

THE SOUTH KELSO REVITALIZATION STRATEGY: EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT



PREPARED FOR THE CITY OF KELSO BY
CONFLUENCE PLANNING ASSOCIATES &
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY'S MASTERS OF URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING PROGRAM

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Introduction

This Existing Conditions Report outlines Confluence Planning Associates' (CPA's) research and data collected during the Landscape Scan phase of the development of the South Kelso Revitalization Strategy. This document is intended to summarize and synthesize data pertinent to the current state of the South Kelso Neighborhood and identify trends that may impact this community's future. This information—particularly when compared to regional and statewide trends—gives valuable insight into the health of the social and economic environment of the South Kelso Neighborhood. A comprehensive and holistic understanding of the community, including change over time, is necessary for the identification of local assets, constraints, and community priorities, and in the development of recommended strategies to achieve those objectives.

Literature Review

Confluence Planning Associates conducted a thorough review of existing planning efforts and demographic statistics that will ultimately influence the implementation of an effective Revitalization Strategy in South Kelso. CPA's research included a review of:

The **Summary of Existing Planning Documents** summarizes the past 30+ years of planning efforts in the region. These efforts are divided into broad themes: Housing, Economic Development, Mobility, Education and Social Services, and Recreation. Documents reviewed include the 1980 Kelso Comprehensive Plan, the City of Kelso Downtown Revitalization Plan (2007), the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Report (2009), the Consolidated Housing & Community Development Plan (2009-2013), the Cowlitz Transit Authority (CTA) Transit Enhancement Plan (2010), the CWCOG Great Streets Concept (2012), and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Cowlitz-Lewis Economic Development District (CLEDD) (2009).

The **Social Support Revitalization Efforts** section provides information on existing efforts to provide support to South Kelso residents, including the Lower Columbia Community Action Program (CAP), the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington, and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) (2009/2010).

The **Key Demographic and Trends** section outlines relevant trends in population, education, employment, income, and housing. This information was culled from local, state, and national surveys such as the U.S. Census and American Community Survey. These statistics help identify where Kelso may be gaining an advantage or falling behind in comparison to regional and statewide growth trends.

Local Knowledge

In an effort to gather data on the full spectrum of experiences, lifestyles, and perspectives of the South Kelso Neighborhood, CPA sought the casual anecdotes of local individuals with ties to South Kelso, in addition to formal institutional research publications. For their help, we would like to thank the residents, business owners, teachers, and employees of South Kelso for their willingness to share their experiences with our team.

CPA invited the general public to two 'Coffee Talks' held at the Kelso Public Library. The purpose of these was twofold: to inspire excitement in the community about their capacity to leverage change in their neighborhood, and to give the planning team an understanding of local knowledge systems rooted in place. Participants at these events engaged in informal conversation about their past experiences, present understandings, and future desires for the neighborhood. Summary findings from these events can be found in the **Community Outreach Findings** section.

The **Stakeholder Interview Findings** section summarizes the perspectives of a diverse range of stakeholders with ties to the South Kelso Neighborhood. Confluence Planning Associates defines stakeholders as a person

who—as a result of their affiliation with a particular organization or effort—may provide a unique perspective germane to their particular community experience. Stakeholders are typically 1) organized around a theme, 2) represent a body of individuals, and 3) are vested in the future health of the South Kelso community. These individuals typically represent a city department, not-for-profit organization, church, business, school, or other organization.

The **Synthesis** section contains CPA’s current understanding of South Kelso with consideration of all of the above findings. Four key leverage points have been identified: 1) the role of Wallace Elementary and a potential partnership with the Kelso School District; 2) Walkability and Density in the Downtown Core; 3) Community Cohesion; and 4) a Spatial Mismatch of Jobs and Capacity. By addressing these issues, the Kelso community has significant potential to build social capital, economic resiliency, and shape the future identity of the South Kelso Neighborhood as a vibrant, healthy community.

The planning team of Confluence Planning Associates looks forward to leveraging these lessons learned as we co-create a list of solutions, recommendations, and strategies that the collective community can utilize to best develop the future, vibrant South Kelso that all have imagined.

Community Profile

Kelso, WA is located on Interstate 5 about 50 miles north of Portland, OR and 120 miles south of Seattle, WA. The city is located at the confluence of three rivers, the Cowlitz, Coweeman, and Columbia. Kelso is the county seat of Cowlitz County. The city's population is approximately 12,000 people,¹ with about 50,000 residents in the entire metro region including the city of Longview that shares a border with Kelso and lies across the Cowlitz River to the west. Kelso has experienced virtually no population growth since 2000. The city is comprised of 8.5 square miles of land and has an average population density of 1,465 residents per square mile.

The South Kelso Neighborhood lies between the Cowlitz River to the west and the Three Rivers Mall to the east, Highway 4 to the north and the Kelso-Longview Airport to the south. The neighborhood includes a well-established core of single-family homes (mainly one-story residences), with a small commercial district situated along South Pacific Avenue, and vacant industrial land in the southern end of the neighborhood.

The South Kelso Neighborhood is home to approximately 5,846 residents living within 2,264 households, making it home to roughly half of the entire population of the city of Kelso.² The South Kelso Neighborhood is slightly younger than Kelso as a whole with over 25% of the population under 18 years of age.³ Much like the city as a whole, South Kelso is predominantly white, though it is home to the largest concentration of Hispanic or Latino residents—the largest minority in the city.⁴ Roughly 75% of neighborhood residents have completed high school, but less than 7% have completed college or an advanced degree.⁵ The South Kelso Neighborhood also has a higher unemployment rate than the city as a whole, 9.8% to 8.6%, and has the lowest median household income, \$33,143, and the highest percentage of households needing public assistance, 13%.⁶ Finally, while residences in the neighborhood are primarily single-family, 48% are occupied by renters rather than owners.⁷

¹ [1] City of Kelso Datasheet, October 22, 2012

² City of Kelso project proposal, Fall, 2012

³ ACS 2006-2010

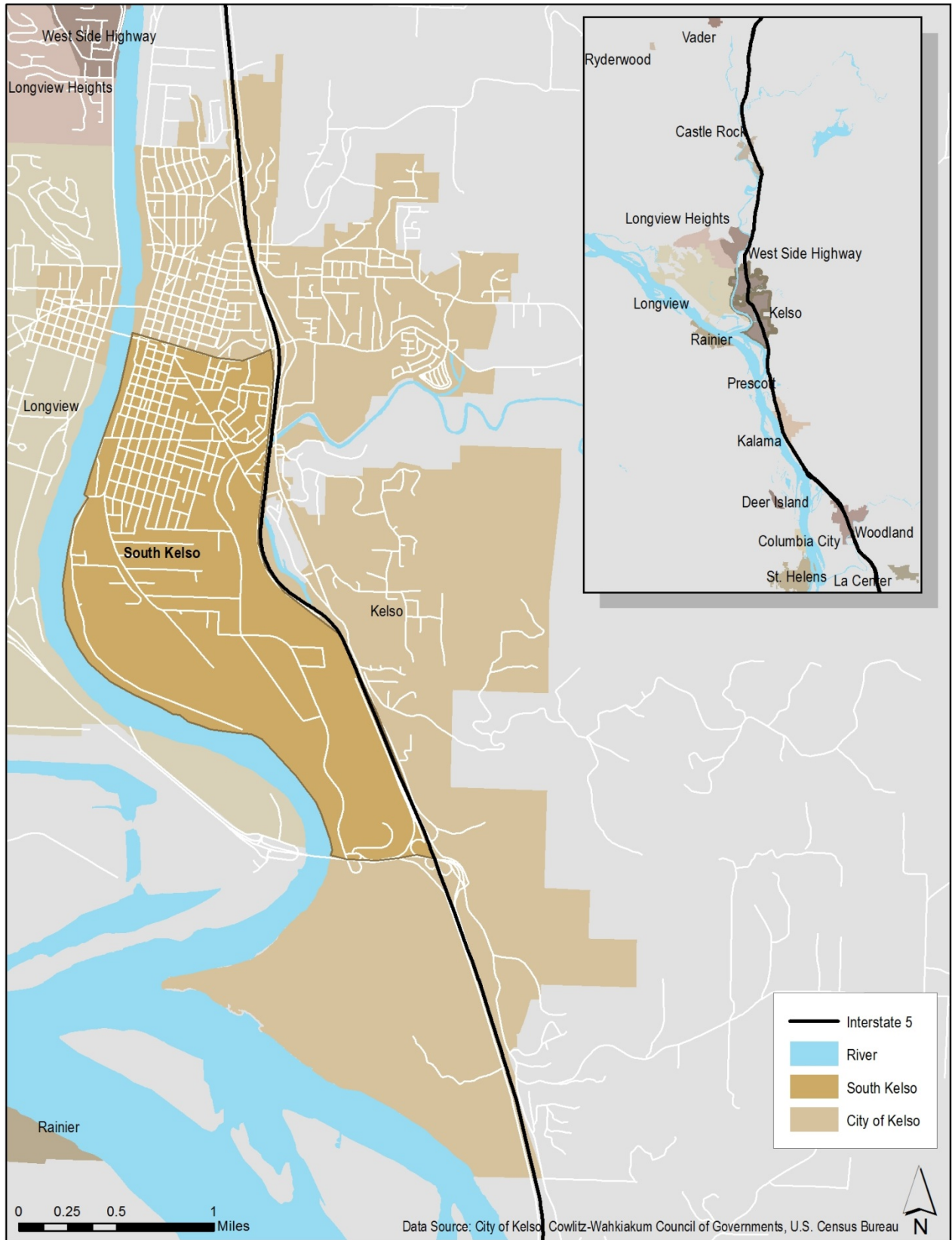
⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

Figure 1 South Kelso Context Map



Summary of Existing Planning Documents

As part of our due diligence and to better understand what past efforts have been suggested and attempted in the South Kelso Neighborhood, we reviewed a number of existing planning documents that have been generated over the past 30 years by the City of Kelso, the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, and Cowlitz County.

For ease of reference, the summary of this document review has been organized into five themes: Housing, Economic Development, Mobility, Education and Social Services, and Recreation.

Housing

The 1980 Kelso Comprehensive Plan recognizes that there is a need to provide “a decent home and suitable living environment for all citizens of the community” and that this must be accomplished through the provision of “a variety of dwelling types, densities, and costs in all areas of the city.” In particular, the Plan calls for multi-family development to be located “near commercial areas, recreation facilities, schools, employment centers, and transit routes.” The geographic location of the South Kelso Neighborhood meets many of those identified metrics, however the community would benefit from additional employment centers located nearby.

The Comprehensive Plan also identifies the South Kelso Neighborhood as one that would benefit from greater availability of multi-family housing and medium density development in the form of single-family, duplex, or triplex units. In the years since the Plan was adopted, the South Kelso Neighborhood has seen a limited shift to these housing types and a slight increase in neighborhood density, particularly along South Pacific Avenue. However, the majority of the South Kelso Neighborhood remains single-family.

One option for achieving the housing density levels called for in the Comprehensive Plan would be through the amendment of the City’s zoning code to allow for increased building height and mixed-use buildings, especially along South Pacific Avenue, as recommended in the 2007 City of Kelso Downtown Revitalization Plan. A survey of downtown business owners showed general support for amending the zoning code to allow buildings with commercial on the ground floor and residential units above as a way of increasing residential density downtown. Allowing mixed-use development would result in new types of housing being available in South Kelso, attracting downtown residents to support South Kelso businesses.

The provision of affordable housing should be included in any revitalization effort in South Kelso. The Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan (2009-2013) identifies a number of strategies to ensure that the housing stock of South Kelso continues to meet the needs of its residents. These strategies include: retaining, preserving, and improving the condition of decent and affordable housing for low- to moderate-income households; encouraging the acquisition of affordable rental housing to expand housing choices for low- to moderate-income households; assisting low-income and special needs renters who bear extreme housing cost burdens; and promoting diverse, thriving downtowns by supporting efforts to improve and expand housing within the central business district.

Economic Development

The Kelso community is struggling to transition out of its past economy based in resource extraction (fishing/logging) and into a service-based economy.

The 1980 Kelso Comprehensive Plan calls for a “diversified, well balanced economy to insure stable, sustained economic growth” by encouraging the siting of firms that will “diversify the local employment base, create employment and business opportunities, and reduce area dependence upon natural resource processing and seasonal activities.”

To achieve this, the Plan recommends that higher employment industries be given priority over low employment uses such as warehouses and storage facilities and that commercial development along South Pacific Avenue be encouraged to further connect with and blend into the surrounding neighborhood.

The City of Kelso Downtown Revitalization Plan (2007) advocates for the City to focus efforts on the existing commercial corridor along South Pacific Avenue. The Plan references a survey through which downtown business owners indicated that they believe the City could do more to support downtown businesses. Business owners indicated that they believe more could be done to make the downtown seem vibrant and attractive, including the programming of more community activities, the rehabilitation of storefronts, and the recruitment of new businesses to the downtown area.

Mobility

The Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments Great Streets Concept for Longview and Kelso (2012) identifies the two biggest challenges to mobility in the South Kelso Neighborhood as 1) a discontinuous pedestrian system that discourages walking and 2) many arterial streets that cut through the neighborhood, negatively impacting the overall connectivity of the neighborhood and opportunities for neighborhood place-making.

South Kelso's existing infrastructure shows considerable potential for the region to be a highly walkable neighborhood in terms of the average resident's proximity to schools, businesses, and employment centers. However, the current road system is unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists, forcing the majority of trips to be made by private automobile. The Great Streets Concept suggests that bicycle and pedestrian access should be a high priority in future local comprehensive plans. This could include "encouraging local jurisdictions to develop ordinances, which require the provision of safe, adequate, and convenient access for pedestrians and bicycles in new development."

In addressing concerns over school children walking to and from school, the Great Streets Concept encourages local jurisdictions and school districts to cooperatively seek funds through the Washington State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT's) Safe Routes to School Program. It also encourages the provision of sidewalks and bicycle lanes on arterials and school routes. Increasing South Kelso's 'walkability' would encourage residents to frequent businesses in the core of the community, particularly those along South Pacific Avenue, as they would be more accessible than those necessitating a vehicle. The Great Streets Concept plan identifies a number of steps for improving the pedestrian environment in South Kelso, including the completion of the sidewalk network, the addition of high visibility pedestrian crosswalks, and activated traffic signals.

The Cowlitz Transit Authority Transit Enhancement Plan (2010) provides a comprehensive review of Cowlitz Transit Authority's (CTA) public transit services in the Kelso-Longview area. In 2008, the voters approved an increased sales tax to fund improved public transit services. The Enhancement Plan provides recommendations to improve Community Urban Bus Service (CUBS) based on an assessment of existing conditions and a public outreach process to identify needs and opportunities. The report recommends simplifying the two bi-directional loops through South Kelso to one streamlined route to improve legibility of the system.

During the development of the Transit Enhancement Plan, a passenger survey was administered to CUBS riders. The survey findings present some interesting statistics and generally indicate that CUBS passengers are highly transit dependent, including:

- 62% ride CUBS 5 days per week
- 15% would not have made the trip without CUBS
- 59% earn under \$10,000 per year
- Most CUBS riders are students, unemployed, or retired

Education and Social Services

The 2009 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Cowlitz-Lewis Economic Development District (CLEDD) identifies a number of strategies designed to develop a regional workforce. These include: support for K-12 programs that strengthen the future employability of the community; encouraging schools, training centers, skills centers, and employers to offer workforce development opportunities, re-training, internships, and apprenticeships; encouraging adult education at high schools, community-based organizations, and community colleges; and encouraging or expanding opportunities and networks in education, languages, job training, and search services to assist immigrants and minority groups in the region.

The Strategy also recommends that local governments consider offering programs for the elderly, youth, those in poverty, those requiring mental health and substance abuse services, and to support and encourage cultural amenities.

Recreation

The 1980 Kelso Comprehensive Plan recognizes the need for parks and open spaces to allow for recreational opportunities. To realize this goal, the Plan suggests that improvements should be made to the recreational facilities at local school playgrounds, so that the schools may also serve as neighborhood parks.

The strategy identified the South Kelso Neighborhood as an area where the City should develop neighborhood parks that incorporate play facilities for area children. The Plan also notes that neighborhood parks should “be located so as to provide easy and safe access by area residents who may reach them by foot or bicycle.”

To address the maintenance needs of both existing and future neighborhood parks, the Plan suggests that the Park Board institute a neighborhood park maintenance program, utilizing local residents on a volunteer basis.

Finally, the Comprehensive Plan also recommends a continuation of the arrangement between the City of Kelso and the Kelso School District that allows for Kelso schools to be used as indoor facilities for group and individual recreation activities, and arts and crafts programs.

Conclusion

Review of these past plans has served as an affirmation that the issues and challenges that have been vocalized by the community are the same as those that have been identified in past studies. These plans have also highlighted the success or challenges demonstrated by past efforts, informing the future recommendations by the planning team.

Key Demographics and Trends

In addition to qualitative and anecdotal evidence, it is important to identify and measure quantitative community statistics in order to understand current existing conditions of the community, particularly with consideration to change over time. CPA reviewed key demographic statistics that are recognized as indicators for community economic, social, and environmental sustainability. These data can also be used to provide a baseline to measure future improvement based on team recommendations.

Population

The South Kelso Neighborhood has seen only a 1.6% increase in total population from 2000 to 2010. This figure is greater than growth numbers reported by the City of Kelso as a whole, but smaller than those of Cowlitz County or State of Washington (Figure 2).

Three significant population trends will impact the provision of services: 1) the number of working age adults (age 18 to 64 years) living in South Kelso has increased 7.6% in the past decade, a larger rate than was reported by the entire city. This suggests a growing workforce in South Kelso would benefit from job creation and workforce services within that area. 2) South Kelso and the city as a whole experienced a decrease in population under 18 years of age (-6.5% and -6.8%, respectively). These figures conflict with statewide trends (Washington State, 4.5% increase) (Figure 2). These changing demographics will have an impact on the Kelso School District in the form of shrinking enrollment (Figure 4). 3) South Kelso experienced a 9.1% decrease in the number of elderly residents between 2000 and 2010, suggesting that there may be a decrease in the demand for city services and programs for the elderly.

Figure 2 Age, Percent Change, 2000-2010 Census and ACS

	% Change: South Kelso	% Change: City of Kelso	% Change: Cowlitz County	% Change: Washington State
Total Population	1.6%	0.3%	10.2%	14.1%
Under 18 years	-6.5%	-6.8%	-0.7%	4.5%
18-64 years	7.6%	4.8%	11.1%	16.1%
65 years and over	-9.1%	-5.3%	27.8%	25.0%

The South Kelso Neighborhood has undergone a transition in the racial make-up of the neighborhood between 2000 and 2010. White, African American, and Asian populations decreased 5.7%, 16.7%, and 47.5%, respectively, while the Hispanic and Latino populations grew by over 60% (

Figure 3). Kelso as a whole experienced a similar trend over these ten years. This shift in demographics suggests that there is a growing need for bilingual services and future development that serves the Hispanic community.

These demographic changes also have the potential to disrupt the cohesion of the South Kelso Neighborhood as longtime residents adjust to the new neighborhood demographics. City efforts to promote cultural awareness, tolerance, and diversity would increase community cohesion in this area.

Figure 3 Race and Ethnicity, Percent Change, 2000-2010 Census and ACS

	% Change: South Kelso	% Change: City of Kelso	% Change: Cowlitz County	% Change: Washington State
White	-5.7%	-6.8%	5.1%	4.8%
African American	-16.7%	-20.4%	18.7%	20.7%
Asian/Hawaiian/Native American/Other	-47.5%	-46.3%	-34.0%	-8.0%
Hispanic or Latino	61.0%	63.4%	88.5%	71.2%

Education

Between 2000 and 2010, the neighborhood of South Kelso and the City as a whole reported similar decreases in populations of individuals under 18 (Figure 2). However, this is not reflected in student enrollment numbers. Wallace Elementary School, which serves the South Kelso Neighborhood, has seen its enrollment increase by over 10% in the past decade even as total student enrollment in the Kelso School District has declined by 5% (Figure 4). This suggests that there is a higher percentage of elementary age students living in South Kelso as compared to the entire city and that the City and School District should focus programs and services for younger students in the South Kelso Neighborhood.

Wallace Elementary School has seen a 13% decrease in the number of students meeting or exceeding the 3rd grade public school reading proficiency standard (from 68.9% to 55.6%), compared to the Kelso School District as a whole, which has seen a 2% increase overall (Figure 4). Third grade reading proficiency is widely seen as an indicator of future success in school. These figures may infer that a particular effort should be made to support youths’ progress in Wallace School.

Kelso High School has seen an almost 10% increase in its 4 year graduation rate⁸ in the past decade to 87.3%, far exceeding Washington State overall (76.6%) (Figure 4). Additionally, the number of South Kelso residents who have attended some college or received an Associate’s degree increased almost 9% between 2000 and 2010 (Figure 5). Yet, both the City of Kelso and the neighborhood of South Kelso have seen a slight decrease in the number of residents who have earned a Bachelor degree, suggesting that economic development needs to accommodate Kelso’s average level of education (Figure 5).

Over 87% of students at Wallace elementary receive free or reduced-rate meals, an almost 6% increase since 2005 (Figure 4). Both Kelso at large and Washington State reported higher percent increases of students receiving free and reduced-rate lunches.

⁸ The Kelso School District’s system for calculating graduation rates has changed to comply with national standards, which has influenced these figures.

Figure 4 K-12 Statistics, Percent Change, 2005-2012 Washington State Board of Education

	% Change: South Kelso	% Change: City of Kelso	% Change: Washington State
Student Enrollment	10.9%	-5.0%	3.0%
3rd grade public school reading proficiency	-13.3%	2.0%	0.5%
4-year adjusted cohort high school graduation rate	--	9.8%	2.3%
Free or Reduced-Price Meals	5.9%	11.4%	8.8%

Figure 5 Higher Education Attainment, Percent Change, 2000-2010 Census and ACS

	% Change: South Kelso	% Change: City of Kelso	% Change: Cowlitz County	% Change: Washington State
Attended some college or received Associate’s degree (age 25 and over)	8.8%	5.8%	3.4%	-0.1%
Received Bachelor, Graduate or professional degree (age 25 and over)	-1.6%	-0.7%	1.3%	3.3%

Employment and Income

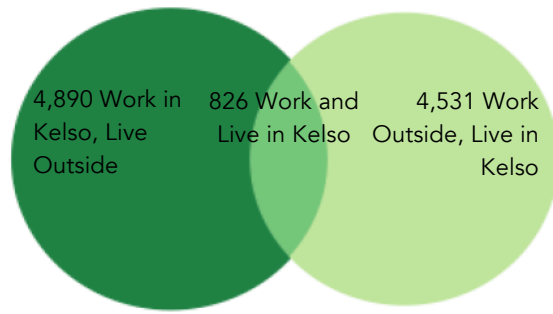
Kelso residents are primarily employed in retail (14.2%); health care and social assistance (14.0%); manufacturing (13.9%); accommodation and food services (8.1%); and educational services (7.9%) (Figure 6). Major employers in Kelso include the Kelso School District, Foster Farms, Safeway, Target, Columbia Analytical Services, Western Fabrication, PAPE Machinery, and DSU Peterbilt.

Figure 6 Top 5 Kelso Employment Sectors, 2010 U.S. Census

	Count	Percent Share
Retail Trade	759	14.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	752	14.0%
Manufacturing	743	13.9%
Accommodation and Food Services	436	8.1%
Educational Services	421	7.9%

To date, there has not been a good match between available jobs and the qualifications of South Kelso residents. Figure 7 shows that the vast majority of Kelso residents don’t work in Kelso despite the fact that there are jobs present that attract workers from across the region. Only 826 Kelso residents work in Kelso.

Figure 7 Inflow and Outflow of Employment in Kelso, 2010 U.S. Census



Just over one-quarter of Kelso residents, 27.1%, work in Longview (Figure 8). Only 15.4% of Kelso residents also work in Kelso. Small percentages commute to Vancouver (4.6%), Portland (3.6%), Seattle (2.9%), Tacoma (1.8%), Woodland (1.5%), and Olympia (1.0%).

Figure 8 Work Locations of Kelso Residents, 2010 U.S. Census

City	Count	Share
Longview, WA	1,454	27.1%
Kelso, WA	826	15.4%
Vancouver, WA	246	4.6%
Portland, OR	194	3.6%
Seattle, WA	157	2.9%
Tacoma, WA	98	1.8%
Woodland, WA	79	1.5%
Olympia, WA	52	1.0%
Yakima, WA	44	0.8%
Hazel Dell, WA	40	0.7%
All Other Locations	2,167	40.5%
Total	5,357	100.0%

Unemployment trends in South Kelso and Kelso at large (Figure 9) likely relate to concurrent decreases in Bachelor, Graduate or professional degree attainment (Figure 5). Between 2000 and 2010, the unemployment rate in South Kelso increased 2.1% to reach 9.8%, while the rate in the city as a whole increased at a similar rate to 8.6% in 2010.

Figure 9 Employment, Percent Change, 2000-2010 Census and ACS

	% Change: South Kelso	% Change: City of Kelso	% Change: Cowlitz County	% Change: Washington State
Residents employed 50 to 52 weeks	6.2%	6.9%	7.1%	8.5%
Residents unemployed	2.1%	1.9%	1.9%	0.8%
Residents not in labor force	3.0%	-0.4%	1.8%	0.3%

An additional concurrent trend to the increase in unemployment has been a decrease in median household income, especially in the South Kelso Neighborhood. While the Great Recession resulted in across the board decreases in median household income as evidenced by Washington State overall experiencing a 4.5% decrease, this rate almost tripled in the South Kelso Neighborhood which saw a 14.4% decrease (Figure 10). In 2010, the median household income in South Kelso was \$33,143, compared to \$38,711 in 2000 (2010 dollars).

Though South Kelso saw a rise in unemployment and decrease in median household income, it experienced an 11% decrease in the number of residents living below the poverty line. This could be explained by a combination of higher wage earners leaving the neighborhood (resulting in a lower median household income) and an increase in wages at the bottom of the spectrum. These figures are notable when compared to conflicting trends in City of Kelso, Cowlitz County, and Washington State (Table 6).

According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology Housing and Transportation Affordability index, 100% of residents in the South Kelso Neighborhood spend more than 15% of their income on transportation costs. Moreover, 70% of South Kelso residents spend 45% or more on housing and transportation costs combined.⁹ These thresholds, combined with decreased median household income, indicate that many South Kelso residents are struggling to make ends meet.

Figure 10 Income and Poverty, Percent Change, 2000-2010 Census and ACS

	% Change: South Kelso	% Change: City of Kelso	% Change: Cowlitz County	% Change: Washington State
Median Household Income (2010\$)	-14.4%	-7.4%	-9.7%	-4.5%
Below Poverty Level	-11.2%	18.0%	32.8%	27.4%

Housing

Vacant housing in the South Kelso Neighborhood decreased at a slower rate compared to the city as a whole between 2000 and 2010, and remains at a higher rate to date. Just under 10% of the housing stock in South Kelso is vacant, down 14.5% since 2000, compared to a 21.1% decrease in the city all together (Figure 11).

South Kelso has experienced a shift away from homeownership and toward a rental market, as evidenced by the data presented in Figure 11. Renter occupied housing units increased 7.1% in South Kelso between 2000 and

⁹ H&T Affordability Index, from Center for Neighborhood Technology, accessed <<http://www.htaindex.org/map/>>

2010, compared to only 2.0% for the city as a whole. This type of trend may negatively affect neighborhood cohesion and the community’s sense of ownership. Traditionally, renters are more mobile, resulting in less social and financial investment in their neighborhood and less interest in engaging in neighborhood improvement efforts. Absentee landlords may also lead to disinvestment and lack of upkeep. The City could consider specifically targeting the renters living in South Kelso through programs that draw them into revitalization efforts.

Figure 11 Housing, Percent Change, 2000-2010 Census and ACS

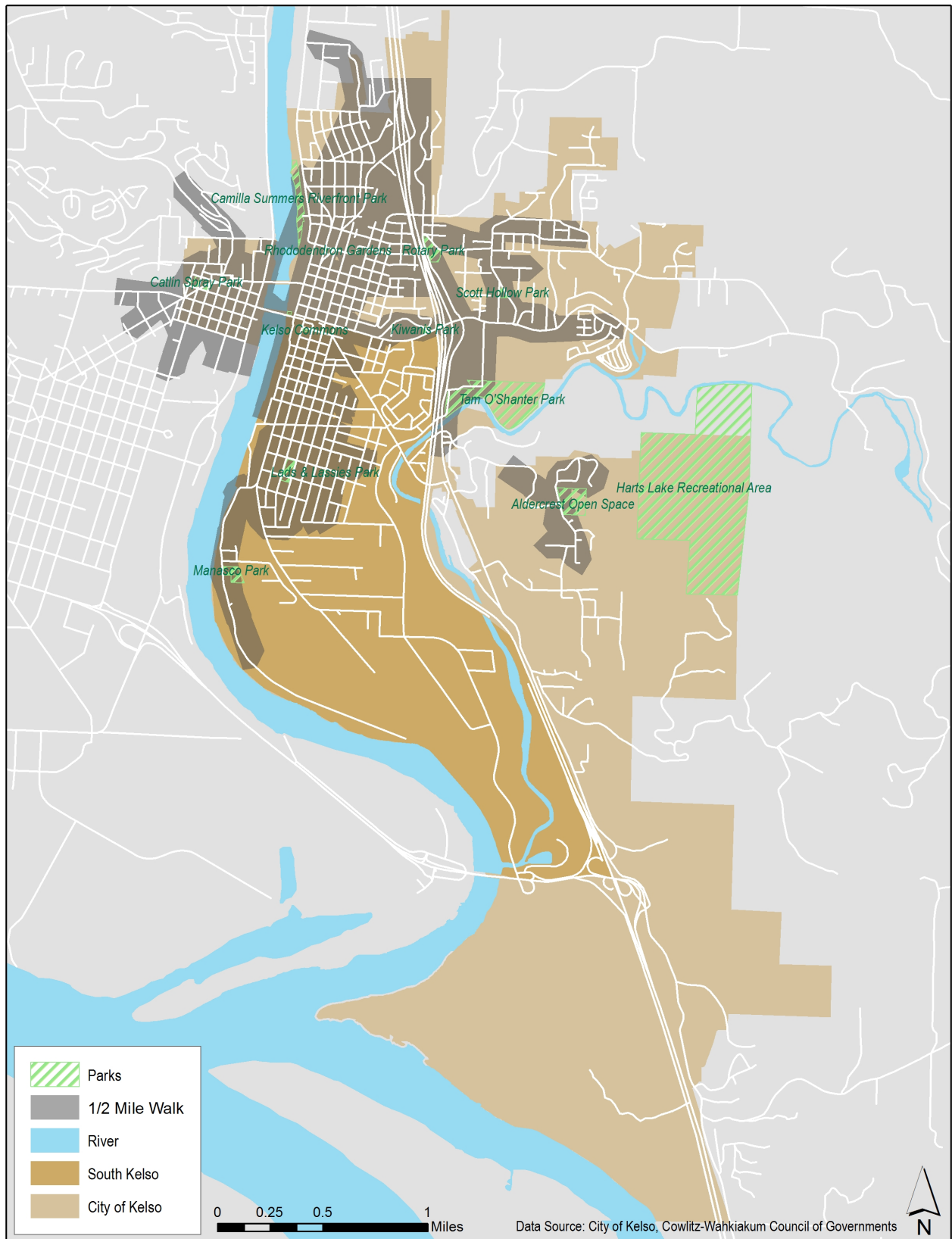
	Percent (2010) South Kelso	% Change South Kelso	Percent (2010) City of Kelso	% Change City of Kelso
Vacant Housing Units	9.6%	-14.5%	7.1%	-21.1%
Renter Occupied Housing Units	48.0%	7.1%	45.1%	2.0%

Community Park Access

Most Kelso residents are within a half mile walk of a community park (Figure 12). Yet, South Kelso residents have lesser access to parks than other neighborhoods in Kelso. The bulk of the southern half of South Kelso and the Three Rivers Mall and surrounding area has no access to parks. While this area is largely comprised of employment uses, some residences are located within this area.

Additionally, the quality and safety of the parks that are accessible may not be adequate for the facilities to act as recreational and social assets in the community. The Lads and Lassies Park and Manasco Park, located in South Kelso, are both small in size and may not feature the right mix of recreational amenities that interest area residents. Crime and drug use also discourage the functioning of these public spaces as community assets.

Figure 12 Community Park Access in Kelso, WA



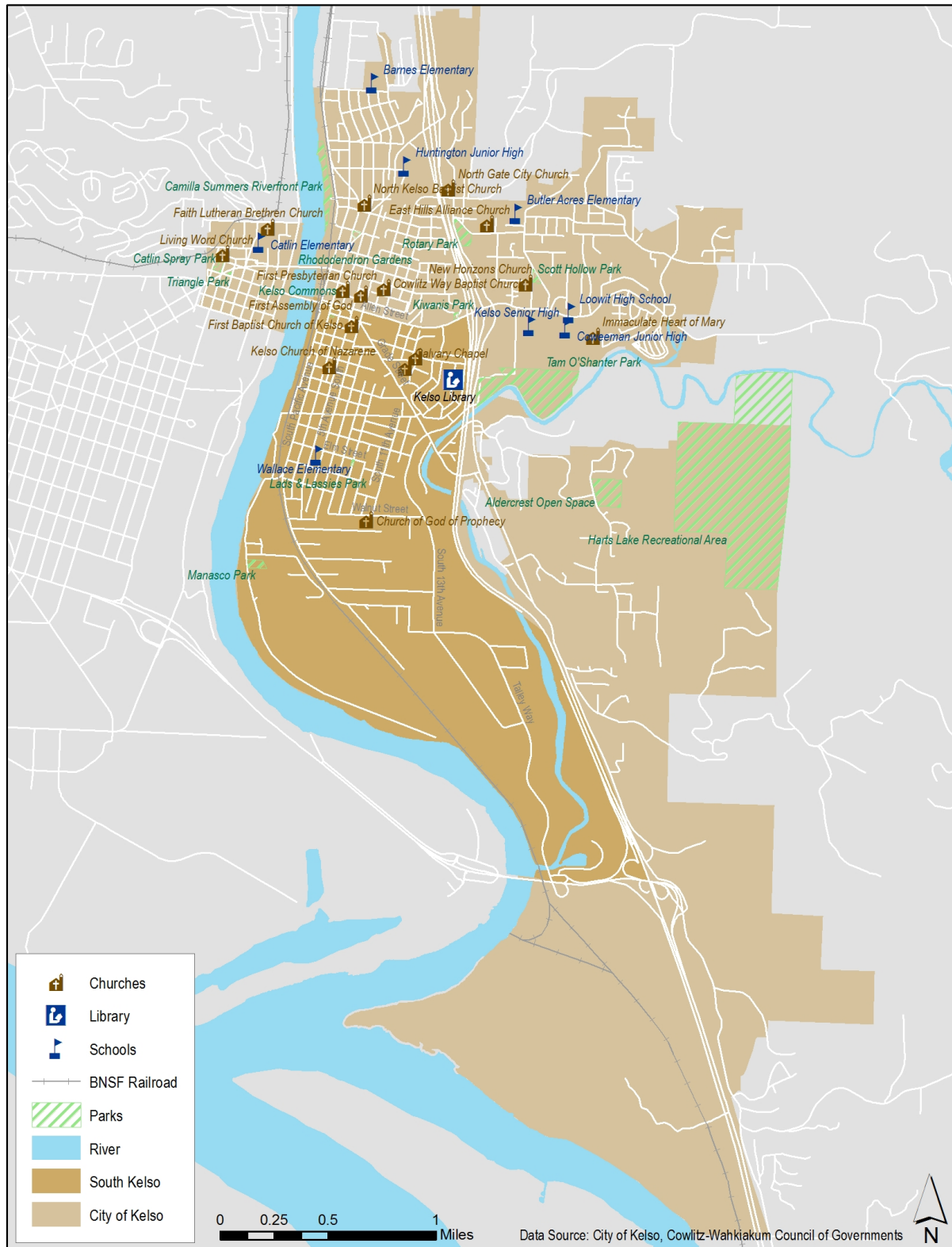
Community Venues

Figure 13 designates churches, libraries, and schools within the City of Kelso. The map reveals a dearth of these designated community venues in South Kelso, especially in proportion to other parts of the city.

Although there is a lack of service centers, two venues that are essential to community cohesion are located within South Kelso: Wallace Elementary School and the Public Library. Throughout this report, Wallace Elementary is highlighted as a point of community pride, and the single element of 'community' in South Kelso. Although it can be argued that the Library isn't in the South Kelso Neighborhood, many residents recognize this institution as being within their district and it still plays a vital role in an area where there are few community venues.

Physical space, such as community venues, generates security, comfort and connection for individuals, and allows residents to interact with and build community with other residents of their neighborhood. In these spaces information takes the form of stories, ideas, concerns, and challenges - all shared through conversations, activities, programs, and mentoring.

Figure 13 Community Venues in Kelso, WA



Healthy Food Access

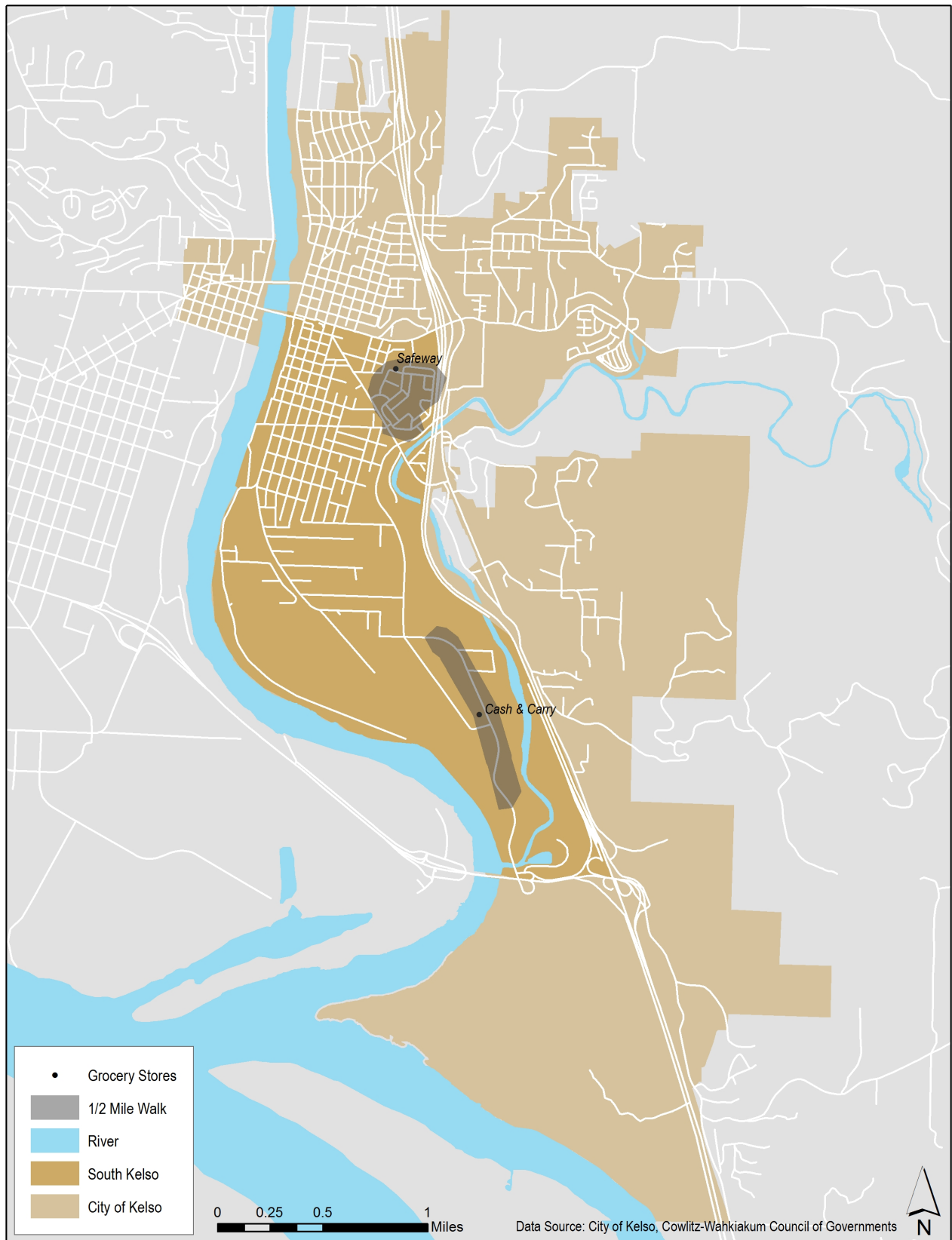
Decisions about food spending and diet are to a great extent impacted by accessibility and affordability of food stores, including the time required to reach a store that sells healthy food compared to ease of access of unhealthy foods.

Only two full service grocery stores that offer healthy foods are located within the South Kelso Neighborhood (Figure 14). Only very small portions of the neighborhood are within a half mile walking distance of these two sources of healthy foods.

The United States Department of Agriculture defines a food desert as areas “vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas.”¹⁰ The South Kelso Neighborhood qualifies as a food desert based on this definition.

¹⁰ American Nutrition Association. *USDA Defines Food Deserts*. Nutrition Digest Volume 36 No. 3

Figure 14 Healthy Food Access in Kelso, WA



Transportation Access

South Kelso is well served by transit options, including CUBS¹¹ routes 20 and 21 (Figure 17). Routes 20 and 21 are two bi-directional loops through Kelso, providing South Kelso residents with access to Three Rivers Mall, Safeway, West Kelso, and Longview. These two routes operate on a 60 minute schedule from 7AM – 7PM on weekdays and 8AM – 6PM on Saturdays. There is no CUBS service on Sundays.

Route 21 experienced a larger ridership growth than Route 20 between 2008 and 2012, at 10.2% compared to a decrease of 3.5% (Figure 15). Yet, Route 21 carries more riders overall, at 92,632 riders in 2012 compared to 54,108 riders for Route 21.

The current route configuration and schedule does not provide service to employment locations in the southern end of South Kelso; however the agency is in the process of implementing the recommendations outlined in the 2010 Transit Enhancement Plan to provide some service to these areas.

Figure 15 Annual CUBS Ridership, Routes 20, 21 and All Routes, 2008 and 2012, River Cities Transit

	City of Kelso		
	2008	2012	% Change
Route 20	95,970	92,632	-3.5%
Route 21	49,090	54,108	10.2%
All Routes	361,256	381,018	5.5%

South Kelso residents also have access to two multi-use paths: one located along the Cowlitz River and one along the Coweeman River (Figure 17). These facilities can provide recreational as well as transportation options to South Kelso residents.

The South Kelso Neighborhood is generally characterized by a compact street grid, which allows for easy access to destinations by walking or bicycling. Walk Score, an online website, supplies scores to describe how walkable a specific location is. A Walk Score is a number between 0 and 100 that measures the walkability of any location. According to Walk Score, South Kelso’s Walk Score varies greatly, from 20 to 94. A score of 20 indicates a very car-dependent environment while a score of 94 suggests a walker’s paradise.

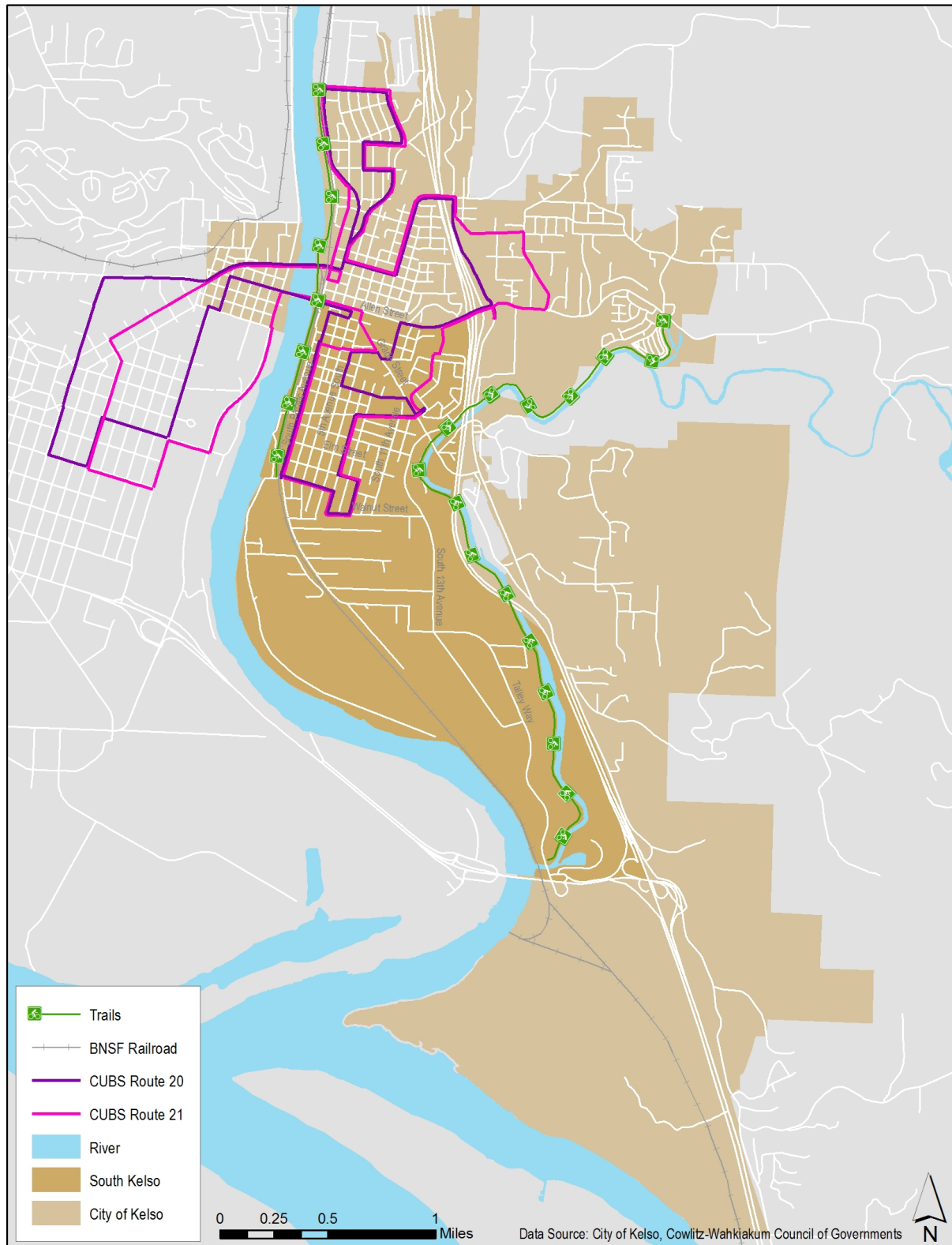
Some reasons for this large discrepancy include that the majority of South Kelso is laid out on a 19th century grid, which promotes small, connected blocks and high walkability. The intersection density of this grid is very high and promotes walking. However, this neighborhood has also experienced several decades of disinvestment, leading to crumbling or non-existent sidewalks. The southern portion of the neighborhood takes on a winding, disconnected street pattern promoting car use, larger plots of land, and less walking.

¹¹ Community Urban Bus Service has been recently renamed to River Cities Transit

Figure 16 Walk Score Categories and Descriptions

Score Range	Description
90 – 100 (Very Good)	A Walker's Paradise. Daily errands do not require a car.
70 – 89 (Good)	Very walkable with most errands accomplished on foot.
50 – 69 (Neutral)	Somewhat walkable with some amenities within walking distance.
25 – 49 (Poor)	Car-dependent with only a few amenities within walking distance.
0 – 24 (Very Poor)	Car-dependent with almost all errands requiring a car.

Figure 17 Transportation Facilities in Kelso, WA



Environmental Toxics

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) manages a dataset to track the release of toxic chemicals from facilities, known as the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI). The TRI inventory provides information to:

- Identify potential environmental concerns and gain a better understanding of potential risks;
- Identify priorities and opportunities to work with industry, government and communities to reduce toxic chemical releases and potential risks associated with them;
- Provide community members with information and insights regarding toxic chemical releases and waste management practices in the community;
- Make informed decisions on the consequences of such practices and take action; and
- Establish reduction targets and measure progress toward those targets (Agency, 2012)

The TRI does not reveal whether or to what degree the public is exposed to listed chemicals. It can be used as a starting point in evaluating exposures and resulting risks.

There are four TRI sites in South Kelso. (Figure 18). Those facilities are: Weyerhaeuser NR CO – Longview, Foster Poultry Farms Kelso Plant, Pacific Coating & Laminating, and Stowe Woodward.

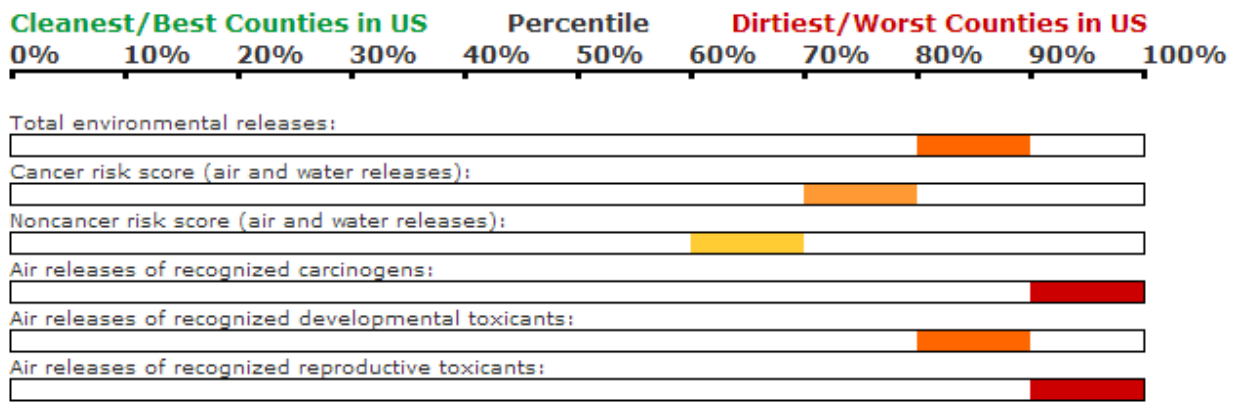
Figure 18 Map of Toxic Release Inventory Sites in Kelso-Longview, WA



Source: Environmental Protection Agency

The chemical releases documented in the TRI place Cowlitz County in the 90th percentile for the release of recognized carcinogens and reproductive toxicants. Cowlitz County is in the 80th percentile for total environmental chemical release and developmental toxicants (Figure 19).

Figure 19 2002 Rankings: Major Chemical Releases or Waste Generation in Cowlitz County



Source: www.scorecard.goodguide.com

Social Support Revitalization Efforts

The data above reveal a neighborhood struggling to meet the most basic characteristics of a stable community, including housing, education and jobs. South Kelso is going on several generations of disinvestment, extensive social support and households unable to break out of the cycles of poverty.

With this said, the community has not stood idly by in the face of these struggles. State and local efforts have reached out to the community to provide alleviation and support addressing many of the challenges listed in the previous section.

For example, the Lower Columbia Community Action Program (CAP) has been very active throughout Kelso for over several decades. An outcome of the Lyndon Administration's *War On Poverty* initiative, CAP has been present in Washington State since 1964.

CAP centers its work on the philosophy that community action must stem from a collective belief, identity and effort to improve one's neighborhood. Since its inception CAP has seen their several of their initial programs mature into fully-operational organizations, including two retail-based organizations that provide training for individuals and services to the community. The Grounds for Opportunity (GFO) Cafe is a full service cafe that also provides a 16-week certificate course for future employment in the restaurant industry.

The location also acts as the main kitchen for CAP's Meals on Wheels and Senior Community Lunch programs. The second operation, CAPtured Treasures, sells gently-used or new clothing, many high-end brands, at discounted prices. The store also serves as a training site for individuals interested in future retail careers.

In addition to CAPs work, the Emergency Support Shelter, Head Start, the Saturday Farmer's Market and the Ethnic Support Council have been providing services to the community for an extended period of time. Since 1989 the Ethnic Support Council has worked on meeting the needs of a constantly diversifying community of immigrants, refugees and those with limited English capabilities within Kelso, and heavily-consolidated in South Kelso. The Council provides on- and off-site interpreters and translators to assist with translation of basic day-to-day activities or more formal meetings and appointments. In addition, the Council provides cultural awareness and geography workshops for individuals or organizations looking to increase their understanding of diverse communities. The Council assists members of the Latino, Vietnamese, Russian and Cambodian communities in finding Kelso a welcoming place to call home.

The Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington has a branch office in South Kelso. The agency assists individuals who have health, access and mobility challenges due to aging or limited physical capabilities, as well as to those professionals who provide care to these individuals. The Agency provides Information and Assistance, Family Caregiver support, fitness and wellness and Education-based programs. Although CPA has not found any official community plans in their initial research of the organization, the ASK! campaign presents an opportunity to have a dialogue with this service provider on developing a South Kelso-specific plan to address the aging and immobile populations located in the neighborhood.

To directly address housing issues facing the community, the City of Kelso began the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) in 2009/2010 with the hope of using a variety of funding sources to acquire and redevelop structures or sites, in order to facilitate housing investment, neighborhood pride and increased benefit from developed land. NSP acquired four properties and helped with the purchase of a fifth property located in Longview. Since then NSP has deeded two of the properties to CAP, one to Habitat and the final project will also be deeded to CAP. The house in Longview currently serves as Veteran's housing.

Two of the Kelso properties were repair and remodel projects that turned into single family housing, while the Habitat for Humanity property was new construction. The most current project involves the remediation of an old salvage yard that had been a neighborhood eyesore for several years and will eventually be a structure deeded to CAP. However, even though these successes are a great accomplishment, all of the projects to-date have been located in North Kelso and Longview, none have occurred in South Kelso.

At a much broader level there are plenty of opportunities to partner with the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Government to work across their three broad mission areas with impacts for South Kelso-focused revitalization efforts - Community Mobilization, Economic Development and Affordable Housing and Homeless Assistance. Much of the Council's work and plans have been mentioned throughout this report. Continuing partnerships between the Council, the City and the neighborhood through the existing frameworks could serve as conduits for focusing on crime, neighborhood engagement, health and wellness, job and business development and housing-related research and programs in South Kelso. There are a variety of existing plans across these categories, but more research and a deeper conversation between the City of Kelso and the CWCOG directly examining South Kelo's role in these facets of community could result in strong, well-coordinated plans that can benefit the community and the region as a whole.

Community Outreach Findings

Confluence Planning Associates hosted two Coffee Talks at the Public Library to gather community input through casual discussion. These Coffee Talks were held for the duration of the library's public hours and offered free refreshments. Members of the CPA planning team listened to resident concerns, stories, and ideas for neighborhood revitalization in casual and unstructured interviews.

The comments that were received are focused around three broad topic areas: community assets, problems, and solutions. Community members offered many insightful and important comments pertaining to all three themes, but the general sentiment is that South Kelso is "hurting" or "depressed" and that the neighborhood is "not what it used to be." The following outlines the major themes that were heard throughout these events.

Community Assets

The community conversations revealed that residents are generally very happy with the school district and see Wallace Elementary as the focal point of the community. Several people commented on appreciating the quiet neighborhood and the "old charm" of houses. Much of the housing stock is historic, and 'with some work could be quite nice'.

People appreciate that they can walk to most of their destinations and like the bus and the bus routes. Tam O'Shanter Park was recognized as a community asset, as was the proximity to I-5.

Although safety was mentioned as a concern, some people said that their children play outside and it is safe. It was mentioned that the general safety of the neighborhood "depends on where you go." The police play a positive role in neighborhood safety; people noted that they "don't mess around."

The friendly small town charm and sense of community were noted. People like the mixed cultures and the local history. The community is proud of their children. They like the mall, the golf course, the museum, and the Old Kelso Theatre. Fishing on the Cowlitz, proximity to three rivers, and the open space were all noted.

Community Problems

Many of the problems mentioned were in regards to infrastructure. A general lack of walking facilities, such as crosswalks and sidewalks, were mentioned numerous times, as was poor street conditions. People feel that the lack of investment in their streets and sidewalks breeds a lack of investment in yards and houses. Sidewalks are viewed not just as walking infrastructure but as providing definition between the yard and the street, which help people to keep up yard appearance.

People would like to have more parks, and would like to see increased safety in the ones that exist. They also noted that the areas near bridges are unsafe, and there were questions about why two bridges were needed in the first place. The community noted vacant land and litter among general neighborhood appearance problems.

Economic development was a common theme. Some people noted that the mall 'killed downtown Kelso'. There were many comments pertaining to empty storefronts and lack of business in downtown. People spoke of the farmers market being prohibitively expensive for small entrepreneurs. There were general concerns about the lack of jobs and the long commutes that many people make to find living wages.

People are unhappy about the traffic re-route plan in West Kelso. It was noted that even though money has already been spent on this project, it would better to abandon the project regardless of loss investment incurred. This project signals to the community that the City has not prioritized South Kelso for reinvestment dollars.

There is concern that there are not enough activities for children and teens. It was mentioned that there used to be more for kids to do, with facilities such as skate world and the bowling alley. Youth have 'no place to hang out'.

One person said that nuisance abatement is negative and heavy-handed. However, it was mentioned several times that there is no longer an abatement officer and so the neighborhood appearance is going downhill. People said that when general neighborhood appearance is not enforced, it creates a general downhill spiral, which contributes to the neighborhood blight (known as the broken-window theory).

Complaints about the City were often in regards to the permitting process and believe that the City is not "business friendly." The community voiced concern about the process for the approval of large, publicly funded projects; people feel as though that the City is not open and responsive to their concerns.

Abandoned buildings and absentee landlords were mentioned as contributing to the general poor condition of the neighborhood. Some people were concerned that social services offered in the neighborhood act as a magnet for a needy population.

People commented on the lack of community cohesion, that neighbors don't know each other, races are separated, and the social capital that used to exist has been eroded. People feel that there is limited infrastructure for positive activity. Methamphetamine and crime were mentioned as safety concerns. Gang activity is also a safety concern, and it was noted that gangs hang out at Wallace Elementary after hours.

Community Solutions

After detailing the problems, Coffee Talk participants offered constructive solutions. In the community development realm, people suggested a homeowner or neighborhood association and a vintage home renovation group. Street fairs and block parties were also suggested. Several people said that they think there should be a community center with craft and gardening opportunities, a teen center, and a place for life skills education. A community or school garden was a recurring theme. A historical mural program was mentioned for beautification value.

Some people lamented that there is no Parks and Recreation Department in the City, and said that the City leans on Kelso High School too much. Free events and activities for all ages are wanted. An indoor skate/BMX park is desired, as well as a family fun center with an outdoor pool for summer activities.

There were suggestions to promote the high quality fishing that the area has to offer as well as improve access to the river. People would like to see parks along the river, and more landscaping for neighborhood beautification. A bike share program was also suggested.

It was noted on several occasions that a volunteer network could be tapped to keep up neighborhood appearance. Community clean up and painting days were suggested. Block parties were mentioned in this context, as well as a structure for "block champions." It was suggested that the Granges be included in neighborhood volunteerism as well as groups such as the boy scouts.

The train depot was suggested as an economic development tool. It was noted that this could be a regional park and ride hub for taking public transit to Seattle and Portland. People would like to see more tech industry, historic preservation, and a focus on the airport as an economic development tool.

It was suggested that the source of empty lots and abandoned houses be addressed. Tax penalties or other financing mechanisms to discourage vacant lots and rundown housing (presumably by absentee landlords) were

suggested. Other people suggested the focus to be on incentivizing good behavior as opposed to disincentivizing the problematic.

People mentioned the Work Source and their GED program. The Community Action Program (CAP) and an increase in City-nonprofit partnerships were suggested. One resident suggested an urban renewal area.

Stakeholder Interview Findings

Defining Our Stakeholders:

Confluence Planning Associates defines stakeholders as a person who—as a result of their affiliation with a particular organization or effort—may provide a unique perspective germane to their particular community experience. Stakeholders are typically 1) organized around a theme, 2) represent a body of individuals, and 3) are vested in the future health of the South Kelso community. These individuals typically represent a city department, not-for-profit organization, church, business, school, or other organization.

Purpose of Stakeholder Outreach:

It is the goal of Confluence Planning Associates (CPA), in partnership with the City of Kelso, to understand and respond to the South Kelso Neighborhood's needs and expectations. We believe that successful stakeholder engagement requires a commitment to actively engage with stakeholders to listen, build relationships, and respond to their concerns. Engagement is not an end in itself, but a means to help build better relationships with the community of South Kelso, ultimately resulting in improved lives for South Kelso Neighborhood residents and the City of Kelso as a whole.

Stakeholder engagement is CPA's attempt to initiate open, two-way dialogue seeking understanding and solutions to issues within the South Kelso Neighborhood. It involves discovery of issues within the South Kelso Neighborhood with the potential for the implementation of ideas that benefit both stakeholders, the community, and the City of Kelso. Engagement is used as a means for the City of Kelso to seriously consider the views and involvement of South Kelso residents. These residents provide significant feedback regarding opportunities to align citywide goals and objectives with the societal needs and expectations of residents and will help drive long-term sustainable solutions.

Current Stakeholder Outreach:

In February of 2013 planners from Confluence Planning Associates (CPA) began an intensive stakeholder outreach program. To date, CPA has interviewed more than 18 individuals including city officials, community leaders, church pastors, and local business owners. CPA planning staff felt it was vital to interview all stakeholders in person rather than over the phone. Using a personal, small-town approach allowed for CPA to have rich interactions with community stakeholders and create lasting relationships. Most importantly, by utilizing face-to-face interviews with community stakeholders, we have positioned our clients to maintain productive relationships with influential stakeholders long after CPA's direct engagement has ended. Stakeholder engagement is critical to the success of the South Kelso Revitalization Strategy. By engaging the right people in the appropriate manner we can improve the long-term success of this project.

As part of our outreach program, CPA has presented to four separate commission or councils within Kelso. Those are: The Kelso City Council (including the department heads), the Kelso School District (the largest employer in Kelso), the Kelso Planning Commission, and the Kelso Downtown Revitalization Association (KDRA). Through these four presentations we have informed and gathered feedback from 32 community stakeholders to date. These presentations were used to inform and to gather feedback from city leaders.

Common Problems/Themes from Stakeholder Outreach

The below is a summary of opinions and perceptions expressed in stakeholder interviews.

Lack of education/high dropout rates – The City of Kelso has one of the highest high school dropout rates in the State of Washington. CPA outreach staff consistently heard from stakeholders that there is a lack of education in South Kelso. Generally speaking this feedback was related to academic education, vocational training, and basic life skills for parents of South Kelso. The lack of education and life skills has carried forward from previous generations with children repeating the patterns of their parents (i.e. dropping out of school).

Drug use, crime, and safety – Each stakeholder interview (this does not include the presentations to commission/councils) revealed serious concerns over drug use and crime in South Kelso. High rates of these activities leave many stakeholders -including business owners and local residents- feeling unsafe in the neighborhood. Most noted that this feeling is particularly prevalent at night but most also noted a lack of safety during day light hours in certain sections of the South Kelso Neighborhood.

Hungry and bored children – Kelso was recently ranked as the #1 city in the State of Washington for highest percentage of households receiving food stamps. It was noted by one stakeholder that some children don't have access to adequate food while at home, relying heavily on meals offered during school hours. It was noted in more than half of the interviews that children are typically bored after school hours, on the weekends, and during summer break. There is a lack of programming and places for children to socialize healthily after school. This, according to those interviewed, increasing delinquency in the neighborhood.

Transient population and the built environment – South Kelso's rate of renter-occupied housing is roughly 76%. Spurring home-investments is more difficult in renter-dominated neighborhoods. Garbage, broken/falling fences, old cars, and other refuse are prominent features in many of the housing units. Most stakeholders interviewed felt strongly that South Kelso lacks basic infrastructure (i.e. sidewalks), in a neighborhood where roughly 90% of all elementary students walk to school.

Lack of community – The vast majority of stakeholders indicated a concern over the 'total lack' of community feel within the neighborhood of South Kelso. High crime and drug use are associated with distrust and a lack of safety, while the transient nature of many South Kelso residents doesn't engender social capital.

Difficult relations between businesses and the City – Interviews with business owners indicated that some business owners feel that the City of Kelso does not make existing or potential business owners feel welcomed. Some business owners expressed an opinion that development permits are expensive and that City staff are not as responsive as expected.

Potential Revitalization Partners

1. Kelso School District
2. Wallace Elementary School
3. Kelso Downtown Revitalization Association
4. Kelso Public Library
5. Kelso Police Department
6. Cowlitz County Fire & Rescue

Assessment of Unmet Needs, Opportunities, and Challenges

The above literature review, community feedback, and stakeholder interviews shed light on challenges the neighborhood of South Kelso is facing, as well as latent organizational synergy and significant opportunities for partnership. Many of the characteristics of the built environment in South Kelso are highly desirable—from beautiful turn-of-the-century buildings to the dense network of walkable street intersections. The community in South Kelso has a strong sense of community pride with great potential to be channeled into neighborhood empowerment and resident engagement. Furthermore, the relatively small size of the community may facilitate greater ease in partnership development and in combining assets to realize increased organizational efficiency and collective impact. The following section contains key leverage points that Confluence Planning Associates has identified as having the potential to render significant community impact in the short and long-term.

Wallace Elementary & the Kelso School District

Wallace was identified because of its role as a community hub, its impact in the lives of future Kelso residents, and its embodiment of significant public investment. A great majority of community members expressed that Wallace was the largest grounding institution for the South Kelso Neighborhood. Wallace's wholly positive reputation could be a strong catalyst for rallying the South Kelso Neighborhood around both the physical building and conceptual identity of the School and neighborhood. Wallace is easily accessible to the great majority of the community, both due to its central geographic location which aids in its walkability, but also conceptually because of its inextricable connection to the community's biggest rallying agent: children. Wallace is an approachable and unintimidating venue for facilitated community interaction and participation.

Furthermore, the school building and adjacent grounds represent significant infrastructure investment that has great potential to be utilized to achieve countless other community objectives (i.e. adult/continued education, community gardens, after-school programming). However, recent increases in school enrollment at the elementary level and concurrent decreases in performance may indicate a need for more support. As the neighborhood's chief constructive institution, it should receive priority allocation for investments in agency energy and funding. The potential inability of the school to maintain *and build* upon its successful position in the neighborhood could be devastating to the community; the failure of the community's star player.

The Kelso School District could be an integral player in the revitalization of the South Kelso Neighborhood. A strong partnership between the City and the School District could produce sizable results in securing funding for infrastructure (i.e. Safe Routes to School funding for sidewalks), programming, and reveal synergies in the form of collaborations for a community center. Past suggestions to combine Public School and general public parks could be realized at Wallace. This partnership could also increase the 'fundability' of grant and capital requests by demonstrating stakeholders' commitments to efficiency and collectively leveraged assets.

Community Walkability & Downtown Density

Many communities strive to increase neighborhood walkability for good reason: it benefits residents of every age range, lifestyle, culture, and income level, and strengthens the region's attractiveness for families, businesses, and the elderly. South Kelso has great potential to be a highly walkable neighborhood. The area's high density of street intersections and grid layout combined with historic housing stock, river front location, and small geographic size all point to the potential for a pleasant and productive pedestrian experience.

The City could encourage walkability by directly investing in built infrastructure (i.e. crosswalks) and by encouraging higher residential and employment densities in the downtown core. As suggested in the 1980 Comprehensive Plan, a zoning code amendment that permits a greater variety of uses (business and residential) and greater residential densities would result in highly walkable development. The Great Streets Concept indicates that bicycle and pedestrian access should be a high priority in South Kelso. Increased foot and bicycle traffic on residential and business streets would likely result in reduced crime and gang activity, encourage yard

maintenance, housing upkeep, and community cohesion through increased interaction. These issues directly translate into advantages for the local economy, public health, and ecological sustainability.

Community Cohesion

Community Cohesion and a wealth of social capital are inextricably linked to healthy community, particularly in those communities that are struggling financially. The South Kelso Neighborhood currently has limited social or physical infrastructure around which to engage in community activities. Social infrastructure includes clubs, associations, and councils, among others. Community members suggested the need for a neighborhood association, and have requested a club that focuses on historic home preservation. A physical venue to hold these activities is also needed, and South Kelso would strongly benefit from a community center or some location that serves as proxy.

Partnerships with Wallace Elementary and the Kelso School District may reveal opportunities to hold such activities in the Wallace Building after school hours. Past partnerships between the City and the Kelso School District are referenced in the 1980 Comprehensive Plan, but the extent of these partnerships is unclear at this point in time. Kelso also lacks smaller 'venues', such as community kiosks and bulletin boards, which can be built on street corners and parks.

Kelso has great potential to build a locally and regionally-recognized identity around the city's relationship with the natural environment. An identity grounded by a strong connection with the Cowlitz, Coweeman, and Columbia rivers would benefit from greenway development adjacent to the river, natural riverfront restoration, greater pedestrian and bicycle access, and the deliberate re-facing of buildings towards the river. A strong identity tied to a geographic place can promote community cohesion and pride.

Enhanced park access and programming would complement the Kelso river-based identity. Kelso currently has a good network of parks, wherein many households are within a ½ mile walk of a park (see Figure 12), however the majority these parks are underutilized, under-developed, and lack community programming opportunities.

Social and physical community infrastructure would help the neighborhood ossify around an identity, which is currently needed in South Kelso. Geographic neighborhood boundaries that are recognized throughout the community and promoted by neighborhood branding, slogans and imagery contribute to residents' pride and the feeling of 'belonging'. Many neighborhoods consider this the first step (after assembling a neighborhood association or working group) in establishing community cohesion. The neighborhood could leverage and learn from the existing 'We Are Kelso' campaign in rallying residents around a common theme.

Shifting demographics in the South Kelso Neighborhood present an opportunity and a challenge to the community. Often, long-term community members resent these changes and can harbor animosity toward their 'new' neighbors. Having multiple segregated communities in South Kelso prevents community cohesion and prohibits collaborative efforts in revitalization. The neighborhood's ethnic populations are growing; these changes should be ushered in with celebrations of cultural diversity, not by retreating into the isolated safety of familiar company. The City could engender greater tolerance (and thus sense of community) by promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity by hosting public events such as international cook-offs and tolerance workshops. This is a challenging task, but success relies on many small catalytic efforts throughout the neighborhood.

Addressing South Kelso's highly transient populations—measured by high reports of individuals experiencing homelessness and low reports of homeownership—would also be one successful strategy to achieve greater community cohesion. A high percentage of renter-occupied housing can correlate to shrinking investment in housing maintenance, parent and community involvement in schools, volunteerism, and neighborly relationships.

Spatial Mismatch of Jobs and Capacity

The South Kelso Neighborhood is currently experiencing a challenge associated with the spatial mismatch of jobs and the local residents' capacity to fulfill them. Many jobs in South Kelso, and Kelso at large, require applicants to have completed college or a vocational program. However, residents of South Kelso report limited educational attainment and trends indicate each generation sees a shrinking number of college graduates. These cycles are difficult to break, but not impossible. Education advocates need to provide simple and accessible venues through which South Kelso residents may advance their training and employability.

Partnerships between the City, regional education initiatives and agencies, and non-governmental organizations could provide significant funding opportunities to promote continued/adult education, vocational programs, and other skill development to make sure that residents continue to have the skills necessary to find jobs and remain employed. A partnership between the City, the Kelso School District, and Lower Columbia College could ensure that residents are entering the labor force with the skills necessary to be successful. Many residents suggested the need for life-skills education, particularly those for parents, to help break cycles of neglect in South Kelso.

Next Steps

Many challenges have been identified in the South Kelso Neighborhood, but more importantly, the community has many strong social and environmental assets that will prove integral to future revitalization. City revitalization efforts often struggle to achieve what Kelso has already confirmed: a wealth of beautiful historic buildings positioned around a highly walkable street grid, all within enviable proximity to three natural rivers and stunning mountain views. Furthermore, the community of South Kelso shows pride in the city and excitement about revitalization; positive energy which, with proper tools and channels, will prove invaluable in future efforts. CPA hopes to channel these assets and the community's desires into a series of steps and strategies to help Kelso realize the latent vibrant community it is.