Creating a 24-Hour Campus
Wayne State has been intentional in its efforts to transform from a commuter destination to a 24-hour campus, with strategic efforts around housing, transit and mobility, placemaking and public safety. Since 2002, Wayne State has built three new residence halls, adding more than 2,000 beds. Demand for student housing currently exceeds supply, with an additional 100 students housed nearby at the St. Regis Hotel and a wait list of several hundred. The university is working to meet this demand by constructing new housing and renovating two existing buildings. The university expects to expand on-campus housing capacity from 3,100 today to 3,750 by 2022. (Wayne State Housing Facilities Master Plan 2016-2026, February 3, 2016). The university is also partnering with a private developer on its second residential/retail development on the south edge of main campus and negotiating the sale of its former Criminal Justice building to a private developer for another mixed-use project. To deepen the WSU community’s engagement in the neighborhood, the university provides safe, active “third spaces” for students, staff and community to spend their time, including a fitness center, completed in 2000, a renovated Student Center, completed in 2016, and a weekly Farmers Market that accepts food stamps and Double Up Food Bucks (a one-to-one match for SNAP beneficiaries purchasing fresh produce) as well as a Student Advantage discount card for students.

Wayne State is further contributing to residential density through its participation from 2011-2015 in Live Midtown, a program offering financial incentives to employees of Wayne State, Detroit Medical Center and Henry Ford Health System who purchase or rent a home in Midtown. According to figures provided by Midtown Detroit, Inc. (MDI), which manages Live Midtown, the incentive attracted and retained 2,025 residents between 2011-2015. Of that number, 571 were Wayne State employees. During the first five years of the incentive, residential occupancy in the neighborhood increased from 92 to 98%. Live Midtown was extended beyond its original five-year term in 2016; with neighborhood occupancy at a high, WSU elected not to participate in this extension. MDI reports that more than 2000 residential units have been added or renovated since 2006, with another 3169 units/beds in the pipeline. This increased residential density is impacting the neighborhood’s small businesses with 130 new businesses and nonprofits opening since 2013. The overall financial impact of Live Midtown between 2011-15 was $21 million. (Midtown Detroit Inc. 2016 Community Development Briefing)

The university has also invested heavily in transit and mobility to ensure our community provides a range of transit options and attracts the residents and businesses who desire or depend on them. We are a major investor in the M-1 light rail line traversing the city’s major thoroughfare, we initiated a greater downtown Bike Share program that will launch in 2017 and we brought carsharing to Detroit, starting with two ZipCars on the Wayne State campus in 2011 and expanding to 23 on campus, and 58 throughout the city, today. Each fall, the university provides month-long free city bus passes to all student living on campus, and we promote walking and biking through various initiatives, including Bike to Work Day and the annual Baroudeur bike
ride, which brought 1000 cyclists to Midtown in 2015, its inaugural year, with proceeds supporting student scholarships.

Spearheaded by the Office of Economic Development (OED), the university has also undertaken numerous placemaking initiatives. Employing the “small-scale intervention” concept known as tactical urbanism, the initiatives are designed to be inexpensive and flexible, while encouraging interaction and a sense of place. Initiatives have included: Walk [Wayne State], featuring quirky, temporary signs that alert campus regulars and visitors to the many noteworthy destinations that are a short walk or bike ride away; Park(ing) Day, which turns parking spaces into temporary urban parks and art installations from the Detroit Institute of Arts. The most successful initiative yet sounds basic but has had a tremendous impact: flexible seating placed in strategic locations around campus to encourage interaction and engagement with public space. OED surveyed more than 500 campus and community members about these placemaking initiatives in September 2015. Responses were overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of those surveyed commenting on the seating. “Chairs and tables imply that there is a reason to stop and sit and that the area is safe enough for these ‘portable’ items to be utilized without being stolen. This communicates a feeling of friendliness and safety,” observed one respondent. Placemaking priorities are determined by a university-wide Placemaking Committee, and projects are executed with the assistance of the WSU PlaceMakers, a group of student volunteers.

The residents of Midtown, both on- and off-campus, contribute significantly to the neighborhood’s economic vitality: they pay property and income taxes, they increase property values and they patronize local businesses, among many other investments. To maximize the benefit to local businesses, Wayne State’s Office of Economic Development leads several initiatives to connect local businesses with the growing campus community, including publication of business guides and discount books, a “Show Your One Card and Save” student/employee discount program, and numerous opportunities for local businesses to “pop up” on campus. A recent study estimated that expenditures in Detroit due to Wayne State students alone were $55 million in 2013 (Anderson Economic Group, “The Economic Impact of Wayne State University’s Midtown Detroit Location,” February 13, 2015.). Wayne State’s placemaking, transit and mobility efforts were recently recognized with an Exemplary Innovation Award from local organization Transit Riders United (TRU). TRU noted that WSU has “shown how, even in unexpected places, creativity and innovative approaches can promote a vibrant, connected community in Detroit.”