BLACKSTONE AVENUE
Opportunities Assessment for Early Infill and Revitalization

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OVERVIEW

This opportunities assessment report is the outcome of a partnership of the Local Government Commission (LGC) and Fresno Metro Ministry (Metro) to organize and conduct a multi-day series of meetings, site visits, and collaborative workshops in November 2015 to identify strategies and steps to revitalize Blackstone Avenue in Fresno. The LGC assembled a team of street design, property and business revitalization experts to learn from residents and stakeholders what is working and what is not working on the corridor and provide recommendations.

The LGC, Michele Reeves of Civilis Consultants, and Michael Moule of Livable Streets, Inc. conducted interviews and walks with community leaders, business and property owners, city and other agency staff. The team observed conditions on both sides of the right of way line, from the public street to the private properties and buildings, and everything in between. They noted the size, speed and traffic of the roadway, the quality of sidewalks, location and type of parking, buildings and businesses, frontage and signage, store entries and interiors, and how elements such as these are contributing to or detracting from a welcoming, walkable, unique and memorable environment for maximizing community value and stimulating investment.

The team developed and presented recommendations to residents, small business owners, nonprofit and for profit real estate investors, community-based organizations, city staff and other local leaders on near-term opportunities to revitalize and enhance Blackstone Avenue. The report that follows summarizes the assessment and recommendations.

It begins with a snapshot of the corridor, both past and present. Recommendations are then presented for improvements and actions in both the public and private realm, which include ready-to-implement tactics and overarching strategies to jump start change on aging corridors.
Blackstone History At a Glance *(source: Better Blackstone Association)*

1800s: Blackstone was first a country lane, north of the city limits of Fresno.

1890s: A horse car line connected the homes on Blackstone from Belmont south to downtown.

1900s: The horse-car line was converted to a streetcar that took people north to Zapp's Park at Olive Avenue.

1920s: The large plots of land on either side of Blackstone Avenue began to be subdivided for houses in neighborhoods.

1930s: Blackstone Avenue was designated as a part of “State Route 41,” connecting the Central Coast (Morro Bay) to Yosemite National Park. Hotels and other amenities for travelers began to be built.

1980s: The urban stretch of 41 running through Fresno was upgraded to freeway standards, intersecting State Road 99 to the south. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the freeway portion was extended several miles beyond Fresno, in both directions.

1990s: 41 is expanded to Friant.

2000s: Blackstone is identified as a good candidate for a Bus Rapid Transit system in the Fresno Council of Government’s Public Transit Infrastructure Survey. The Blackstone corridor is envisioned as a high-rise corridor in the 2025 General Plan.

2010s: City of Fresno votes for the creation of a mixed use corridor along Blackstone as a part of the 2035 General Plan. The Fresno City Council votes to continue progress to build the Bus Rapid Transit system along Blackstone and Ventura Kings Canyon. Better Blackstone Association is formed.

Youths escape the summer heat at the popular Zapp’s Park swimming pool, circa 1912, near the intersection of Blackstone and Olive Avenue. Read more here: [http://historical.fresnobeehive.com/2011/07/zapps-park/#storylink=cpy](http://historical.fresnobeehive.com/2011/07/zapps-park/#storylink=cpy)
THE CORRIDOR TODAY

Blackstone Avenue is a north-south arterial roadway and commercial corridor connecting the downtown, mid-city, and north areas of Fresno. It extends north from Divisadero Street in Downtown Fresno to its interchange with State Route 41 just north of Nees Avenue. North of Olive Avenue, Blackstone Avenue is a two-way, six-lane divided arterial with a posted speed limit of 40 to 45 miles per hour. From just north of Olive Avenue to Downtown Fresno, Blackstone Avenue splits into two one-way parallel streets with Blackstone Avenue carrying southbound traffic and Abby Street carrying northbound traffic. Both Blackstone Avenue and Abby Street south of Olive Avenue have three travel lanes with a posted speed limit of 40 mph.

The corridor development pattern is largely based on an increasingly outdated auto-oriented shopping and service environment in which uses are spread linearly along the traffic arterial in commercial strips. Chief characteristics include:

- The wide, multi-lane roadway itself, edged with narrow sidewalks, numerous driveways, and little or no pedestrian amenities; and large intersections with multi-phased signals and multiple turn pockets, further widening the crossing distance at busy intersections.
- Free-standing stores surrounded by parking lots with many driveways, pole signs, and limited landscaping.
- Signs oriented to motorists that outdo buildings in both size and character.
- Buildings of modest or minimal visual distinctiveness.
- Long, undifferentiated segments dominated by retail uses, with other commercial activities and various special uses and institutional anchors mixed in.

Today, while more prosperous concentrations of retail, entertainment and services exist on large sites at major intersections near freeway interchanges (generally Herndon and Nees Avenues), much of the corridor has experienced substantial disinvestment, resulting in vacant, abandoned and underused properties. The old model of free-standing strip retail with its own parking lot, advertising, and sign finds it harder to compete with the visibility, financing, and drawing power of the newer “lifestyle” centers with pedestrian-oriented clustered shopping, entertainment, dining and leisure activity. Some individual neighborhood-serving retail, restaurants, and services adjacent to neighborhoods with
established customers still function well but would be stronger if the corridor were better connected to this base and made more walkable.

Realigning Blackstone Avenue with the forces of market demand, building on existing assets, and better serving the needs of local businesses and neighborhoods require changes on both sides of the corridor right-of-way line. For properties lining the corridor, revitalization can begin with simple, low-cost, low-risk tactical improvements against the backdrop of longer-term collaborative strategies to transform Blackstone Avenue into a series of places in which property owners, developers, and communities will once again invest. A change from auto-oriented to multi-modal transportation through and near the corridor can help kick start and incentivize revitalization and redevelopment, while also enhancing mobility through the corridor. The land use pattern and the thoroughfare design should be planned together and reinforce each other.

NEW INITIATIVES

The adoption of the City of Fresno 2035 General Plan in December 2014 has ignited a new focus on investment and development in the historic downtown core, existing central and south Fresno neighborhoods, and major transit-serving corridors such as Blackstone Avenue. The Fresno Citywide Development Code was adopted one year later with revised development regulations and standards to implement the general plan.

The new policy framework emphasizes rehabilitation, intensification and reuse of vacant and underutilized land along the length of Blackstone Avenue. The Development Code establishes Mixed-Use (MX) District zoning along most of the corridor with development and design standards to allow and encourage a mix of housing, retail, office, and active public spaces in a pedestrian-oriented environment. Among other things, MX districts are intended to:

- Transform certain auto-oriented boulevards and corridors into vibrant, diverse, and attractive corridors that support a mix of pedestrian-oriented retail, office, and residential uses in order to achieve an active social environment within a revitalized streetscape.
- Reduce the need for driving to access shopping, services, and employment and minimize air pollution from vehicle miles traveled.
- Improve access to a greater range of facilities and services for surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- Establish development and design standards for these centers and corridors that will create a unified, distinctive, and attractive urban character, with appropriate transitions to adjacent residential neighborhoods. (source: 2015 Citywide Development Code, p II-31)
In addition, a first phase Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system is planned to begin operation along the Blackstone Avenue and Ventura Street/Kings Canyon Road corridors in 2017. BRT aims to combine the capacity and speed of light rail with the flexibility, lower cost and simplicity of a bus system. The expectation of faster, more frequent transit service on Blackstone Avenue is also fueling new interest in corridor enhancement and rehabilitation.

The General Plan also recognizes the need to reconsider the size, function and motorized traffic capacity needs of Fresno’s arterials for opportunities to create “Complete Streets” that support walking, bicycling, and transit for users of all ages and abilities, and that by creating walkable environments, support new investment and revitalization of surrounding properties. The completion of the freeway system in the 1990s removed a substantial amount of through traffic from Blackstone Avenue, leaving the road with excess capacity and potentially freeing up space to expand sidewalks, improve transit service and amenities, and provide facilities to accommodate bicyclists – all of which, over time, can help reduce traffic pressure on the roadway.

In concert with policy changes, a community-based initiative is underway to transform the corridor through the development of cross-sector constituencies for urban revitalization as well as environmental conservation and sustainable communities. The Better Blackstone Association (BBA) is an emerging coalition formed in 2015 of local business, institutional and neighborhood leaders. Through funding from the Resources Legacy Fund, Central Valley Community Foundation and Relational Culture Institute, and organizational support by Fresno Metro Ministry (Metro), Better Blackstone gathered throughout the year to build a shared vision, strong partnerships, and new strategies to implement change.

Building on this foundation, Metro received additional funding in January 2016 from The Whitney Foundation for BBA activities and to establish and manage the Better Blackstone Community Development Corporation (BBCDC), which aims to positively impact the approximately 50,000 residents and over 2,100 businesses within a half-mile east and west of the 8-mile plus length of Blackstone Avenue from Downtown to Woodward Park.
A Community Development Corporation (CDC) is a nonprofit, neighborhood or community-based organization that can perform a range of economic development functions typically serving lower-income residents or struggling, under-served neighborhoods. The economic development functions that CDCs provide include creating affordable housing, real-estate development, commercial revitalization, business loans, technical assistance, job training and social services.

The Better Blackstone CDC is weaving together neighborhood, business, local government, nonprofit and institutional leaders to spur new Blackstone investment, entrepreneurship and revitalization efforts. Initial partners include the City of Fresno, Fresno Housing Authority, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)-Fresno District Office, Economic Opportunities Commission sponsored Fresno Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). Other key partnerships will be established with banks, financing, training and development cohorts needed to launch, operate and begin the first joint venture projects along Blackstone.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Local Government Commission (LGC), Michele Reeves of Civilis Consultants, and Michael Moule of Livable Streets, Inc. talked and walked with community leaders, business and property owners, and agency staff over the course of four days in November 2015. The team observed conditions on both sides of the right of way line, from the public street

| Discovering Opportunities for a Better Blackstone |
| November 16 – 19, 2015 |
| Monday: “Secret Shopper” anonymous visits to stores, survey of corridor, and visit with City staff |
| Tuesday: Business interviews, site visits, and nighttime presentations to elected and community leaders, “Innovative Strategies for Commercial Corridors” |
| Wednesday: Team work session followed by nighttime gathering, “Small Business on a Big Corridor – Branding, Entrepreneurship Training and Financing Opportunities” |
| Thursday: Team work session followed by nighttime presentation of findings and recommendations to the community, “Building Blocks for Economically Successful Commercial Corridors – The Blackstone Edition” |
to private properties and buildings, and everything in between. They noted the size, speed and traffic of the roadway, the quality of sidewalks, location and type of parking, buildings and businesses, frontage and signs, entrances and interiors, and how these elements are contributing to or detracting from a welcoming, walkable, unique and memorable environment that maximizes community value and stimulates investment.

The team developed and presented recommendations to residents, small business owners, nonprofit and for profit real estate investors, community-based organizations, city staff and other local leaders on near-term opportunities to revitalize and enhance Blackstone Avenue. The review and recommendations that follow include ready-to-implement tactics and overarching strategies to jump start transformation of aging, automobile-dependent strip commercial corridors.

Aligning with Market Conditions

For the purposes of creating recommendations for Blackstone Avenue, the team closely examined the roadway, land use patterns, buildings and businesses and thought about the steps and tools to stimulate investment and placemaking activity on the corridor.

Typical market features for attracting retail and residential infill construction and commercial tenancy include:

- Proximity of high income demographics
- Proximity of high educational attainment

High comparable business sales per square foot
- High residential sales or rent per square foot
- Availability of large lots
- Strong district brand and identity
- Slow traffic speeds

While recent City studies and policy documents identify a few opportunity sites on Blackstone that might meet some of these market conditions, large stretches of the
corridor generally do not. However, focusing in the short term on improving what already exists can change the perception and identity of Blackstone Avenue, a key step in preparing the corridor for further reinvestment and infill activity.

**Toolkit for Property and Business Owners**

In areas where low rents and sales per square foot make it difficult to justify new construction, it can be cheaper and easier to adapt and reuse existing buildings with low cost incremental interior and exterior improvements to attract and support tenants. Property owners with multiple buildings or spaces, or multiple property owners working together within a district or corridor subarea should think about the connection between improvements, types of tenants, and facilitating cross pollination between customer bases.

**Building and Property Recommendations**

Every building should be telling a great story from the street, contributing to district identity and showing who they are, what they are about, and giving visitors an idea what sort of experience they might expect inside. There is an easy formula for tackling buildings from the outside: introduce color, highlight building details, uncover features on older buildings that have been covered over with siding, open the front with great windows, and make it dramatic with some exterior lighting.

These are easy-to-implement changes that property and business owners on Blackstone Avenue can undertake as a community to re-brand and rebuild the corridor.

**Interior Improvements**

- Right Size Retail Spaces (1,000-1,500 SF) to create flexible spaces affordable to small, local and start-up businesses.
- Remove Drop Ceilings (e.g., acoustical tiles)
- Remove Dark UV Window Coating
- Provide Great Natural and Artificial Lighting
- Install Window Infrastructure
- With historic buildings, consider exposing original interior finishes: show brick, restore transom windows, bring in more natural light with skylights in one-story buildings, finish wood floors, and create high ceiling space wherever possible.
Blackstone Corridor Opportunities

Exterior Improvements

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<th>Existing Buildings</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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| **Color!**         | • Three- and four-color paint schemes on every building.  
                    | • Use Beige: Businesses should be trying to get people's attention, not make themselves invisible.  
                    | • Color is the cheapest and easiest way to introduce district vibrancy. |
| **Building Detail**| • Every building has something physically interesting about it, so highlight all building details. It can be trim, molding, texture differences, grain, patterns, shapes, etc. |
| **Transparency**   | • Uncover windows that are blocked by posters/curtains/blinds.  
                    | • Remove awnings/restore transom windows.  
                    | • Remove dark U/V window coatings that turn windows into mirrors.  
                    | • Light the inside of windows so they are transparent during the day. |
| **Exterior Lighting**| • Storefront windows should be amazing at night and make the sidewalk engaging, even though businesses are closed.  
                       | • Introduce building lighting, tree lighting, sconce lighting, gooseneck lighting, decorative lighting—these are the things that tell us a place is open for business and safe for customers at night. |

The before and after photos above illustrate the conversion of a small building comparable to types existing today on Blackstone Avenue with interior and exterior improvements.
Many existing buildings on Blackstone today are monotone and lack building detail and transparency to activate frontage, provide visual interest and invite customers.

This former auto garage was transformed with color, large windows, and conversion of the parking area with picnic tables and landscaping for outdoor eating. The building hosts four small restaurants.

The before and after images above show how a seemingly uninteresting building can be transformed by accentuating the exterior and interior architecture of the building with openness, transparency and lighting.
A building is retrofitted with color and glass and replacement of the blank wall with a plaza, seating and table. Windows and nighttime lighting show businesses and provide security.

A vacant building that housed an auto dealership and bank is transformed into a colorful mercado, with four separate retail spaces, a flexible central open area with vendor stalls, and a commissary kitchen for rent.
Outside the mercado building shown on the previous page, a section of the parking lot was converted to include a row of 8 trailers for food vendors and a covered outdoor seating area for customers.

**Tenanting**

The identity of a district comes from its ground floor businesses, so tenant mixing and tenanting strategies are key to creating vibrancy and activity. Simple rules of thumb include:

- **Tenant for activity.** Any business that is going to engage with the public through windows, display of exterior merchandise, a great building, outdoor seating, and the like is a good business.

- **Tenant for brand.** What is your district or Blackstone’s authentic brand? Figure out what it is and tenant in a way that complements that brand.

- **Tenant for cross pollination between customer bases.** This is the art of good tenant mixing – create a mix of tenants in a project, or within businesses that are proximate, to actually cross pollinate with customers. Projects can be tenanting around themes, like financial or wellness services, or around hours of operation, or around gender... there are myriad possibilities.

- **Tenant for your building type.** For instance, if you have a giant building set far back from the street, you are probably not going to have a lot of success dividing it up into small local retail shops. Instead, pursue some larger users that may have a wholesale/showroom component, or maker space need.
Public Sector Toolkit

Commercial strips are often composed of hundreds or even thousands of separate parcels, far too many individually owned properties for any single owner or developer to substantially change alone. Orchestrating strip corridor revitalization requires leadership by local government.

Over 1,100 businesses have addresses on Blackstone Avenue, with about 50,000 residents living within a half-mile on each side. The City of Fresno, which is responsible for the public right of way and provides coordination and oversight for new development, can help change the image and function of the corridor by supporting renovation, reuse and intensification of private and public properties. The City can also lead transformation of the public right of way into a complete streets environment through capital improvements with the support of regional, state and federal active transportation and transit funding resources. Improvements to the road and surroundings will help change the way residents, businesses and investors view possibilities for Blackstone Avenue.

Incentivize Small, Not Just Big

As noted in the 2013 Fresno General Plan Implementation and Infill Finance Task Force report, getting large, mixed-use redevelopment projects to pencil out at the current stage of market maturity in Fresno and on Blackstone Avenue in particular is challenging. Stimulating early infill and revitalization projects requires sharpening focus and tools to stimulate incremental, realizable improvements that can be implemented sooner rather than later.

Blackstone Avenue is one of the “Priority Areas for Development Incentives” identified in the General Plan for incentives and other benefits to accelerate reinvestment and rehabilitation. Along this line the City could create programs to assist with funding and design, improving technical capacity of agency staff, local developers, builders, property owners and businesses.

The Infill Finance Task Force suggested, for example, that the City could retain a Developer Technical Assistance/Concierge, “an expert in community development finance with knowledge of the various State and federal assistance programs available to support infill development to help walk developers through the options.”

General Plan Implementing Policy:
LU-2-c Infill Design Toolkit. Develop and distribute an infill design toolkit, consistent with the City’s Infill Development Act to support and encourage infill development.

Commentary: The toolkit will use photos and diagrams to:
- Explain design and permit requirements and priority infill development incentives;
- Illustrate context-responsive best practices for prototype development; and
- Address detailed issues such as parking, scale, privacy, outdoor spaces, housing types, transitions, building design, siting and street orientation, setbacks, windows, and general material guidelines and buffering for adjacent uses.
The General Plan calls for creation of an infill design toolkit to help facilitate and encourage infill development

Reward What You Want to See

The City’s new Development Code establishes mixed-use zones and development standards throughout the Blackstone Avenue corridor to support infill by allowing for intensification and diversity of land use. A good next step to stimulate reinvestment would be to scour and fine-tune the regulatory framework to make it as easy and inexpensive to improve what already exists as it is to build new. Successfully leveraging existing buildings and businesses requires flexibility to encourage creativity. Examples include:

- Look for barriers to renovation and opportunities for flexibility in the building code.
- Waive or reduce parking requirements to support building and site renovation intensification projects.
- Waive or reduce development permit and impact fees based on the Best Utilization of Infill Lot Development (City 2013 BUILD Act) model.
- Consider property tax abatements to reduce or eliminate higher taxes resulting from property improvements so an owner or developer can more easily afford to take on debt to make improvements or re-purpose a property.
- Review and revise zoning and permitting barriers to active uses in industrial light assembly buildings and flexible warehouses.
- Review and revise permitting to enable flexible, pop-up expansions, temporary conversions, and low cost construction types in private parking lots and other underutilized spaces.

Reuse and Intensify Sites

Old light assembly, manufacturing, storage facilities and yards, and retail buildings with large parking lots are present throughout Blackstone Avenue. These were built as flexible spaces to house a variety of offices, production shops and services that could be converted over time.

The Vanport Square project exemplifies adaptive reuse of an existing building and intensification of an underutilized site along a major arterial commercial corridor in a disadvantaged neighborhood in Portland, Oregon.

Vanport Square is a 40,000 square feet commercial condominium development on a major multi-lane commercial arterial transit corridor. The developers renovated a 25,000 square-foot manufacturing building, added a plaza and constructed a new 15,000 square-foot building at the northeast corner. The development includes 16 office, retail and restaurant spaces ranging in size from 1,000 to 5,000 square feet targeted specifically for the relocation and expansion of locally owned small businesses. The plaza serves as an amenity to the owners, occupants and customers and the surrounding community as an accessible public gathering space.

The development team was initially looking to develop the site as part of a large-scale project of over 300,000 square feet anchored by a grocery store. After years of unsuccessful efforts to realize the project
with a major commercial tenant, the partners re-evaluated the approach, leading to the following conclusions and development strategy:

1. The commercial real estate market in the area was not ready to support a national chain or other large credit retail or office tenant.
2. Current lease rates would not support the high-end construction and design standards envisioned by the community.
3. A market niche was unfilled for commercial condominiums targeted to small businesses.
4. A strategy of targeting local, small businesses for condominium ownership would meet the public goals for the project and be commercially viable.
5. High quality design and affordability for small owners could both be achieved through using New Market Credits to lower the debt service to the buyers.

Vanport Square opened in 2008 and remains successful today. Ten market rate town homes
Blackstone Corridor Opportunities

Blackstone Avenue and its surroundings are overwhelmingly built for cars, with minimal space, amenities or appeal for walking, bicycling or accessing transit.

have since been added, further activating the site and providing transition from the commercial corridor to the adjacent residential neighborhood (source: Twete and Kerosky, “Public/Private Commercial Condominiums: The Vanport Square Case,” PSU Center for Real Estate, 1st Quarter, 2008).

Role of the Road

As noted previously, from the 1930’s through the 1980’s, Blackstone was considered part of State Route Highway 41. Cars and trucks traveled Blackstone through central Fresno to Yosemite and the coast until the current Highway 41 replaced Blackstone as a major carrier of regional and interregional through traffic.

As a former state highway Blackstone Avenue and adjacent properties are primarily designed for moving and parking motor vehicles, which makes for a difficult environment as soon as motorists leave their cars and for others who choose or have no choice but to arrive by different means.

Generally speaking, sidewalks are narrow with areas of utility obstructions and
numerous wide driveways. Walkways abut the high speed roadway on one side and are flanked on the other by parking lots, blanks walls and fences. The six lanes of fast moving traffic and wide intersections make crossings very challenging by foot. There are no bicycle facilities on the corridor. Bicyclists frequently ride on sidewalks as an alternative to riding on the road. Combined, these difficulties impact safety, experience and access to destinations on the corridor for all modes of travel.

Traffic data from the last five years indicate the average daily traffic (ADT) volume on Blackstone Avenue ranges from about 20,000 to 26,000 vehicles per day south of Shaw Avenue, and about 26,000 to 31,000 north of Shaw. The number of travel lanes compared to traffic volume suggest there is excess capacity. Or stated differently, there may be more lanes than necessary to maintain acceptable levels of service on the corridor, creating a potential opportunity to convert unnecessary pavement from car space to more usable pedestrian, bicycle and transit space.

Conversion of the outer lanes to better accommodate pedestrians, transit users and bicyclists would support corridor revitalization by:

- changing the image of Blackstone Avenue and the way residents, visitors, business owners and investors view the surrounding properties
- reducing traffic speed and noise, which improves ease of access and building and business visibility to motorists
- providing separation between sidewalks and motor traffic, improving conditions for building frontage and activity along the street
- shortening and simplifying pedestrian crossings, reducing pedestrian exposure to traffic and motorist delay
- increasing space for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access and amenities

The curb to curb width for most of the roadway on Blackstone Avenue is 98 feet, set within a 110-foot public right-of-way (except for several intersections from Shaw Avenue northward where the road is widened to accommodate two left turn lanes). The curb to curb width of the one-way portion of Blackstone Avenue connecting to Downtown at the southern end is 52 feet. After studying and measuring the roadway and sidewalks and considering data from recent traffic impact studies, the team prepared conceptual cross sections to illustrate how Blackstone Avenue might be redesigned to support all modes of travel, access, circulation and mobility within the existing corridor constraints.
Blackstone Corridor Opportunities

Blackstone/Abby Avenue, south of Hedges Avenue Existing street cross-section (looking north)

The drawing above illustrates the current street, sidewalk, number of lanes and dimensions on the one-way portion of Blackstone Avenue generally between Hedges Avenue and Divisadero Street in Downtown.

Blackstone/Abby Avenue, south of Hedges Avenue Street cross-section with bicycle improvements

The drawing above illustrates conversion of the roadway through re-striping to include a bike lane with painted buffers on both sides, providing separation from vehicle traffic and open doors on parked cars. Reducing the number and width of lanes on this relatively low-volume segment of Blackstone provides space for the bike lane and would have the added benefit of encouraging slow speeds.
Blackstone Avenue, north of Hedges Avenue Existing street cross-section (looking north)

The drawings above illustrate the existing street, sidewalk, and number of lanes north of the Downtown one-way couplet. The median is 16-feet wide in some mid-block areas, but is generally narrower to provide space for left turning vehicles at intersections.
The illustrations above show the addition of bike lanes with painted buffers on both sides and on-street parallel parking. This would move traffic away from sidewalks and encourage slower speeds, both helpful incentives for supporting enhancement or redevelopment of adjacent properties. Painted buffers provide separation for bicyclists from moving traffic and opening doors from parked cars. On-street parking would add another layer of separation between sidewalks and the street, improving the pedestrian environment.
Blackstone Corridor Opportunities

Blackstone Avenue, north of Hedges Avenue
Alternative with wider sidewalks

The illustrations show an alternative in which sidewalks are widened on both sides. Bike lanes with painted buffers are retained between the bike lane and travel lane. Extending the sidewalks throughout the corridor would greatly enhance the pedestrian environment but would add considerable cost. A less expensive option would be to extend the sidewalks in strategic locations where higher levels of pedestrian activity are expected or desired.
Blackstone Avenue is a major transit corridor and designated for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). The first phase of BRT implementation will be completed in 2017, and includes 6 foot sidewalk extensions at BRT stop locations. The drawing above illustrates incorporation of 9-foot wide platforms and extended sidewalks, combined with 12-foot lane widths at passenger loading/unloading locations, for efficient bus service and operations with stop amenities. The bike lanes shown in the previous cross sections would be routed behind the platforms to reduce conflicts between bicyclists and buses.
Large parking lots front most of Blackstone Avenue north of Shields Avenue. While the outside 19-foot lane and shoulder width can accommodate on-street parking, availability is limited due to driveways, and access and sight lines required for vehicles entering and exiting parking lots. The drawing above shows an alternative in which all three travel lanes in each direction are maintained, but with the shoulder/parking re-striped to include a buffered bike lane. As previously noted, the buffer would provide separation between bicyclists and motorists, and between the sidewalk and traffic. Visual narrowing of the roadway and added friction on the road edges would also encourage slower speeds.
Summing up, repurposing travel lanes on Blackstone for other uses and travel modes can help improve conditions and increase activity for businesses and new development along the corridor. Right-sizing the roadway to support revitalization and infill can be relatively low cost if planned in conjunction with reconstruction or simple overlay projects since applying Road Diets consists primarily of restriping.