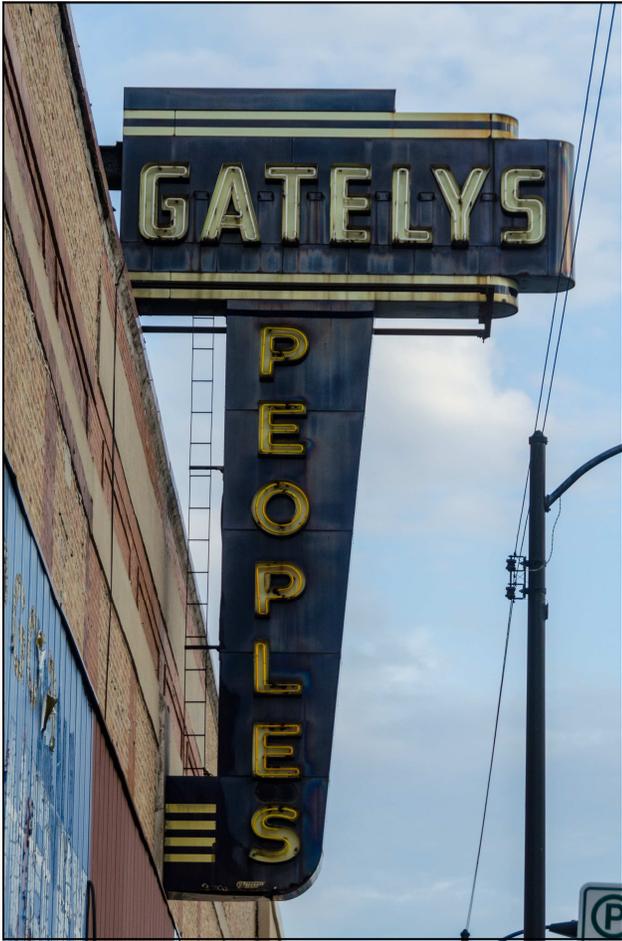
Roseland Commercial District
Survey Figure C: Buildings in
Poor to Fair Condition



Roseland Commercial District
Survey Figure D: Buildings
with Historic Character in
Poor to Fair Condition

Roseland's Commercial District Survey Data and Maps © Preservation Chicago

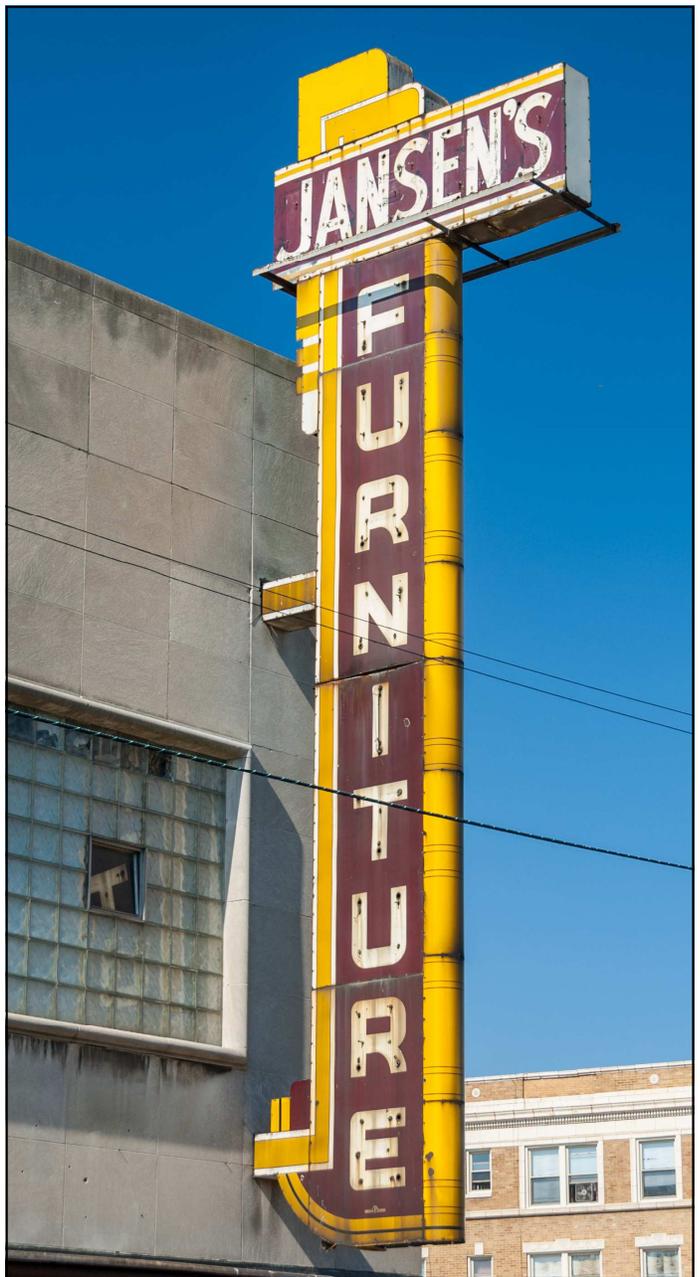
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8. Create grants or low-interest loans for existing building owners to invest in attractive security options for their storefronts and businesses.
9. Invest in affordable housing options on the upper floors of mixed-use commercial buildings.
10. Increase entrepreneurship mentoring, job training, and small business loans to grow and retain more wealth within the Roseland community.
11. Create a new Pullman-Palmer Park Landmark District along 111th and 113th Streets to create a heritage bridge from Historic Pullman Monument to Roseland and South Michigan Avenue and protect significant George Pullman related buildings in Roseland including churches by S.S. Beman, Palmer Park fieldhouse by D.H. Burnham, Palmer Park by Olmsted, Pullman Manual Training School, and Pullman Branch Library.

The City of Chicago, through its Invest South/West and other neighborhood revitalization programs, needs to strategically and comprehensively commit to reversing the disinvestment in Roseland that has occurred over the past 50 years with special focus on its commercial corridors. If the City of Chicago, community organizations, community members and other stakeholders can work together, success is possible.

While South Michigan Avenue is the priority, secondary commercial corridors that would benefit by increased investment include 111th, 95th, 103rd, 115th Streets, and Kensington Avenue. Each of these has a collection of historic buildings and businesses that could serve as a catalyst for change as part of a more holistic plan for the greater Roseland community. Additionally, some of these secondary commercial corridors could serve as a bridge between Pullman and Roseland.

Restoration and development continues to progress in Pullman with the opening of the visitor center in the restored Pullman Administration Building planned for 2021. The hundreds of thousands of anticipated annual visitors to the Pullman Historic Monument are a powerful economic driver that needs to be harnessed with restaurants, shops and services. This presents an outstanding opportunity to attract more visibility and commerce to the Roseland community and especially South Michigan Avenue.

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First Reform Church of Roseland / Lilydale Progressive M.B., at 107th Street in Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers



114th Street Block on Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers



First Reform Church of Roseland, now known as Lilydale Progressive M.B., built in 1887 by Dutch Settlers, at 107th Street in Roseland's Michigan Avenue Commercial District © Eric Allix Rogers