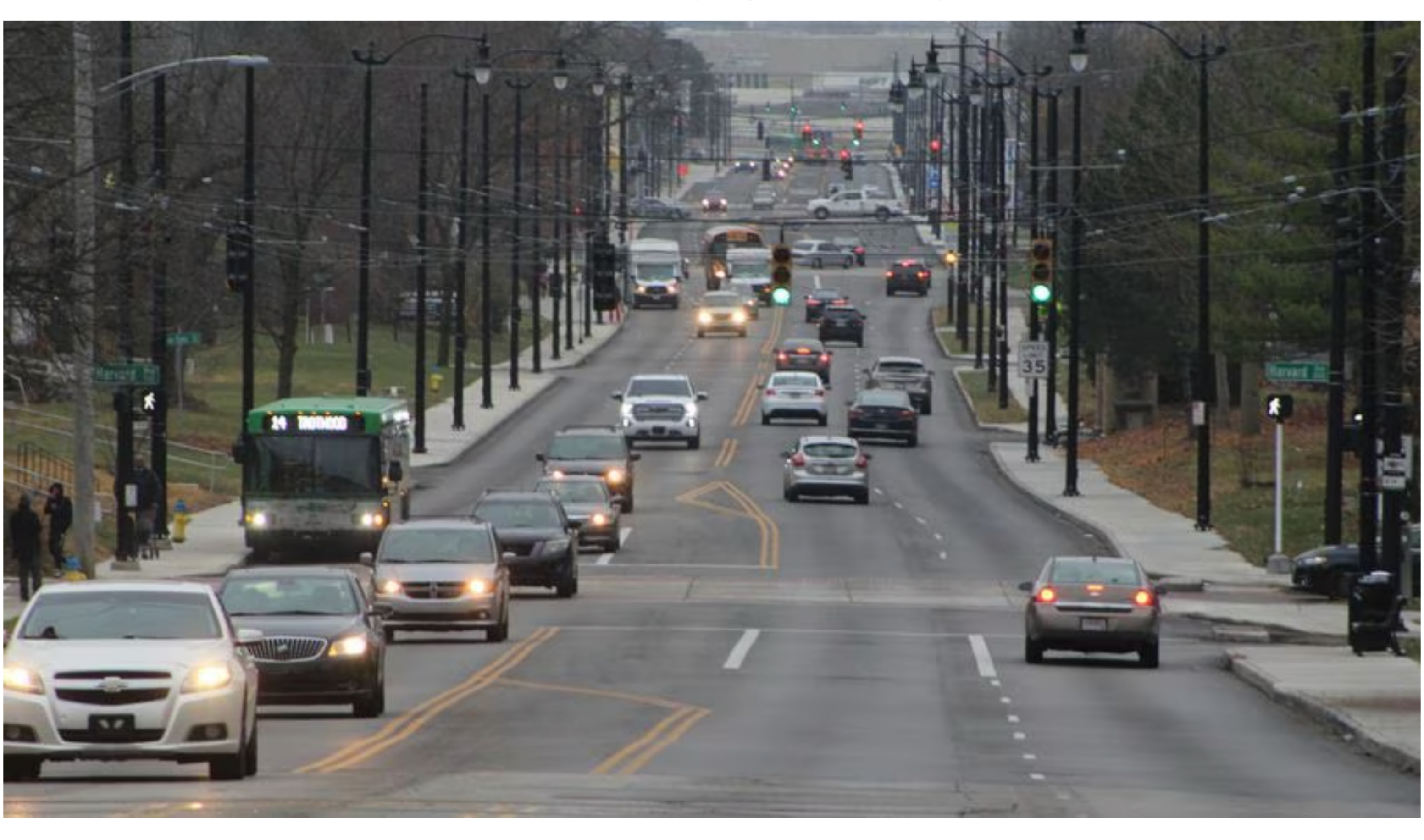
DAYTON.COM

‘Retail desert’ Salem Avenue is changing, has lots of opportunity, group says



LOCAL NEWS

By Cornelius Frolik, Staff Writer

Dec 8, 2022

Restarted local business association hopes to capitalize on improved road, new market, coming developments

Even though the Salem Avenue corridor is no longer a notorious food desert because of the Gem City Market, local business leaders say it remains somewhat of a retail desert, with limited places to shop.

But the area is changing, and leaders hope that a new vision for Salem Avenue will help guide and inspire its revitalization and will help capitalize on the thousands of people who live in the area or drive along the corridor every day.

“There’s great opportunity here — it’s a no brainer,” said Jule Rastikis, president of the Salem Avenue Business Association.

About 22,000 people live along Salem Avenue and about 28,000 vehicles traverse the roadway each day, Rastikis said.

Rastikis said residents who live around Salem Avenue spend a lot of money outside of the area because of somewhat limited shopping, dining and entertainment options nearby.

A market feasibility study completed by Wright State University in 2016 suggested that residents who live within a several-mile radius of Salem and Grand avenues were spending more than $300 million annually outside of the service area.

Rastikis said there is a big opportunity here, especially as Salem Avenue starts to see some major changes thanks to new investment.

The Gem City Market opened in May 2021 on the 300 block of Salem Avenue, which brought healthy food options to an area that some people called one of the worst food deserts east of the Mississippi River.

Credit: JIM NOELKER

A group that wants to redevelop the former Longfellow School campus on the 200 block of Salem has been awarded $1.8 million in state historic tax credits for a $30 million project that will create new senior apartments, a theater and other amenities.

The Salem Avenue roadway itself also is being reconstructed in five multimillion-dollar phases, which officials hope will improve the pedestrian experience, boosting foot traffic and interest in the corridor.

A section of roadway from North to Manhattan avenues was redone, and another from West Riverview Avenue to North Avenue is mostly complete, said Joseph Weinel, Dayton’s chief engineer.

Other parts of the roadway will be rebuilt in the coming years.

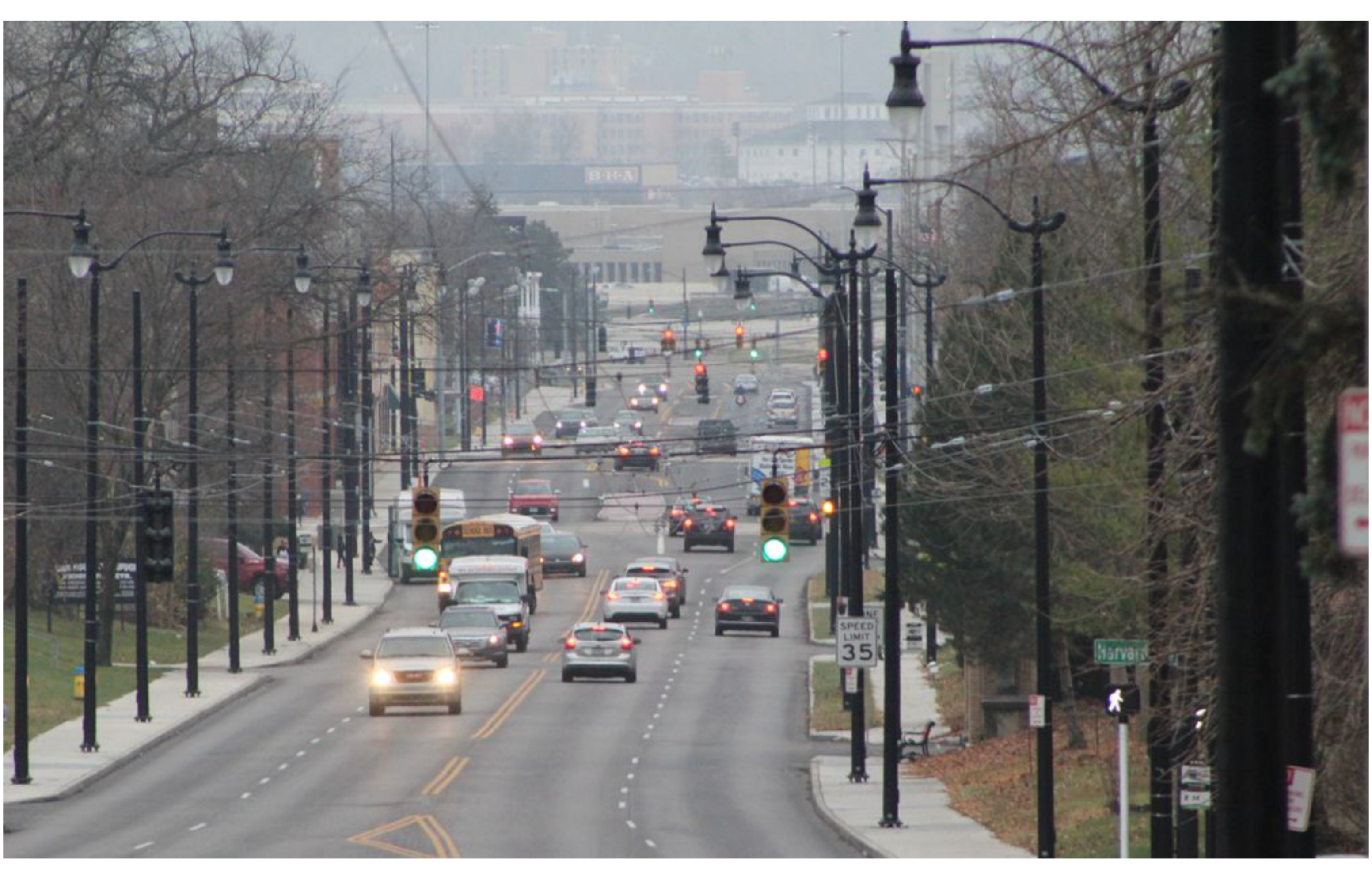
Salem Avenue originally was built for street car lines, and the street was widened over time to accommodate growing traffic volumes, Weinel said.

But the street’s character has changed and its reconstruction seeks to create inviting “human-scaled design and experiences,” he said.

“These sorts of public street improvements serve as a catalyst for private redevelopment,” Weinel said. “Paired with new publicly supported developments like the Gem City Market, Salem Avenue is poised for continued transformations into the future.”

The Salem Avenue Business Association, which was reestablished earlier this year, has helped create a vision for a 2.8-mile section of Salem Avenue that stretches from West Riverview Avenue to Hillcrest Avenue.

This is a high-level vision — not an actual detailed plan — but it was based on substantial stakeholder input and reflects what people want to see, and what they think various parts of Salem Avenue need, Rastikis said.



“We’re seeing a change, we’re seeing what we knew could happen here, and we’re going to see more and more and more,” he said.

The vision breaks Salem Avenue into three zones that each have their own themes.

Zone 1, between Riverview Avenue and Harvard Boulevard, could be a destination for food, entertainment and recreation.

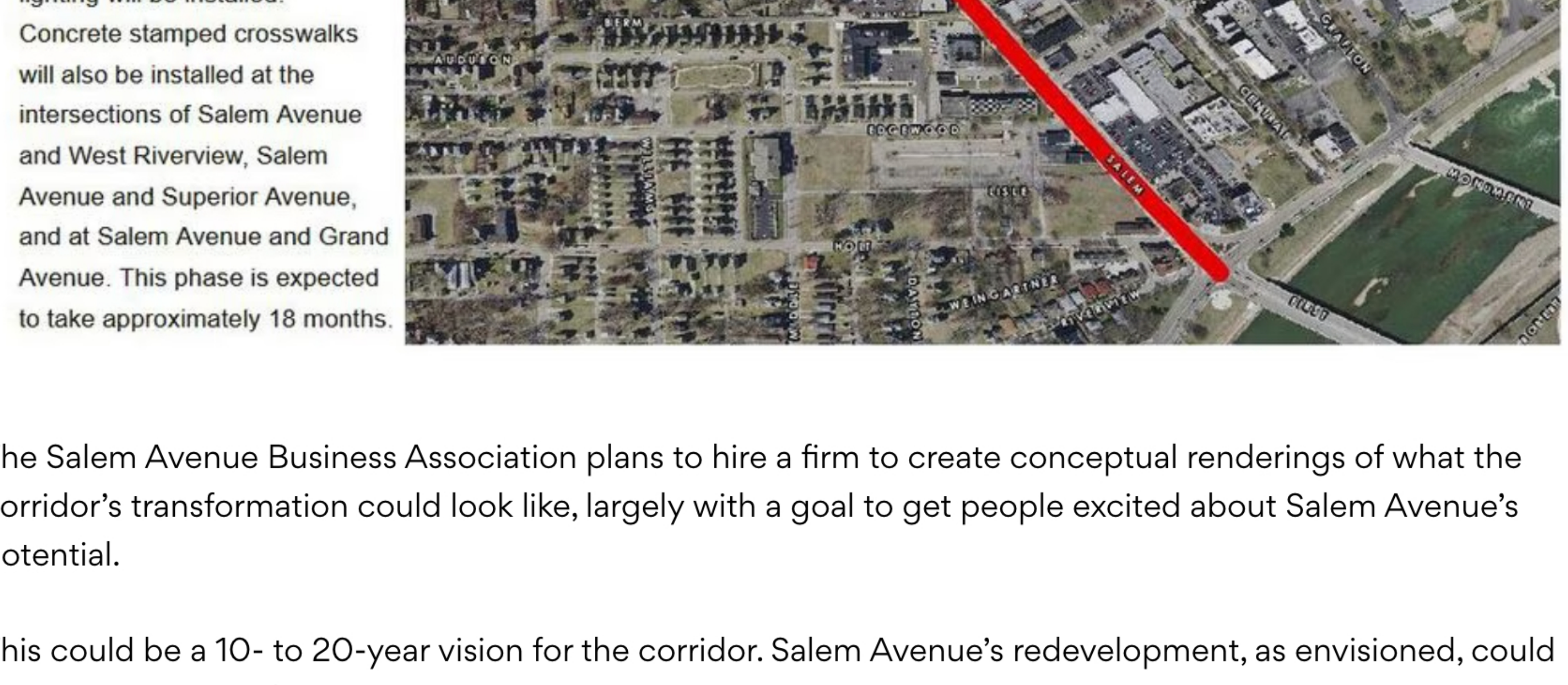
Zone 2, from Harvard Boulevard to Benson Drive, could focus more on retail and residential development.

Zone 3, from Benson Drive to Hillcrest Avenue, could emphasize mixed retail and health services.

The redevelopment possibilities are nearly endless, but some ideas floated include a boutique hotel, a musical arts center, entertainment venues, arts lofts and lots of places to buy food.

New retail food options topped most stakeholders’ wish-lists for Salem Avenue, Rastikis said.

The targeted stretch of Salem Avenue has a “dollar store,” gas stations, a few fast-food establishments, pharmacies, beauty shops, barbers, churches, offices and many homes and apartments, though some are vacant.



Phase 2 will start in the spring of 2022 and involve rebuilding Salem Avenue from West Riverview Avenue to North Avenue. The roadway cross section will be five lanes (two lanes in each direction with a center turn lane) with a 10' cycle track. New pavement, curb, sidewalk and ornamental street lighting will be installed. Concrete stamped crosswalks will also be installed at the intersections of Salem Avenue and West Riverview, Salem Avenue and Superior Avenue, and at Salem Avenue and Grand Avenue. This phase is expected to take approximately 18 months.

The Salem Avenue Business Association plans to hire a firm to create conceptual renderings of what the corridor’s transformation could look like, largely with a goal to get people excited about Salem Avenue’s potential.

This could be a 10- to 20-year vision for the corridor. Salem Avenue’s redevelopment, as envisioned, could create many new jobs.

Carl and Kimberly Diedrich recently bought and moved into a home on Grafton Avenue that is a short walk from the Gem City Market.

Carl and Kimberly, who relocated from Arizona, spent a lot of time on Zillow looking for homes, and they took virtual tours of multiple properties.

Carl Diedrich said they researched the area online and talked to some local residents who indicated Grafton Hill is an up-and-coming area.

They fell in love with the historic home they now own, and they also wanted to live in a vibrant and diverse neighborhood.

Kimberly Diedrich said Salem Avenue made a good first impression.

She is a small business owner — she runs a pet-sitting service in Arizona — and she would love to do as much of her shopping as close to home as she can.

The couple just became members of the Gem City Market, and they plan to explore the area to find more local places to shop.

“We are huge into shopping local,” she said. “We would not leave this part of Dayton at all if we don’t have to.”