

ORDINANCE NO. 03-67 AC CMS

AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN FOR THE CITY OF OBERLIN, OHIO, AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY

WHEREAS, Main Street Oberlin and the City have been working together to create a plan to revitalize the downtown area of Oberlin, Ohio; and

WHEREAS, City Council through the enactment of Ordinance No. 02-92 AC CMS adopted the Downtown Revitalization Plan recommended by the Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio Department of Development has suggested that some additional information be included in the Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Oberlin Planning Commission has recently reviewed the Plan and recommends certain modifications; and

WHEREAS, the updated "Revitalization Plan" must be in place and formally adopted by Council in order for the City to submit a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Downtown Revitalization Application to the State by September 30, 2003.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Council of the City of Oberlin, County of Lorain, State of Ohio, five-sevenths (5/7ths) of all members elected thereto concurring:

SECTION 1. That the Revitalization Plan for the Downtown, City of Oberlin, as submitted, a copy being on file with the Clerk of Council, is hereby formally adopted by Oberlin City Council.

SECTION 2. It is hereby found and determined that all formal actions of this Council concerning or relating to the adoption of this Ordinance were adopted in an open meeting of this Council, and that all deliberations of this Council and of any of its committees that resulted in such formal action, were in meetings open to the public in compliance with all legal requirements, including Section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

SECTION 3. That this ordinance is hereby declared to be an emergency measure necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health and safety of the citizens of the City of Oberlin, Ohio,

or to provide for the usual daily operations of a municipal department, to wit:

"in order to allow for the timely application for said CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program grant funding in accordance with all applicable procedures",

and shall take effect immediately upon passage.

PASSED: 1st Reading – September 2, 2003 (E)
2nd Reading –
3rd Reading –

ATTEST:


CLERK OF COUNCIL


CHAIR OF COUNCIL

POSTED: September 3, 2003

EFFECTIVE DATE: September 3, 2003

City of *Oberlin*

85 South Main Street, Oberlin, Ohio 44074
(440) 775-1531

To: President and Members of City Council
From: Rob DiSpirito, City Manager *RdS*
Subject: Downtown Revitalization Grant Update
Date: January 12, 2005

Please find attached a copy of a recent report from Main Street Oberlin concerning the CDBG Downtown Revitalization Grant program. This report provides an update on Main Street's progress in implementing this grant, and seeks direction related to a possible increase in individual grant awards and on a future grant application.

Main Street's proposal to increase individual grant awards seems to be acceptable, and would ensure that all available grant funds are utilized to the benefit of downtown building and business owners. It is staff's understanding that any owners that have already participated in this grant program would also be able to apply for a second grant award depending on the availability of funds. As a result, we have no objection to Main Street's proposal to increase the size of the grant award on a matching basis.

Main Street's report also inquires as to whether the City would be interested in applying for another Downtown Revitalization Grant in the fall of this year. In this regard, staff would recommend that we consider such a grant application once we have finalized possible City projects and Main Street has some commitment that building and business owners are interested in participating as well.

Geof Comings, Main Street Program Manager, will be present at your meeting on Tuesday, January 18, 2005 to discuss this matter with Council and to answer any questions that you may have.

Should you have any questions, please contact me.

Mike Asmund

"Ohio's Best College Town"

—OHIO Magazine



January 10, 2005

To: Mr. Daniel Gardner, Council President

From: Geof Comings, Program Manager

Re: Ohio Small Cities CDBG-DTR

Dear Mr. Gardner,

The purpose of this letter is to

- 1) Update you on the progress of the \$400,000 Ohio Small Cities CDBG currently administered by Main Street Oberlin, Inc. on behalf of the City of Oberlin.
- 2) Inquire as to how Council would like to proceed with administering the grant to ensure that all funds awarded will be used by October 2005.
- 3) Begin discussions as to whether or not the City would like to apply for additional CDBG funds for 2005-2006.

One- Update

To date, 11 projects using CDBG Downtown Revitalization Funds have been either completed or in process. In addition, numerous projects have taken place downtown that did not utilize these funds.

The following chart lists all downtown building upgrades that have taken place since January of 2004. Projects that used CDBG funds have the amount used listed in the appropriate column. All other projects are projects that were completed during this time period, but did not utilize block grant funds.

Building Address	Activity	Amt. DT CDBG Funds	Amt Matching Funds	Total Project Cost
17 W. College	Electrical	\$2,687.09	\$2,687.09	\$5,374.17
29 W. College	Paint Façade	\$2,107.50	\$2,107.50	\$4,215.00
29 W. College	tuckpoint/rear windows	\$2,562.00	\$2,562.00	\$5,124.00
19 S. Main St.	Roof	\$4,910.00	\$4,910.00	\$9,820.00
18 Carpenter Ct.	Paint Exterior	\$2,362.50	\$2,362.50	\$4,725.00
32 S. Main St.	HVAC	\$3,428.00	\$3,428.00	\$6,856.00
32 S. Main St.	Electrical	\$2,539.14	\$2,539.14	\$5,078.28
53 S. Main St.	Façade Renovation	\$10,000.00	\$13,039.00	\$23,039.00
61 S. Main St.	Elec./Plumbing/Carpentry		\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
51 S. Main St.	Elec./Plumbing/Carpentry		\$48,000.00	\$48,000.00
61 S. Main St.			\$31,500.00	\$31,500.00
82 S. Main St.	Roof	\$10,000.00	\$18,992.00	\$28,992.00
84 S. Main St.	Elec./Carpentry		\$32,000.00	\$32,000.00
95 S. Main St.	Roof	\$5,200.00	\$5,200.00	\$10,400.00
96 S. Main St.	HVAC	\$4,726.00	\$4,726.00	\$9,452.00
13 S. Main St.	Remodeling		\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00
30 S. Main St.	Carpentry		\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
19 W. College St.	Elec./Plumbing/Carpentry		\$120,000.00	\$120,000.00
69 S. Main St.	Elec./Plumbing/Carpentry		\$45,076.84	\$45,076.84
		Grant Funds Used	Total Match	Downtown Rehab Total- Public/Private
		\$50,522.23	\$362,130.07	\$412,652.29

I'm happy to report that the *number of projects* that we have completed is on, or ahead of, the schedule that we predicted in our application to the Ohio Department of Development.

We are also in great shape as to the amount of total investment in the downtown.

We are *behind* schedule on the amount of grant money spent, however. That leads us to.

Two- How to proceed

It is my recommendation that, with Council's blessing, we increase the maximum possible grant award in order to use all CDBG funds before the Oct. 2005 deadline

In order to ensure that all who would like access to CDBG funds would have them available to them, the grant application stated that the *maximum grant award* would be \$10,000. It is now clear that we will be able to offer an increased sum. Poggemeyer Design Group, who is responsible for assisting Main Street Oberlin to administer this grant, has informed me that at this point it would be advisable to offer a 50% matching grant with no maximum project cost. Each project would be reviewed on a case by case basis. Doing so would likely result in a complete expenditure of CDBG-DTR funds which would enable us to apply for another Ohio Small Cities grant for 2006-2007.

Three- Future Downtown Revitalization Block Grants

It is likely that the City of Oberlin will be in a position to apply for another \$400,000 in CDBG-DTR funds (based on successfully administering the first grant). I'm confident that there will be interest on the part of the downtown building owners. In order to receive another grant, however, the City will have to commit to public projects as well. If the City is interested in pursuing another CDBG-DTR for 2006-2007, I am available to review potential projects and answer any question that you may have. The application will be due in September 2005, so it is important to start thinking about now since the grant application is incredibly time consuming.

Main Street Oberlin is able and willing to administer an additional grant should Council be so inclined.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Geof Comings
Executive Director

MOTION.

Request from Main Street Oberlin on DTR –

It is hereby moved to accept the report of the Main Street Manager on the Downtown Revitalization Grant, and to approve the proposal to increase the maximum amount of the grant award to individual building or business owners in order to provide a 50% match with no maximum project cost.

City of *Oberlin*

85 South Main Street, Oberlin, Ohio 44074
(440) 775-1531

January 21, 2005

Mr. Geof Comings
Main Street Manager
7 North Main Street
Oberlin, OH 44074

Dear Mr. Comings:

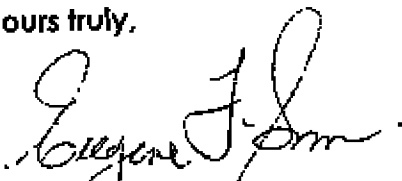
At its regular session on January 18, 2005, Oberlin City Council passed the following motion:

"Motion to accept the report of the Main Street Manager on the Downtown Revitalization Grant, and to approve the proposal to increase the maximum amount of the grant award to individual building or business owners in order to provide a 50% match with a maximum project cost that may exceed \$20,000 if approved by the Main Street Program Manager."

The motion was approved unanimously by a vote 7 Ayes - 0 Nays.

we thank you for your presentation on the Downtown Revitalization Grant Update.

Yours truly,



Eugene F. Simon, CMC
Clerk of Council

/efs

cc: Oberlin City Council Members
City Administration

"Ohio's Best College Town"

—OHIO Magazine

REPORT

City Manager's Office

To: Chair and Members of City Council

From: Rob DiSpirito, City Manager (RDS)

Subject: Downtown Development Plan

Date: August 29, 2003

City Council will recall that a "Downtown Revitalization Plan" was prepared in 2002 by the Chamber of Commerce/Main Street Program and City staff as one of the requirements for the submission of a "Downtown Revitalization" grant application to the State of Ohio Department of Development. That Plan was reviewed by the Planning Commission on August 28, 2002 and was recommended for adoption by Council. Council subsequently enacted Ordinance No. 02-92 AC CMS which adopted the Plan on September 3, 2002.

The Plan adopted last year incorporates information on existing conditions, an analysis of assets and liabilities, problems and opportunities, etc. It also includes a description of the local political, social and legal framework under which planning in the community takes place. The Plan concludes with a "vision" for downtown and a variety of implementation strategies to continue the City's and Main Street Program's efforts to improve downtown and enhance its economic stability.

It is also noted for your information that the State has recently advised communities interested in applying for a "Downtown Revitalization Program" grant that it has changed its requirements related to the matters to be included in a "Downtown Development Plan". As a result, the Main Street Program has prepared an updated Plan which addresses those additional requirements. That Plan has been submitted to and considered by the Planning Commission, and it recommends that Council adopt this updated Plan.

A copy of the updated "Downtown Development Plan" is attached for your reference.

Since the State requires that council adopt a "Downtown Development Plan" that addresses its requirements as part of our proposed grant application, legislation has been prepared for your consideration on September 2, 2003.

Should you have any questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

cc: D. Gibson, Chair, Planning Commission
G. Boyle, Planning Director
G. Comings, Manager, Main Street Program

Downtown Development Plan



Downtown Oberlin plan adopted September of 2003

Introduction

Background

The City of Oberlin has for some time been concerned with development and redevelopment issues, particularly as related to the “downtown district.” Downtown is considered to be a special place that reflects the vitality of the community, and which provides a backdrop for community interaction between members of Oberlin’s diverse population.

The City has previously undertaken streetscape improvements in the early 1980’s which are now somewhat dated. Changing demographics, and shifts in the retail market place have created concerns related to the sustainability of the downtown. In 1998, a consultant’s report on downtown clearly called for action on a number of fronts to better position downtown in the overall context of the market place (Main Street Connections). Since then, Main Street Oberlin, Inc. has taken on the National Main Street Model for revitalizing downtown districts. A full-time Main Street Manager has been engaged to assist with such efforts, and has established standing committees to deal with organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring matters.

The further enhancement of the “downtown district” should follow some agreed-to approach or plan. In this regard, this plan attempts to establish such an approach and to encourage further community discussion and action.

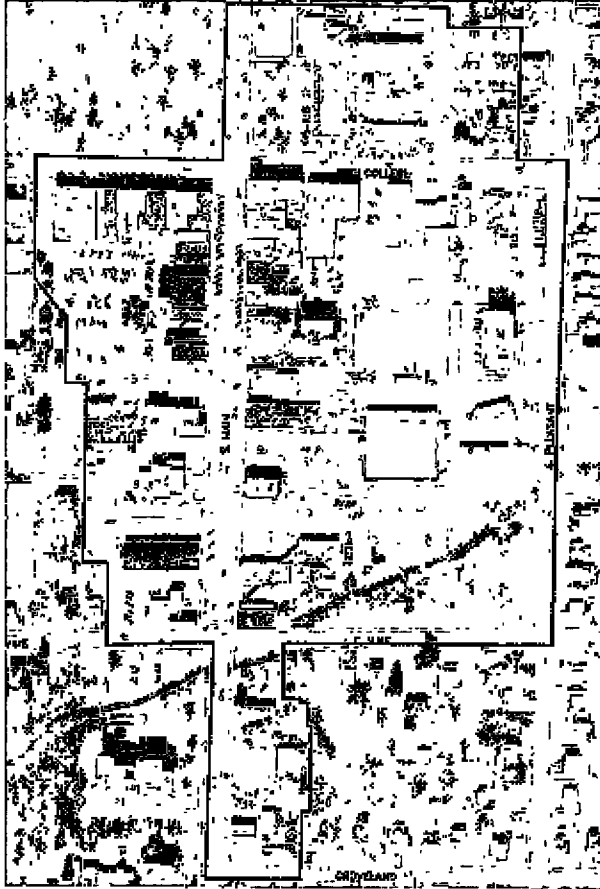
Purpose and Use

The purpose of this revitalization update is to build upon previously completed studies by bringing the concepts, thoughts and ideas together in a graphic master plan. Through plans, pictures, and supporting text, this plan articulates a concept that will guide the city, private property owners, private developers, and concerned citizens toward future improvements in downtown Oberlin. In addition to using this plan as a decision-making tool, the imagery found within this document should also be used to inspire the community, rally support, and pursue funding from both public and private resources.

INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

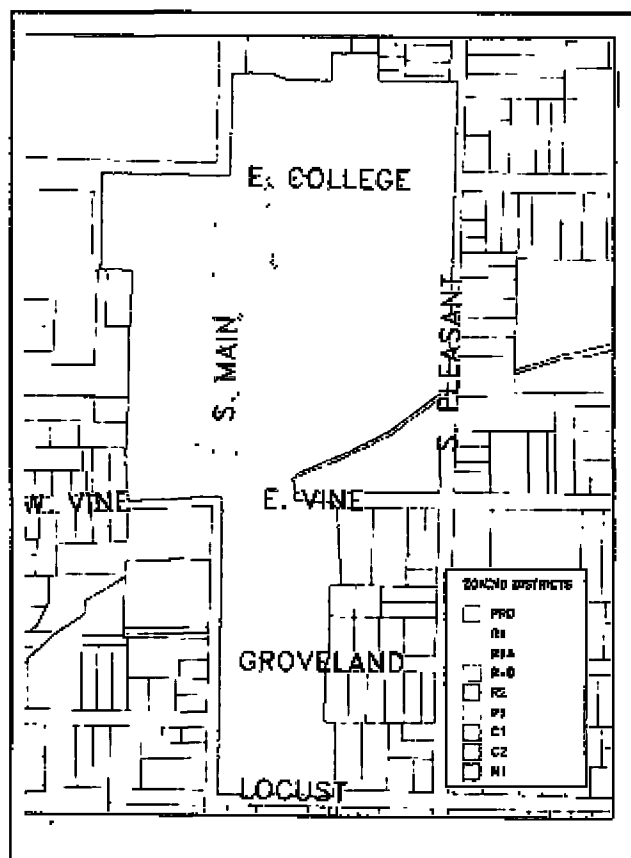
The inventory of the existing conditions of downtown Oberlin and the analysis contained in this document were collected through data collection, field observations, the previous observations of the 1998 and 2002 market studies and various studies conducted by the City of Oberlin over the course of the last three (3) years. Based on the data collected from these sources, downtown Oberlin has been evaluated on two levels. First, the physical conditions that impact the use and aesthetics of the area. Secondly, the current market issues, pending market issues, political policies, social structure, and organizational structure that affect redevelopment along the “downtown district” are also addressed.

Physical Assessment



Boundaries

- Boundaries of the Downtown Oberlin district are north to the Oberlin Inn; Groveland Street to the south; east to Pleasant Street; and west to College Place.
- The district defined above includes the historic central business district and is surrounded on the North and West by Oberlin College, the South by additional commercial, and the East by residential.
- The architecture in the district reflects an earlier era of construction that is very distinct.



Land Use & Zoning Analysis

- Commercial uses are concentrated along either side of South Main Street and the south side of West College Street, and on either side of East College Street.
- Angled and parallel parking is available along the street, with additional off-street parking located to the rear of the buildings that face South Main Street.
- Oberlin's CBD is zoned "C-1" This district provides a variety of retail, service and civic establishments, and residential use on the upper floors
- While the target area is zoned for potential residential use, many of the upper levels remain vacant and are in a state of disrepair.

Pedestrian Environment

Oberlin was once called the town of 10,000 bicycles and is home to 2,700 Oberlin College students. Therefore, the maintenance of a safe and comfortable pedestrian environment throughout the downtown district is critical to retailers and to the overall quality of life of residents.

The quality of the pedestrian environment in downtown Oberlin is generally high based on the following physical conditions:

- Minimal curb cuts interrupt pedestrian movement
- The sidewalk is open and allows for safe pedestrian movement.
- Bike and skateboard use is restricted on sidewalks in the district to allow better movement of foot traffic and to ensure the safety of walkers.
- Buildings are set at the back of the public sidewalk and provide for good visual surveillance into, out of, and along storefronts
- Parallel parking provides a barrier between moving lanes of traffic and the pedestrian sidewalk
- Mature trees provide a natural canopy along large portions of the sidewalk.
- The close proximity of a large area of open space (Tappan Square) to the district provides a venue for activities and attractions in close proximity to the district and encourages the flow of pedestrian traffic into the district.
- Proximity to the college campus results in heavy pedestrian flows.

However, several issues do exist in the district that impede the flow of pedestrian traffic throughout the district

- Decorative light fixtures installed in the district do not provide adequate light for pedestrian and vehicular users.
- Several curbs in the district are experiencing crumbling. This creates a potential hazard for walkers. Also, uneven brick pavers and shifts in the sidewalk slabs create two hazards.
- An inadequate number of bike racks exist to meet the needs of users and are poorly positioned throughout the district to encourage usage.
- The number of window air conditioning units is high in the district causing water pooling and dripping. The addition of central HVAC systems would be a positive addition to the district both for safety as well-as appearance.

Vehicular Conditions

Downtown Parking

- There are 887 parking spaces in downtown Oberlin. Of these spaces, 643 are off-street parking. The remaining 244 parking spaces are on-street parking.
- Within the downtown there are 21 handicap parking spaces.
- The number of available parking spaces found in Oberlin's downtown appears to be sufficient to meet the demand. During peak times, however, finding parking can be quite difficult.



Condition of Parking Lots

- There are 14 parking lots in Oberlin's CBD.
- The average condition of the downtown parking lots is fair. One-fourth of the lots are deteriorated, one-half are in fair condition, and one-fourth of them are in good condition.
- Section 1349.01 (d) of the Zoning Code provides that "no off-street parking or loading shall be required for individual uses located entirely within the area bounded by Lorain, Pleasant, Vine and Professor Streets" in order to recognize the existing character and pedestrian orientation in the downtown area of the City. Much of that "exempted area" forms the "downtown target district" for this plan. Any property located outside of the geographic area described under section 1349.01 (d) would, however, be subject to the off-street parking and loading requirements of the Code (i.e. that area to the south of Vine Street).



Problems Associated with Parking Downtown



- There is a limited amount of parking on the street in front of the stores
- Most of the parking in Oberlin is located behind the stores. Many first time visitors do not know about this parking and are led to believe that Oberlin does not have an adequate amount of parking. Poor signage may be the source of this misperception.
- Oberlin College Students and downtown employees often park in prime on-street parking spaces. This parking should be reserved for shoppers/customers.
- Parking areas behind stores are not attractive. Work should be done to provide improved drainage and landscaping in these lots. The rear entrances to retail shops need to be more inviting.

Traffic Patterns



- Traffic flows through the target area on two streets. Running north to south is State Route 58 (Main Street), an arterial street. College Street, a collector street, carries vehicles east and west through downtown.
- The stream of traffic is steady but manageable. The presence of turning lanes helps to ensure that traffic will move through intersections as efficiently as possible. Pedestrian traffic is often heavy at intersections, however, and it often takes several light changes for a car to get through.
- A traffic impact study conducted for the City of Oberlin calculated that by the year 2010, the volume of vehicles at the intersection of Route 58 and College Street would cause "unacceptable delays".
- A 2002 market study showed that many Oberlin residents and merchants dislike the high number of loud semi's that travel through the target area.

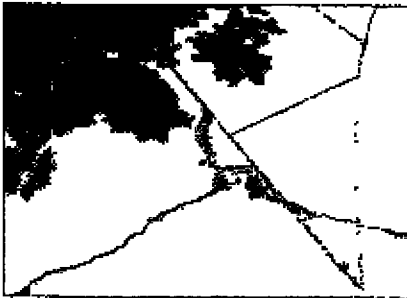


Infrastructure Conditions

Utilities

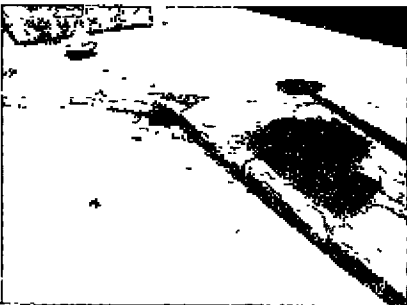
Streets

- The streets in the target area are in fair condition. These streets have no major potholes, but do have many patches. Minor repairs are necessary.



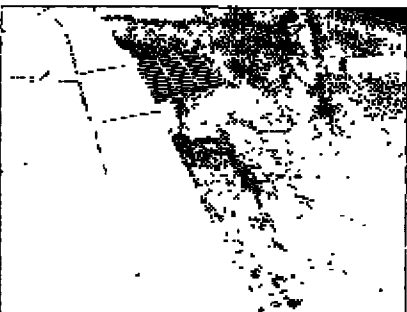
Sidewalks

- While a large percentage of the sidewalks downtown are in good condition, there is a significant portion that is in a serious state of disrepair.
- Small cracks and sections of sidewalk that have risen up are the most common deficiencies.
- Some sections are no longer level due to the growth of tree roots from the decorative trees that line Oberlin's downtown streets.
- The decorative brick border along the edge of the concrete sidewalk has begun to sink and is very uneven. This presents a safety issue, as this strip must be walked over in order to get to and from the on-street parking.



Curbs/Gutters

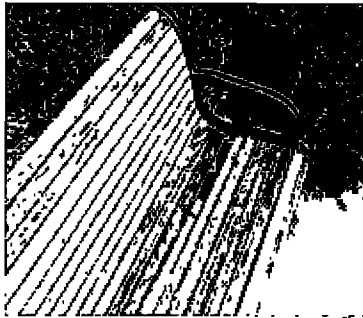
- A majority of the curbs in Oberlin's CBD are in good condition. There are some areas, however, where the curbs are cracked and crumbling.
- The gutters in downtown Oberlin are in a condition similar to that of the curbs. Ponding of storm water can occur in some areas.
- There are some areas where the gutters are in a serious state of decay. These areas are typically located near storm drains, street corners, and at parking lot entrances and exits.



Waterlines/Sewers

- The waterlines and sewers are in fair condition.

Street Furniture



- Oberlin's downtown district is in need of new street furniture.
- There are very few public places to sit in the target area.
- The public seating that does exist is in poor condition. Some of the wooden benches have broken or missing boards. In addition to those needing replacement, others are in need of paint.
- Cigarette urns were recently placed in Oberlin's downtown. This addition to the street furniture had a positive affect on the amount of cigarette butts littered throughout the downtown. Almost all of these urns have been broken, however, and should be replaced.
- Recycling stations are absent from the streetscape and should be included.
- Due to the presence of Oberlin College, many of the downtown patrons are students and professors who arrive on bicycle. More bike racks are necessary to prevent bikes from blocking the sidewalks and to deter bikers from locking their bikes to utility poles.

Lighting

- The lighting in downtown Oberlin is about 20 years old and is of average to below average condition.
- The style of the 150-watt high-pressure sodium lamp fixtures does not provide adequate light to create a safe street environment.
- Many bike riders lock their bikes to the light poles which causes damage to them. This requires painting the poles every few years.
- The bases of many poles have been damaged over time and are in need of replacement.
- Traffic signals are suspended from cable and are in need of repair. Pedestrian crosswalk signals would be of real benefit to pedestrians.



Streetscapes

- The streetscape of Oberlin's downtown is attractive. Some of the pleasing aspects of the streetscape are the large village green on the north side of College Street (Tappan Square), historic buildings, flower filled planters, and appealing window displays.
- The planters that make some areas of the downtown so attractive are not located throughout the entire CBD.
- In order to make a good first impression on visitors, sidewalks must be kept clean and litter free.
- Much could be done at the southern end of the target area to make it more attractive. This could include the repair of parking lots, landscaping that screens visually displeasing lots, and the placement of additional planters.
- Plans should be developed to fill in gaps in the façade line in order to create an enhanced streetscape and to encourage pedestrian/shopper movements throughout the entire target area. These gaps are vacant lots as well as some vacant buildings that are set back from the sidewalk.





Building Conditions

- Most of the buildings located in Oberlin's downtown appear to be in good condition. The facades are all reasonably well maintained, but many need attention to avoid the loss of significant architectural details.
- 73% of the buildings in downtown Oberlin are in need of maintenance. The most frequently cited deficiencies are leaky roofs, loose brick mortar and substandard windows.
- Most of the roofs on Oberlin's commercial buildings are flat. In areas that get a lot of snow, this style of roof can be problematic. Not surprisingly, many of the roofs in Oberlin's CBD need maintenance/ repair/ replacement
- Many of the buildings have very old windows. These windows are attractive, but many are also in poor condition. At best they are energy inefficient, while others are rotting and/or do not open and close properly.



Socio-Economic Assessment

Demographics

Oberlin is currently home to 8,195 (2000 census) residents which have the following characteristics:

- 2,700 students are currently enrolled at Oberlin College and are included in all population numbers. These students are housed in 222 households.
- There are 2,678 total households within the Oberlin City limits.
- The median household income is \$37,128
- Approximately 52.5% of Oberlin's households have incomes at or below that level.
- 71.9% of the total population is Caucasian and 18.5% is African-American with remainder being a mixture of Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian
- 49.3% of the total population is female and 36.1% male
- Due to the presence of Oberlin College, a large population of persons between the ages of 18-25 live in Oberlin.
- Roughly a quarter of the Oberlin population is age 55 or above

Social Framework

In a 1998 Main Street Connections Study the following items were observed:

- The presence of Oberlin College has created a community of idealists and activists. There seem to be as many strongly held and diverse opinions as there are people in the community. Quality of life issues such as housing, equal opportunity, the environment and historical preservation all have strong individual and organizational advocates. Problems seem to arise, however, when efforts are made to channel these diverse opinions into constructive and unified action.
- In surveys conducted within the city, attendees rated the lack of networking between organizations and the lack of a vision as the two biggest challenges facing downtown Oberlin. If the activism described above can ever be channeled and focused on a common vision of what Oberlin should become, the results could be dramatic. The fact that the community recognizes the problem bodes well for the future.
- For its size, Oberlin has an unusual amount of economic and cultural disparity. As stated earlier, a large segment of its population is living at or below the poverty level, the community's minority population percentage and older population percentage are well above the national average and, because of the influence of the College, a larger than normal percentage of its population is college educated. These elements, coupled with a relatively affluent and large student population, represent exceptional diversity that has the potential to be enriching for all. To the extent that there is segmentation among the various elements versus integration, the community as a whole suffers. As an example, some elements of the community expressed a feeling of not being welcome in downtown stores. Whether perception or reality, both they and the downtown merchants suffer as a result.

Political & Legal framework

The City of Oberlin exists as a political subdivision within Lorain County in Northeast Ohio. The City's form of government is a "charter city" with an elected council and appointed City Manager. Council is comprised of seven (7) elected members. All members are elected to two (2) year terms, and are subject to term limits (five two year terms). Council also appoints a City Solicitor, City Auditor and Clerk. Other department heads are appointed by the City Manager and other employees are appointed under civil service rules.

The City Charter provides for the establishment of various boards and commissions including the Planning Commission. Under Ohio law, the Planning Commission has many responsibilities including the development of community or comprehensive plans. Also active are the Historic Preservation Commission (following the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines) and the Design Review Sub-Committee.

The City first adopted a "Comprehensive Plan" in 1970, and developed a "Strategic Plan" in 1991 that addresses a wide variety of issues. The City is presently engaged in the development of an updated Comprehensive Plan that should be completed in mid 2003.

On August 18, 2003, City Council approved a resolution declaring the establishment of a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) for Oberlin's Central Business District. Throughout this process the City received the cooperation and approval of the Oberlin Public School Board. The CRA covers an area much larger than the target area for the Ohio Small Cities CDBG, but it should be noted that the entire area to be included in the grant is within the boundaries of the CRA.

City Council has enacted comprehensive zoning and subdivision regulations to control development within the city. The first comprehensive code was enacted in 1965, and many updates have taken place since then to keep this document contemporary. Historic preservation and design review regulations are also in place.

The City has a State-certified Building Department, and administers the Ohio Building Code.

Downtown Economic Indicators

According to an analysis of the market for the city, the following important observations have been made:

- The market for downtown Oberlin retailers can be broadly divided into three categories.
 - Oberlin College students, faculty, and staff
 - Permanent residents of Oberlin and the surrounding rural townships and non-college daytime workers
 - Shoppers and visitors from beyond a five-mile radius, including parents, alumni and other visitors to Oberlin College
- The proximity of Oberlin College to the downtown district has an enormous impact on spending in the district. It is estimated that Oberlin College students spend at least \$13.5 million per year on retail purchases, based on national statistics collected by College Trak, Inc.
- Currently there are two separate proposals for large-scale retail developments to be located in the southern portion of the City of Oberlin, approximately one mile from the central business

district. These 400,000 square foot proposals call for the duplication of some downtown services and could impact the economic viability of the district.

Market Analysis & Issues

As indicated in the market study, the market for downtown Oberlin retailers consists of many diverse and overlapping subgroups which can be divided into three categories:

- Oberlin College students, faculty, and staff
- Permanent residents of Oberlin and the surrounding rural townships and non-college daytime workers
- Shoppers and visitors from beyond a five-mile radius, including parents, alumni, and other visitors to Oberlin College

A recently completed 2002 market analysis conducted by First Avenues confirmed this earlier finding and indicated that shopping in the district is heavily influenced by the first category.

The 2002 market study also made the following conclusions based on NOACA data, shopper intercept surveys, and merchant focus groups:

- Very low retail vacancy exists in Oberlin compared to Lorain County as a whole
- There is a significantly higher percentage of office space located in the district
- Very few small retail spaces (under 1,000 square feet) are available
- People visit downtown Oberlin primarily for shopping. However, eating/dining is the second most common reason individuals visit the district.
- Most visitors identify the College as the major image of Oberlin
- The primary areas seen needing improvements were related to shopping and dining. Lack of store variety (24%) and lack of restaurant variety (13%) were cited most commonly among survey participants.
- Merchants identify lack of retail basics, lack of a cohesive plan and effort, and challenges related to the purchase and redevelopment of existing buildings as major issues deterring growth in the district.
- Merchants participating in the focus groups indicated a modest upward trend in sales over the past two to three years.

THE FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN OBERLIN

In recent years, the nature of retailing has changed dramatically. Shopping malls and “big box” retailers offer a wide variety of products at very low prices. As a result, small towns such as Oberlin, which were once social, civic and economic centers are now experiencing rising vacancy rates, falling sales and physical deterioration. This does not have to be the future, however.

Recognizing that a thriving downtown is essential to a healthy community, Oberlin has decided to take efforts that will ensure that the central business district (CBD) will not follow in the path of those towns experiencing economic decline. One way in which this will be accomplished is by obtaining the support of the community

and creating a unified vision for the downtown district. Focus groups with downtown merchants and customer surveys have already been conducted, and work will continue to ensure that all parties involved in the revitalization of downtown is focused and consistent.

The Program Manager of Main Street Oberlin, Inc. has, and will continue to, develop, conduct and execute a wide variety of activities that will enhance and promote the general welfare and prosperity of the downtown. Oberlin is fortunate to have a strong historic preservation organization. For many years, the Oberlin Historical Improvement Organization has taken on projects that have brought many visitors from both in and out of town to Oberlin's CBD. In spring of 2003, Oberlin's downtown district was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This will likely have a significant impact on the local economy as a result of heritage tourism. Oberlin's downtown has very few vacancies. A strong CBD is already in place in Oberlin, yet some problems do arise as a result of the low vacancy rate. Many of the prime ground floor storefronts are occupied by professional services rather than retail. If Oberlin's retail base is to remain stable it will be necessary to add additional retail uses that compliment the existing retailers.

On a similar note, encouraging new structures to fill in the "missing teeth" that exist in Oberlin's streetscape as well as working to promote the reuse of un-used upper floor space will further increase total available square footage of the downtown retail, office and residential space. Two projects that are applying for funds through the Ohio Small Communities CDBG will have a significant impact on the streetscape in addition to adding both retail and residential space to the downtown.

Finally, Oberlin must enhance the physical facilities downtown. The infrastructure, streetscape and condition of the buildings in the CBD all need to be upgraded. While a majority of the buildings in Oberlin's commercial district appear to be in good condition, such is not necessarily the case. With the average building age being roughly 100 years old, large amounts of structural and code work must be performed on over half of the total building stock.

Mission

Downtown Oberlin will be the center of life for the community as it has been for the past 170 years. People from Oberlin and surrounding communities will come to Oberlin's CBD to meet all cultural, civic, entertainment and shopping needs in an authentic environment.

Achieving this vision for the future of Downtown Oberlin will be a large undertaking. Oberlin has many active groups in place who are working to make this vision a reality, however.

The Main Street approach

Recognizing the needs of the downtown and creating work plans is a vital step in improving the economic and social viability of the district. Of equal or greater importance is putting revitalization strategies into effect. Now in its second year as an official Main Street Program, Main Street Oberlin is working to put revitalization plans into action.

Main Street Oberlin is led by a nine member Board of Directors including representatives from major community stakeholders, Oberlin College, the City of Oberlin, Oberlin Historical and Improvement Organization, and various members of the business community. The organization currently operates with a full-time program manager who actively supports the organization's four standing committees: Promotion, Economic Restructuring, Design, and Organization. The committees are made of community volunteers who are responsible for planning, with the assistance of the City of Oberlin, both the physical and marketing strategies of the community.

Oberlin College

Oberlin College recognizes that the continued vitality of Oberlin's downtown is imperative. The Oberlin College Campus borders the downtown on two sides. While this has benefited the businesses in town, the College also benefits. Students in Oberlin do not have to drive out of town to meet their basic needs as many of the stores in the commercial district carry a variety of goods. Students can purchase school supplies, clothing, shoes, books and many other items within a comfortable walking distance of their dorm.

The College has also realized that a downtown plagued by vacancies and deteriorating buildings would deter prospective students. For this reason the College works with Main Street Oberlin and other Oberlin organizations to ensure that the downtown will continue as Oberlin's civic, social and shopping center.

City of Oberlin

City officials have long been committed to preserving the downtown district. In addition to routine maintenance and utility upgrades, the City has several commissions that work to improve the CBD. The City also hired a local preservation organization, the Oberlin Historic Improvement Organization, to submit an application to the National Park Service to place the downtown on the National Register of Historic Places. In spring of 2003 Oberlin's Downtown District was placed on the National Register.

Through the commitment of these organizations and many others, Oberlin's historic downtown will indeed remain the center of life for hundreds of years to come.

Physical Strategies/Goals for Achieving Downtown Mission

The following activities are encouraged to improve the physical quality of the district.

- Promote preservation of architectural heritage
- Total replacement of all street furniture within five years
- Address the numerous issues that surround privately-owned off-street parking
- Long range strategy regarding the ownership and improvements of off-street parking
- Review of the "Sign Code" for the central business district to make it more compatible with the district's historic nature.
- Financial incentives to encourage private business owners to undertake sensitive adaptive reuse such as upper floor residential or office.
- Expand the district to include frontage along S. Main Street between Vine Street and Groveland Street.
- Address the perception of limited parking in the district through the use of angled parking on S. Main between Vine and Groveland Streets and potentially the north side of West College.

- Address the deterioration of curbs and sidewalks in the district with ongoing maintenance and replacements
- Encourage adoption of urban design guidelines related the buildings and street surfaces
- Maximize the overall aesthetic appearance of the district through effective signage, storefront design, window merchandising and the increase of banners, flower baskets and street planters in the district.
- Improve the appearance of the rears of buildings through building improvements, screening dumpsters, attractive low landscaping, fencing, etc.
- Strengthen the visibility, safety and attractiveness of pedestrian crosswalks
- Cluster new compatible retail with similar existing retail
- Connect the commercial district to existing and potential future bikeways and maintain the district's bicycle friendliness with signage, bike racks, etc.
- Create attractive gateways into the community and the downtown with attractive architectural elements and signage.
- Install additional directional and informational signage in downtown and along corridors leading to it.
- Enhance the appearance of building rears, create multiple, attractive corridors from parking areas to storefronts and combine with visible, attractive signage.
- Promote better way-finding signage to downtown from the "North Coast Inland Trail" (bike path).

Downtown Housing/Additional Retail

A 1998 Market Study by Main Street Connections noted in a section entitled "A vision for the future" several key issues that should be addressed in order to stabilize the downtown. Adding upper floor office space and residences and a gradual increase in the density of development in downtown were identified to be of great importance to this end. At present, there is one major project that has been proposed for the downtown that addresses both of these issues.

The proposed redevelopment of 43 E. College Street (with options on additional properties) will create 60-80 new housing units in Oberlin's historic downtown district, it will build additional retail space which will serve to expand the retail base that will compliment existing retailers and add critical mass, and will extend the City's streetscape and draw shoppers to the eastern edge of downtown. The block of E. College has just one vacant building, but pedestrian counts are considerably lower here than on the W. College block. Creating a strong anchor for this block will draw shoppers further east and will increase the use of the entire downtown area.

The proposed project is exploring building mixed income housing with retail on the first floor and several live/work spaces. The addition of so many new residential units in the CBD will have a positive effect on the businesses downtown. Customer intercept surveys conducted on July 11, 2003 were used to determine that a greater variety of goods must be made available in downtown Oberlin in order to keep local dollars in town. More variety of restaurants and clothing were frequently mentioned in the 75 surveys conducted on this day. Also frequently mentioned was the need for "more crowd", "like to see more people downtown" and other such responses. With a greater number of downtown residents will come more downtown activity- both social and economic.

Marketing Strategies

Community Marketing

Marketing Strategies

Community Marketing

Currently the Main Street Oberlin Promotion Committee is responsible for the organization of the community's overall marketing program. The Committee worked with the Oberlin Area Chamber of Commerce, supported financially by \$40,000 in bed tax fund collected by the City of Oberlin, to organize and promote the following activities in 2002/2003:

- Juneteenth Festival
- Summer Concert Series
- Vintage Days Festival & Family Fun Fair
- Easter Egg Hunt
- The Big Parade
- Bicentennial Quilt Show
- Organization website (www.oberlin.org)

These events all draw residents and visitors to the historic downtown. Each year tens of thousands of people attend the many events that entertain and educate attendees.

In May of 2003 the Oberlin Area Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Oberlin, Inc. worked together to help create a 16 page promotional insert in Northern Ohio Live. It is estimated that over 130,000 people read this magazine. The insert advertised local businesses, events and places of interest in Oberlin

The following marketing strategies are proposed or encouraged for Oberlin:

- Identify an image for the district and market that to residents and visitors
- Promote a positive retail/business environment for the successful operation of businesses in downtown Oberlin through events and activities such as:
 - Joint advertising
 - Downtown shopping guide
 - The merger of arts and cultural events with retail opportunities
 - Greater links for businesses to existing website
 - The continuation of and expansion of existing special events
 - The creation of a large scale festival in the district
- Cultivate individual habits of coming downtown through special events and festivals
- Maintain and expand the existing website at www.oberlin.org
- Promote cultural and heritage tourism opportunities through promotion of an African-American Heritage tour
- Promote cultural and heritage tourism opportunities through the creation of a walking tour brochure with the Oberlin Historical and Improvement Organization.