

## **ORDINANCE NO. 10-33 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 an updated 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, City Council through the enactment of Ordinance No. 03-67 AC CMS adopted an updated Downtown Revitalization Plan; and

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio Department of Development has identified that some additional information is to be included in such Plans; and

WHEREAS, the Oberlin Planning Commission has recently reviewed the Plan and recommends adoption of that Plan; and

WHEREAS, the updated "Revitalization Plan" must be in place and formally adopted by Council in order for the City to submit a Preliminary Threshold Application under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Downtown Revitalization Program to the State by May 21, 2010.

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 Downtown Revitalization and Development Plan for the City of Oberlin, 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 operation of a municipal department, to wit:

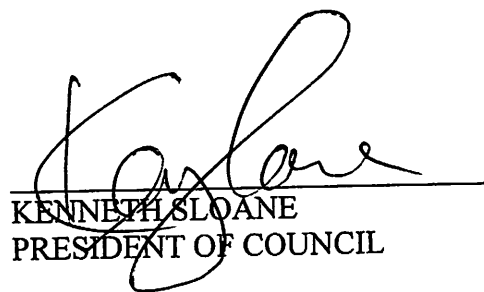
*“in order to allow for the timely submission of a Preliminary Threshold Application under the FY 2010 CDBG Comprehensive Downtown Revitalization Grant Program in accordance with all applicable procedures and requirements”,*

and shall take effect immediately upon passage.

PASSED: 1<sup>st</sup> Reading – May 17, 2010 (S)(E)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Reading –  
3<sup>rd</sup> Reading –

ATTEST:

  
BELINDA B. ANDERSON, CMC  
CLERK OF COUNCIL

  
KENNETH SLOANE  
PRESIDENT OF COUNCIL

POSTED: 05/18/2010

EFFECTIVE DATE: 5/17/2010



City of Oberlin, Ohio

# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN: 2010 UPDATE

Draft: 13 May 2010

Date of Adoption: \_\_\_\_\_



OBERLIN, OHIO  
 Downtown Revitalization and Development Plan Update 2010

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## I. Introduction

### Background

Downtown Oberlin has served as the focus of economic, social, cultural, educational and governmental activities for the Oberlin community and its surrounds for well over 175 years. In recent years, various programs and projects have been implemented in order to support and strengthen the downtown area as it has experienced shifting economics and market patterns, and as the buildings and supportive infrastructure have aged and been incrementally renewed.

In recent decades, several significant events stand out:

- In the 1980's, the City constructed streetscape improvements which, after nearly 30 years of service, are now undergoing repairs but are in need of updating and/or replacement.
- A 1998 market study focused on the need to reposition the downtown in the regional market, especially in the face of anticipated competition from new retail districts and big box development in the area.
- In 2002, Main Street Oberlin Inc. was established to bring the National Main Street Model to Downtown Oberlin with a full-time Main Street Manager to facilitate local efforts in organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring.
- In 2003, Downtown Oberlin was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a result of the efforts of the City of Oberlin and of the Oberlin Historic Improvement Organization (Oberlin Heritage Center).
- In 2003, the City was awarded a grant of \$400,000 from the Ohio Department of Development which was utilized to upgrade public right-of-way intersection signals and pedestrian crossings. Matching private investments focused on repair and upgrades of building conditions, including but not limited to windows, electrical systems, and the roofs of several buildings.
- In 2005, the City was awarded a second \$400,000 grant which provided assistance for private building rehab and infrastructure improvements.
- In January 2010, Main Street Oberlin merged with the Oberlin Chamber of Commerce to share resources, reduce costs, and to continue and improve the activities of the previously separate organizations. The new organization is called the Oberlin Main Street-Chamber or OMSC.

### Purpose and Use

The purpose of this document is to support and encourage continued redevelopment, development, design, promotion, and economic enhancement activities and improvements in Downtown Oberlin. This will be accomplished by:

- Continuing the base line of information about Downtown conditions which has been established and updated in previous downtown plans.
- Reviewing and summarizing improvements and changes made in the Downtown since the most recent Downtown Plan Update (2003).
- Cataloguing new and planned developments which will impact Downtown.
- Identifying opportunities and issues to be addressed.
- Identifying potential future projects which will benefit Downtown Oberlin by taking advantage of the opportunities and/or resolving or mitigating the issues.
- Encouraging continued and expanded coordination of the efforts of the collaborators who support Downtown, including but not limited to property owners and businesses, the Main Street Program/Chamber of Commerce, the City of Oberlin, and Oberlin College.

## II. Inventory and Analysis

This Section II: Inventory and Analysis presents an assessment of the physical features of Downtown Oberlin. It is based, in part, on past assessments supplemented by updated observations made by Northstar Planning & Design LLC.

This Section is also informed, in part, by the extensive report prepared in March 2010 by the Oberlin Main Street – Chamber Design Committee titled Conditions Assessment and Recommendations for Downtown Oberlin Streetscape. The principal author of this report is Elizabeth Andre' Tisher, with Nathan Engstrom, contributor. The report project was overseen by several volunteer members of the Design Committee, including Chairperson Barry Richard, Walker Brock, Melissa Duffes, and Dennis Grieve. This report is focused upon streetscaping and building conditions. It provides a comprehensive assessment of those features and includes well-considered recommendations or guidelines for repairs and improvements.

### Physical Assessment

#### Boundaries

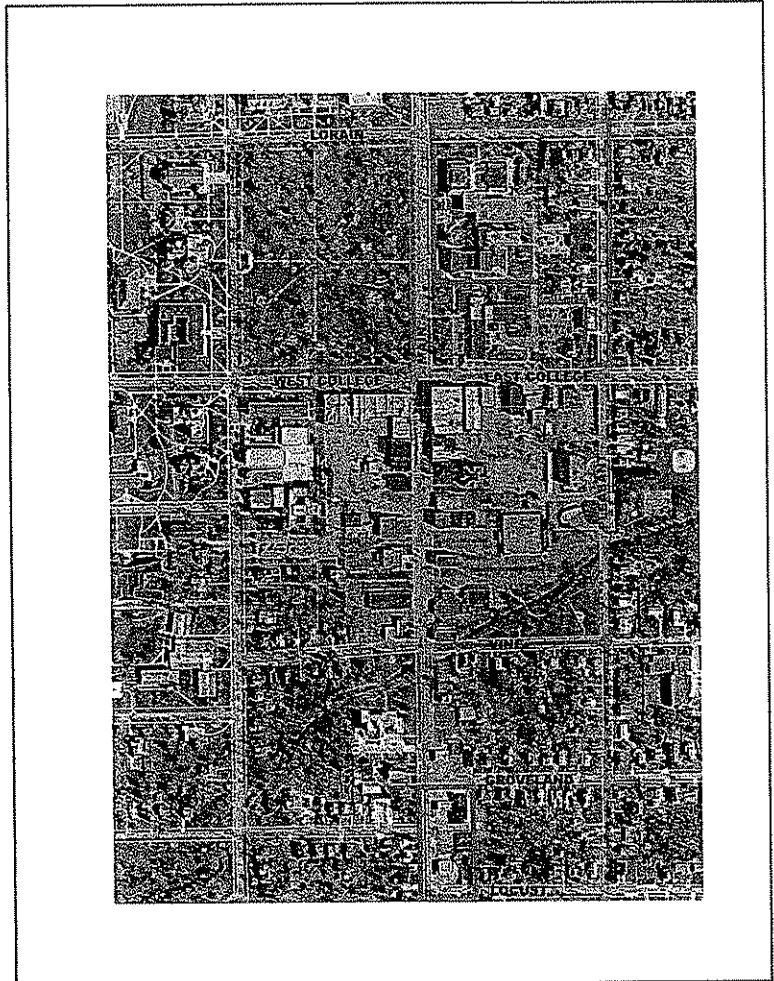
The existing boundaries of the Downtown program area are illustrated on the aerial photograph below.

The boundaries are selected to define the area which encompasses the businesses, structures, and streets which are the essential functional elements of the downtown. The boundaries also define the potential project benefit area for grants and associated local investments.

A new area has been added to the earlier outline of the Downtown area. This new area is the public right-of-way of Main Street from College Street north to and including the intersection with Lorain Street. This area is recommended as an addition due to the importance of the Main/Lorain intersection to the functioning of the Main/College intersection which was upgraded with a 2003 CDBG grant.

Also illustrated are two areas recommended for consideration for future expansion of the Downtown area.

- The first expansion would extend the District northward to Lorain Street between Main and Pleasant Streets. This expansion would bring the proposed Oberlin College Green Arts District (see description later in text) into the official Downtown program area.



- The second expansion, which was considered but not implemented in the previous Downtown Plan, would extend south along the east side of Main to Locust Street. This area would be a southerly extension of Downtown encompassing existing businesses which exhibit a different development pattern and character from the northerly traditional central business area. This area is, nonetheless, an integral southerly approach to Downtown and has the potential to support future infill and redevelopment and add to the critical market mass of the whole. Also, with appropriate planning and design controls applied to that area, an enhanced gateway into downtown would be created.

At this time, it is uncertain whether inclusion of either of these two areas will benefit the overall downtown plan and future programs.



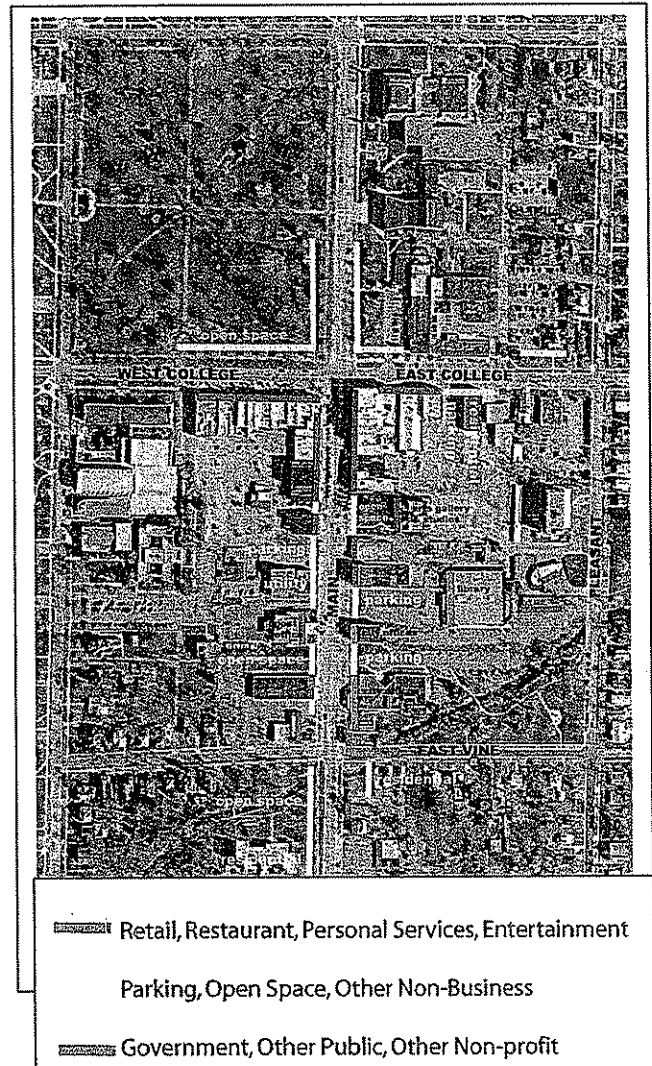
### Downtown Development Pattern

The Downtown is shaped like a “T”, with Main Street and East/West College Streets forming the legs of the “T”. Downtown commercial activity is focused on these streets, with Main Street carrying a significant amount of regional north-south through traffic.

In the downtown, commercial activity is found on both sides of Main Street from College Street south to Vine Street and also on a portion of East College Street. These two-sided commercial frontages give the impression of greater intensity of commercial activity. West College Street, the easterly portion of East College Street, and Main Street south of Vine Street have commercial uses on only one side of the street and exhibit less commercial intensity.

It is also noted that there is a cluster of government service uses in the central area of Main Street- the library, municipal court, post office and city hall. While these uses are important and contribute to downtown activity in significant ways, they are not commercial uses in the common sense and create a break in the more cohesive commercial frontages.

The illustration at right highlights several of the distinct breaks in the continuity of the frontages dedicated to retail, restaurants, entertainment, and personal services (red bars). Some of these “breaks” should be recognized as potential future infill or redevelopment opportunities in support of a more cohesive business environment. Where possible, retail, restaurant, and entertainment uses should be clustered to promote pedestrian/shopper activity and movement from one establishment to the next. This is the concept on which pedestrian-oriented shopping centers are organized.



Given that the Downtown is relatively small and very walkable, the impacts of these façade breaks may be modest provided that they are well-maintained and support a continuous pedestrian environment. As noted later in this Plan, some of these locations may provide opportunities for pockets of expanded public or semi-public pedestrian activity along the rights-of-way.

In discussion with Oberlin Main Street – Chamber members, it was noted that pedestrian-visitors tend to “walk and shop” the West College frontages and the northerly portion of the South Main frontages but are then deterred from further walking and shopping by the visual and functional gaps in the south half of the block. Retail and restaurant uses south of those gaps do not then benefit from the presence and shopping potential which those visitors bring to Downtown.

**Land Use**

The land uses in the Downtown Oberlin area are primarily commercial uses, service uses, and government uses, together with supportive secondary functions such as parking lots. Notable exceptions are the Oberlin College residential apartment tower on Pleasant Street and MLK Park at the intersection of Pleasant and Vine Streets.

A survey of the existing uses in Downtown, on all floors of existing buildings, was prepared by the Director of Oberlin Main Street-Chamber. Existing uses and vacancies are listed on the tables below.

**West College Street: south side of street, from west to east**

Address	Ground Floor Business	Second Story Function(s)	Third Story Function(s)
(College Place alley)	(College Place alley)	n/a	n/a
37 W. College	Oberlin Bookstore	academic offices	n/a
29 W. College	Bead Paradise	photo studio (front) and retail (rear)	n/a
27 W. College	Tooo Chinese	rental apartments	n/a
25 W. College	Smith's Furnishings	professional office and music studio	rental apartment
23 W. College	Gibson's Bakery	bakery workspace	bakery workspace
19-21 W. College	Velvet Turtle (west half bldg.)	rental apartment	vacant
19-21 W. College	Agave Burrito (east half bldg.)	professional office	vacant
17 W. College	Carlyle Flowers & Gifts	professional offices	n/a
13 W. College	Ben Franklin (west building)	music studio	n/a
13 W. College	Ben Franklin (east building)	professional offices	n/a
7 W. College	Herrick Jewelry	professional offices	n/a
5 W. College	Java Zone	service (hair salon)	n/a
(South Main Street)	(South Main Street)	n/a	n/a

**East College Street: north side of street from west to east**

Address	Ground Floor Business	Second Story Function(s)	Third Story Function(s)
(North Main Street)	(North Main Street)	n/a	n/a
20 E. College	Cellular Central	hotel rooms	n/a
(pedestrian walkway)	(pedestrian walkway)	n/a	n/a
24 E. College	Lorain National Bank	n/a	n/a
32 E. College	Petrill, DDS	n/a	n/a
40 E. College	Lorain National Bank	n/a	n/a
(Willard Court alley)	(Willard Court alley)	n/a	n/a
58 E. College	Shansi House	apartments (visiting academic)	n/a

East College Street: south side of street from west to east

Address	Ground Floor Business	Second Story Function(s)	Third Story Function(s)
(North Main Street)	(North Main Street)	n/a	n/a
5-9-11 S. Main (E. College frontage)	First Merit Bank (E. College frontage)	professional offices and service	professional offices, service, apartment
(alley)	(alley)	n/a	n/a
17-19-21 E. College	Manuel Barber / Apollo Theater / Ross Insurance	vacant	n/a
27 E. College	Cable Co-op	rental apartments	n/a
(driveway)	(driveway)	n/a	n/a
35 E. College	Pearson residence (art studio)	family residential living space	n/a
(planned new alley)	(planned new alley)	n/a	n/a
(55 E. College)	retail (planned)	residential (planned rental & condo)	residential (planned rental & condo)
(65 E. College)	retail (planned)	residential (planned rental & condo)	residential (planned rental & condo)
(Internal alley)	(future business)	Under construction	n/a

South Main Street: west side of the street from north to south

Address	Ground Floor Business	Second Story Function(s)	Third Story Function(s)
(West College Street)	(West College Street)	n/a	n/a
5 W. College (S. Main frontage)	JavaZone	service (hair salon) and rental apartments	n/a
16 S. Main	Ade's Place	rental apartment	n/a
18 S. Main	Subway	n/a	n/a
20 S. Main	Edward Jones	n/a	n/a
24 S. Main	Workshop Gallery	rental apartment	n/a
26 S. Main	Watson Hardware	rental apartments	rental apartments
30 S. Main	The Feve	bar / restaurant	n/a
32 S. Main	Main Office Copy Shop	rental apartment	rental apartment
(vacant lot)	(vacant lot)	n/a	n/a
22 Carpenter Ct. (rear vacant lot)	Oberlin Market	rental apartments	n/a
38 S. Main	Main Street Menu	rental apartment	n/a
40 S. Main	Modern Beauty Salon	service (yoga studio)	n/a
42 S. Main	Oberlin News-Tribune	service (yoga studio)	n/a
(Carpenter Court alley)	(Carpenter Court alley)	n/a	n/a
52 1/2 S. Main (rear Carpenter Ct.)	Lorenzo's Pizza	n/a	n/a
(Verizon parking lot)	(parking lot)	n/a	n/a
56 S. Main	Verizon	storage / equipment / vacant	(rear only third story – storage / equipment / vacant)
(driveway)	(driveway)	n/a	n/a
68 S. Main	US Post Office	n/a	n/a
(vacant lot)	(vacant lot)	n/a	n/a
82 S. Main	The Bridge / Mandarin / Lupita's	n/a	n/a
90 S. Main	Midas	n/a	n/a
(East Vine Street)	(East Vine Street)	n/a	n/a

## South Main Street: north to south

Address	Ground Floor Business	Second Story Function(s)	Third Story Function(s)
(East College Street)	(East College Street)	n/a	n/a
east side of the street 5-9-11 S. Main	First Merit / Weia Teia / Aries Style Salon	professional offices and service	professional offices, service, apartment
13 S. Main	John Cole Accounting	professional office, storage, workshop	rental apartment
15 S. Main	Black River Cafe		apartment /office and rental apartment (rear)
19 S. Main	Ginko Gallery	n/a	n/a
21 S. Main	Sperry-Gorske	rental apartment	n/a
23 S. Main	Campus Cleaners (vacant)	vacant	n/a
27 S. Main	Infinite Monkey	vacant	n/a
29 S. Main	Dave's Army-Navy	vacant	n/a
31 S. Main	Oberlin Wellness	n/a	n/a
39 S. Main	New Union Center for the Arts	offices and classrooms	performance space
(driveway)	(driveway)	n/a	n/a
47 S. Main	Lormet Credit Union	n/a	n/a
(alley)	(alley)	n/a	n/a
51-53 S. Main	Fresh Start Diner (Under Const'n) / Yesterdays Ice Cream	art studio space	n/a
65 S. Main	Oberlin Public Library	n/a	n/a
69 S. Main	Old City Hall	professional offices	storage
(driveway)	(driveway)	n/a	n/a
85 S. Main	City Hall / Oberlin Police	n/a	n/a
95 S. Main	Campbell Antiques	retail	n/a
(East Vine Street)	(East Vine Street)	n/a	n/a
13 E. Vine	Puffer's Flowers	n/a	n/a
(Plum Creek and bridge)	(Plum Creek and bridge)	n/a	n/a
117 S. Main	W. Reserve Land Conservancy	vacant	n/a
121 S. Main	vacant (house)	vacant	n/a
133 S. Main	Knife Cleaner / Beethoven Bagels	n/a	n/a
141 S. Main	Full Circle Fuels	n/a	n/a
(Groveland Street)	(Groveland Street)	n/a	n/a

### **New and Planned Developments**

Three major developments are under construction or planned within or abutting Downtown Oberlin. All three will have significant impacts on Downtown and include:

- East College Street Project. This mixed use development is under construction in the southwest quadrant of the intersection of East College and South Pleasant Streets. The current phase includes two structures of three stories each intended to house new commercial space (22,000 sq ft) and 33 condominium residences. A third building is now under construction for business uses.

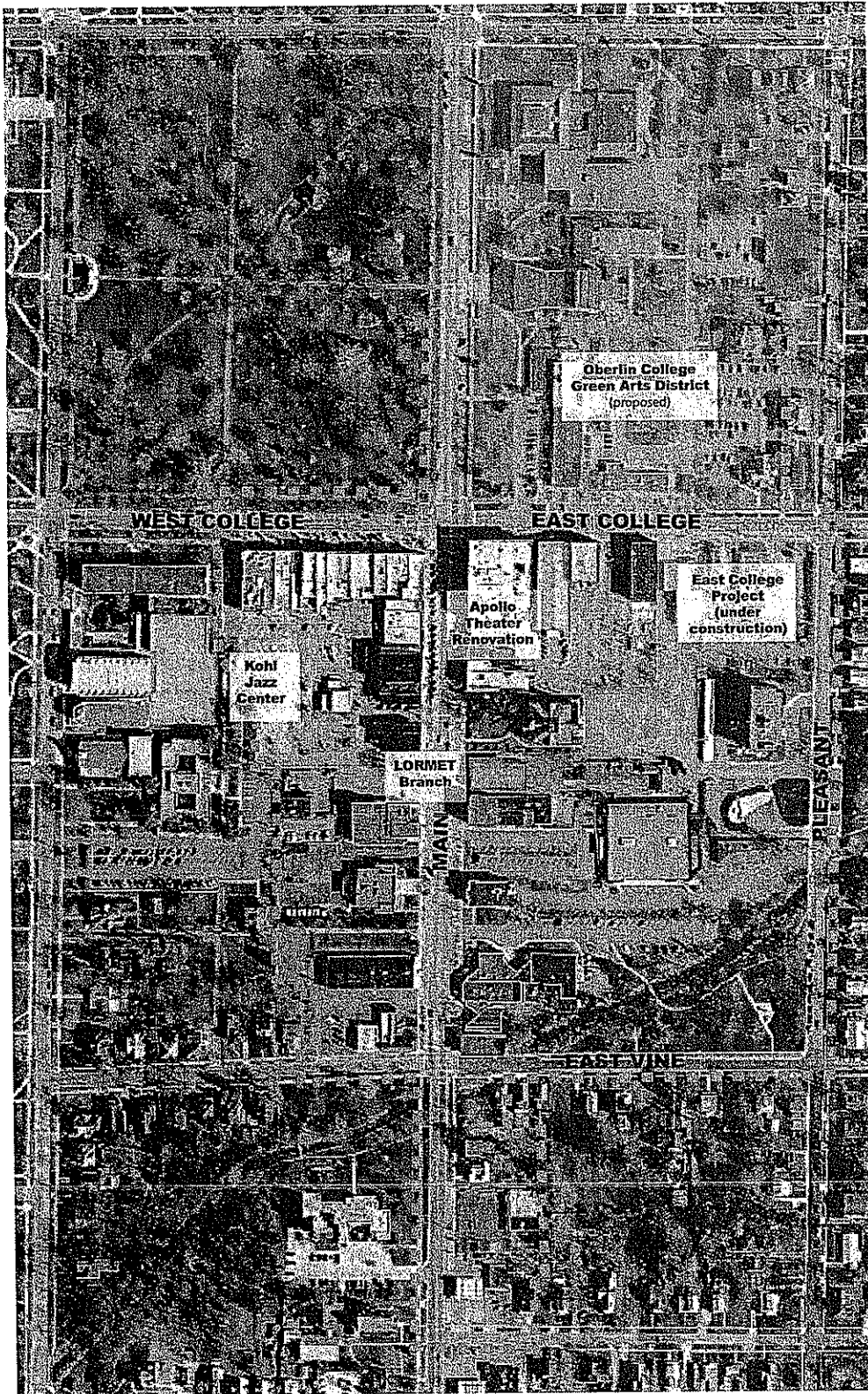
This development is an important new expansion of the Downtown. When fully occupied, it will extend and intensify the commercial use area along the south frontage of East College Street and include new condominium housing. In the next phase, an additional office structure is planned at the rear of the property.

- Kohl Jazz Center (Oberlin College). This facility expands the space available to jazz students and faculty when this building opens in the first half of 2010. In addition to jazz studies, the facility will house the music history and music theory departments, a recording studio and a large collection of jazz memorabilia. It will be the world's first music facility to earn a gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification. Of significance for downtown is the potential to market to visitors attending performances at this new facility.
- Oberlin College Green Arts District. A small portion of the designated Downtown (the north side of West College Street) is included within the proposed Green Arts District, a block bound by East College, Pleasant, Lorain, and Main Streets. Oberlin College is studying the potential for creating the Green Arts District to include a new Oberlin Inn and conference center with additional uses under consideration including new retail space, classrooms, art library, practice rooms, and student housing. The intent is to coordinate all uses within a model sustainable development utilizing green building design and technologies. A design which reflects a functional and aesthetic integration with the existing Downtown would benefit both the Green Arts District and the Downtown.

Two significant reinvestments in existing buildings are also underway:

- The LORMET Community Federal Credit Union has purchased the former American Automobile Association building on Main Street and is reconstructing both the interior and exterior to provide a new full service branch.
- The Apollo Theater has recently completed a major reconstruction project which updated this historic movie theater facilities at a cost of approximately \$1.2 million dollars. An additional investment is anticipated to expand the second floor facilities and provide an additional screening room.

The locations of the foregoing projects are illustrated on the aerial on the next page.



**Zoning**

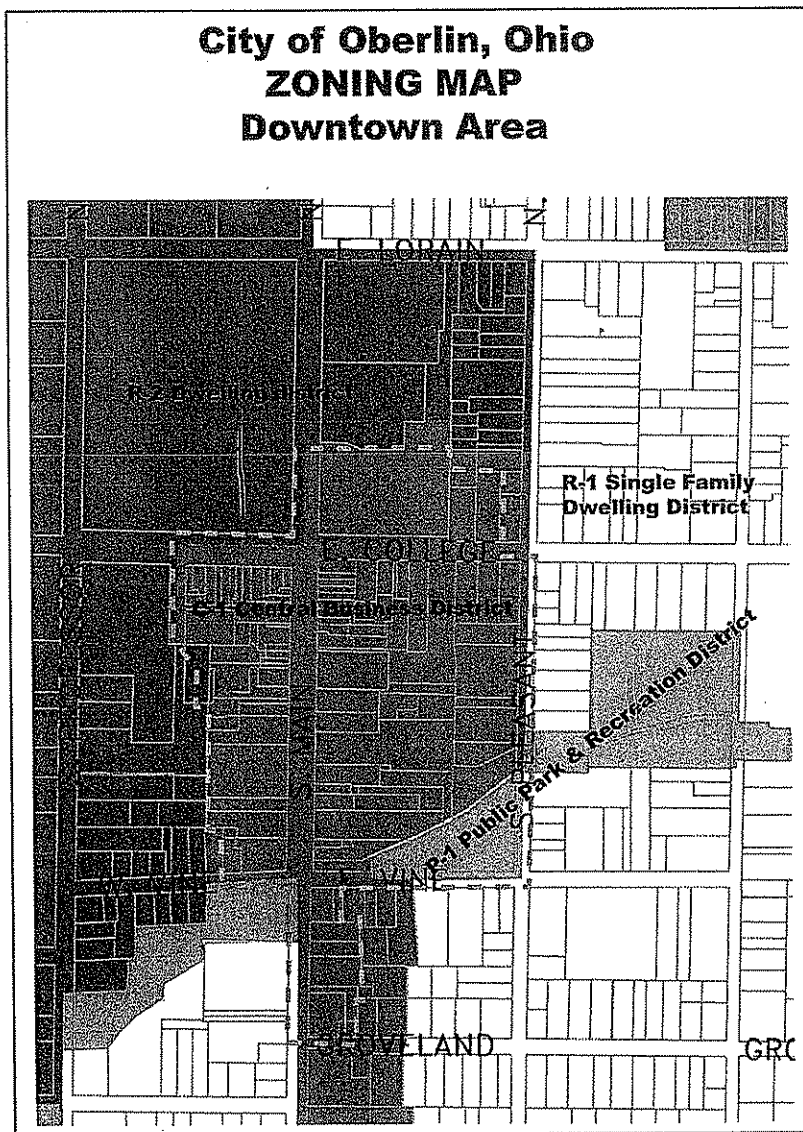
Most of the area identified as Downtown Oberlin is classified in the “C-1 Central Business District” in the Oberlin Planning and Zoning Code.

The C-1 District permits a wide variety of retail and service uses in addition to dining, entertainment, public, and semi-public uses. Residential uses are permitted on floors other than the first floor or street level of a building. The C-1 District is exempted from parking requirements due to the built character of the area.

The Oberlin Planning Commission continues to review the C-1 District zoning standards to ensure that they support economic activity, historic preservation, and quality design in structures, site improvements, and signs.

Much of the proposed “Green Arts District” and College property to the west of Main Street is zoned “R2” Dwelling District.

A section of the Zoning Map is shown below with the Downtown area highlighted.





### **Building Conditions**

Existing and future activity of all types in the Downtown require locations within good to excellent quality buildings. Maintaining buildings is, therefore, essential to the continued viability of this important area.

Many of the dominant structures and their facades in Downtown Oberlin were constructed in the mid to late 1800's. Their historic character creates the historic character and charm of the Downtown. Due to the age of these buildings, they have experienced many years of use, wear, and alteration. They were constructed in a time when issues such as energy efficiency, handicapped accessibility, and rapidly advancing communication technologies were not factors in their design and materials.

As a consequence, while the historic appearance of these historic structures is generally attractive, many facades have received historically inappropriate alterations and less visible functional features such as roofs, electrical, HVAC, plumbing, and insulation are often out of date. In many cases, too, building conditions are deteriorated due to exposure, wear, and other factors.

It was noted in the 2003 Downtown Plan that "most of the buildings 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." A visual survey indicates that, in general, this continues to be the case. In recent years, the efforts of property owners have resulted in historically appropriate improvements to some facades. The efforts of the Planning Commission and its Design Review Subcommittee in providing guidance in design review have also had a positive impact.

The 2003 Downtown Plan also noted that "73% of the buildings in downtown Oberlin are in need of maintenance. The most frequently cited deficiencies are leaky roofs, loose mortar and substandard windows." This statement is also believed to remain generally true although the East College project, now under construction, required the demolition of at least one building in marginal to poor condition and one in good condition, both of which are being replaced with new buildings.

The 2003 Downtown Plan noted that the many flat roofs found on the historic buildings are problematic due to the effects of snow and that "many need maintenance/repair/replacement." It is believed that this continues to be the case.

The 2003 Plan also noted that the windows in many of these old structures are deteriorated, dysfunctional, and energy inefficient. Where the windows suit the character of the buildings and have been maintained, they are often attractive features. The closing up of original window openings or replacement with inappropriate newer windows is a continued threat to the character of the structures and the area.

The Conditions Assessment and Recommendations for Downtown Oberlin Streetscape (2010) provides additional commentary on specific deterioration conditions observed in the district.

### **Gateways and Public Spaces**

The primary gateways to Downtown Oberlin are the north and south approaches on SR 58/Main Street.

- On the north, this gateway is the North Main/Lorain Street intersection where land uses transition from generally residential activities (north of Lorain Street) to institutional and with a view of the commercial area. The condition and function of the intersection detracts from the appearance of this gateway which is graced with views of a historic church, Allen Memorial Art Museum, and Tappan Square.
- On the south, the gateway is located roughly at the South Main/Vine Street intersection. Approaching from the south, traffic on South Main crosses a bridge over Plum Creek. The character and conditions of some of the structures in this area (notably those on the east side of South Main Street, south of Vine Street) do not contribute to an attractive gateway. As noted in the OMSC Study (Conditions Assessment and Recommendations for Downtown Oberlin Streetscape, 2010), improvements to the bridge and open spaces along Plum Creek could improve the appearance of this entry and more strongly mark it as a gateway to Downtown.

Several public spaces are maintained within Downtown.

- City Hall. Areas to the front and north sides of Oberlin City Hall are landscaped and provide public seating areas.



- Post Office. The Post Office is setback from the right-of-way and is improved with landscaping and a small paved plaza and wide steps.
- Tappan Square. This large park-like square is owned and maintained by Oberlin College and is frequented by college students, staff, residents, and visitors. Extensive landscaping, a band shell, and walkways make it an attractive edge for the north side of Downtown.
- MLK Park. This city park is located on Vine Street in the southeast corner of downtown. It provides a transition between the structures and parking in this area and the residential neighborhood to the south. Plum Creek also passes through the park.

#### **Topography and Vegetation**

Downtown Oberlin slopes downgrade generally from north to south, draining into Plum Creek. While the topography has limited impact on the design and function of Downtown, it does make the core avenue (South Main Street from College Street to Vine Street) easily visible as a whole when viewed from either end.

An extensive review of vegetation and landscape conditions is presented in the OMSC Study/Conditions Assessment. (Assessment is part of background documentation for this Plan.)

### Infrastructure Conditions

Current infrastructure conditions have been assessed through information obtained from Oberlin City Staff supplemented by field observations. This assessment includes improvements and major repairs completed since the 2003 Downtown Plan.

It is apparent from the following summary of conditions and recent projects that, while there continue to be needed improvements, many incremental improvements and continuing maintenance have been made in recent years in all areas of infrastructure. These projects contribute to the generally sound condition of Downtown Oberlin.

It is also apparent, however, that age and deterioration in some of the most visible infrastructure elements, notably streetscape features, are impacting the aesthetic quality of the Downtown. These conditions are addressed in more detail in the Conditions Assessment and Recommendations for Downtown Oberlin Streetscape (2010).

**Utilities.** The City of Oberlin operates the public water, wastewater, storm water and electric utilities serving the Downtown.

#### Waterlines

- Waterlines serve all frontages in the Downtown. They are reported to be in good to fair condition.
- A new 8-inch waterline was installed in 2/3 of the block of Pleasant Street south of East College Street. This improvement replaced deteriorated 4-inch and 8-inch lines and was required to support the East College Street project now under construction. (2009-2010)
- A new waterline was recently installed in College Place in support of the Jazz Studies Center project. (2009)
- A new waterline was installed in East Vine Street.

#### Wastewater

- Sanitary sewers serve all frontages in Downtown. They are reported to be in generally fair condition.
- A new sanitary sewer was installed in College Place in support of the Jazz Studies Center project. (2009)

#### Electric Service

- Oberlin Municipal Light and Power System (OMLPS) electric lines serve all parts of Downtown.
- Wiring has been relocated underground in the area of the West Alley. A 12KV service has been extended into this area and interconnected to the area east of Main Street via an underground bore. The intent is to provide backup service.

#### Storm Water System

- The public storm water system serves all parts of the Downtown. Storm water drainage is generally oriented toward the south of the Downtown into Plum Creek which is a major local watercourse.
- Storm sewer improvements have been made in South Main.

**Motor Vehicle Facilities.** The City of Oberlin operates and maintains the streets and associated facilities within the public rights-of-way, including on-street parking.

#### Street Pavements, Curbs and Gutters

- All areas of Downtown are served with public streets. Street conditions are generally fair to good.
- The pavement of East Vine Street was completely reconstructed, including new base courses.
- Three pavement improvement projects are budgeted or under consideration at this time:
  - Resurface Carpenter Court (2010)
  - Resurface College Place (2010)
  - Resurface South Pleasant (2010)

#### Traffic Management

- The primary traffic flow in the downtown area is north-south traffic on Main Street which is also State Route 58.
- Significant east-west thru traffic occurs on Lorain Street (State Route 511) at its intersection with Main Street, located one block north of the presently designated Downtown area.
- A traffic impact study was conducted by Pflum, Klausmeir & Gehrum Consultants, Inc. in July 2000 addressing existing traffic conditions, forecasting traffic, and identifying projected operational deficiencies to be addressed with new signalization, signal timing adjustments, and additional turn lanes.
- The intersection of Main and College Streets was redesigned and upgraded with new traffic signals to improve thru traffic movement, turning movements, and pedestrian safety.
- New signals were installed at Main and College Streets and at Main and Vine Streets, including pedestrian walk signs and Fire Department Opticon control systems.

#### Street Signs and Signalization

- The improvements at Main and College Streets included the replacement of cable-mounted signals and signs with new pole-mounted signals and signs. (FY2003DTR)
- The same improvements were made at Vine and Main Streets. (FY2005DTR)

#### Street Lighting

- Street lighting pole bases, noted as damaged in the 2003 Downtown Plan, have been replaced.
- New street lighting fixtures will be installed in 2010 in the area of the East College Street Project. These fixtures will be evaluated for installation in other parts of downtown.

#### Parking

- Downtown parking is provided and maintained by several entities. These include:
  - City of Oberlin - On-street parking and a city parking lot at city hall. The city hall parking lot was repaved.
  - Oberlin Off Street Parking Inc. – This organization is comprised of several downtown property owners. Parking facilities are located in the rear areas of both of the blocks which are east and west of Main Street and south of College Street. Free parking spaces are available to visitors. Reserved spaces are sold to businesses and their employees.
  - The large lot located in the west block (operated by Oberlin Off Street Parking Inc.) has recently been repaved and restriped in coordination with changes instigated by the Jazz Studies Center project.
  - Oberlin Public Library – The library lot open to public use.
  - Private lots – Privately owned and operated lots are located throughout the district. They are generally reserved for business vehicles, i.e., the Verizon Building, and/or for customer vehicles.

**Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities.** Downtown sidewalks underwent a major reconstruction in the 1980's. The improvements included brick pavers, street trees, and other amenities. At nearly 30 years of age, these improvements have deteriorated in many areas. The City has made incremental repairs and replacements in order to maintain the function, safety, and appearance in addition to the improvements noted below.

#### Sidewalks/Pedestrian Facilities

- Bridge railing and sidewalk improvements were made to the Pleasant Street bridge (at Plum Creek) to improve pedestrian safety. (2009)
- The improvements at Main and College and at Main and Vine included installation of pedestrian crossing signals. (FY2003DTR and FY2005DTR)
- Several sidewalk access ramps have been reconstructed to address ADA guidelines.
- The West College Street crosswalk at College Place has been reconfigured. (2009)
- All non-signalized crosswalks have been upgraded with new pavement markings and pedestrian crosswalk signs. (2009)
- Benches have been installed in 26 locations throughout Downtown. Styles and conditions vary, with most of the oldest installations showing significant deterioration of wood seating surfaces.
- Trash Receptacles. Several types of receptacles have been installed throughout downtown including trash bins, ash bins, and recycling containers. These units are also of varying styles and conditions.

#### Bicycle Facilities

- Bike Racks. The lack of racks noted in the previous Downtown Plan has been addressed with the installation of additional bike racks in several locations. As noted in the Conditions Assessment and Recommendations for Downtown Oberlin Streetscape (2010), additional bicycle storage facilities, perhaps in alternative locations, may be needed to adequately address demand.
- A notable addition to the streetscape was the installation of two sculptural bike racks which were specially designed as both functional and artistic features.

#### Streetscape Features

- Street Trees. Trees have been installed and maintained in approximately 60 locations within the public rights-of-way of Downtown. These locations include sidewalk level beds and planting containers. Trees are of varying ages and canopy spread, generally appearing to be in good condition despite the stressful circumstances in which they are grown. It has been noted that the *Ginkgo biloba* installations create seasonal plant litter on sidewalks.
- Planting Containers.
- Planting Beds.
- Hanging Flower Baskets.
- Pole-mounted Celebration Banners.

## Socio-Economic Assessment

### Demographics

The most recent US Census was taken 10 years ago. The next will occur in April of this year (2010) and results will not be available until late 2010 or early 2011. The data from the 2000 Census which was reported in the previous Downtown Plan is thus still the most relevant:

- 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 the poverty level.
- 71.9% of the total population is Caucasian and 18.5% is African-American with the remainder being Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian.
- 56.3% of the total population is female and 43.7% male.
- Due to the presence of Oberlin College, a large population of persons between the ages of 18-25 live in Oberlin. Approximately 3,000 students are currently enrolled at Oberlin College and are included in all population numbers. While the majority of students live in College housing or an Oberlin Student co-op, about 400 live off campus.
- Roughly a quarter of the Oberlin population is age 55 or over.

### Social Framework

As noted in the previous Downtown Plan, Oberlin reflects a diversity which is unusual for a small community.

Observations included:

- The presence of Oberlin College has a strong influence on the character of the community. Its student body and staff contribute to a high average level of education, a high level of idealism and activism, a diversity of opinions, and strong support for quality of life issues such as housing, equal opportunity, environmental preservation, and historic preservation.
- A large segment of the population has incomes at or below the poverty level and the minority and older populations are above the national average.

### Political and Legal Framework

Key features of the political and legal environment have also been noted in previous versions of the Downtown Plan. Among them are:

- The City of Oberlin is a chartered municipality within Lorain County and the State of Ohio.
- The City is governed by an elected City Council of seven members elected to two year terms, with a limit of five terms.
- City Council appoints a City Manager, Law Director, Finance Director, and Clerk. Department heads are appointed by the City Manager. Some employees are appointed under civil service rules.
- The City Charter provides for the establishment of several boards and commissions. Among the most active are the Planning Commission, the Design Review Subcommittee of the Planning Commission, and the Historic Preservation Commission. The afore-mentioned committees have significant influence in planning, land use, zoning, historic preservation, and design matters in the Downtown and throughout the community.
- The City operates a state-certified Building Department which administers the Ohio Building Code.
- The City enforces zoning, subdivision, historic preservation and design review regulations which affect the Downtown area. These regulations are periodically reviewed and updated.

### Downtown Economic Indicators

The following conclusions of prior market studies for Downtown Oberlin continue to hold true in the present, with some modifications. These conclusions are discussed in greater detail in the Downtown Oberlin Market Analysis Update for 2010.

- The market for downtown Oberlin retailers can be broadly divided into three categories:
  - The students, faculty, and staff of Oberlin College.
  - Permanent residents of Oberlin and of 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 has an enormous impact on spending in the district. It has been 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.)
- Large-scale retail developments have been proposed, and to some extent developed, in the southern portion of the City of Oberlin since the 2003 Market Analysis. This area of new commercial development is located at the intersection of State Route 58 (South Main) and US 20, approximately one mile south of Downtown. To date, new construction has included a big box general retail store (Walmart), and some smaller retail and service providers. One older shopping structure is undergoing reconstruction and is successfully attracting new tenants. This growing area appears to present retail competition for general shopping goods, although it does not yet provide the range of dining, specialty shopping, arts and crafts, and entertainment opportunities available in Downtown. The area clearly is not convenient for the walk-in student, visitor, and residential markets of Oberlin. It has likely consumed some of the local market which depends on auto access for goods and services.

### Relevant Downtown Plans, Studies, Projects and Programs

The City of Oberlin has implemented several projects and programs of significance for development and redevelopment in Downtown Oberlin.

- **Downtown CRA.** In 2003, City Council adopted Ordinance No. 03-51 AC CMS which established the Downtown District Community Reinvestment Area ("Downtown CRA"). This area includes all properties bound by Main, Professor, West Vine, South Main, Groveland, and Pleasant Streets. This ordinance makes it possible for the City to grant real property tax exemptions for remodeling and construction within the Downtown CRA as provided by state law.
- **Citywide Comprehensive Plan.** The City adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1970 followed by a Strategic Plan in 1991. The most recent update of the Comprehensive Plan was adopted by City Council in January 2005.

The 2005 Comprehensive Plan (pp. 49-50) addresses Downtown as an area deserving special attention and concept planning. The then-current Downtown Revitalization Plan was referenced and the following recommendations were made:

- The downtown area must continue to expand joint promotion and coordination programs, including joint marketing, which build its identity in the regional market as a specialty shopping/tourist/arts destination, encourage attendance at annual special events, and increase service to the local resident/student market.
  - The downtown organizations should identify specific retail, service, and office uses which fit the location in terms of market demand and character. Direct recruitment of local and regional businesses fitting those niches should be continuous.
  - Existing frontages should be filled with retail and personal services uses preferred over office uses.
  - Retail density should be increased by constructing additional structures along Main Street and East College Street. Relocation of the telephone exchange and replacement with commercial use should be encouraged. Commercial/office construction on the corner of Main and Vine Streets should also be considered.
  - The visibility and utility of off-street parking facilities should be improved by repairing pavement, installing pedestrian amenities (walkways, lighting, landscaping) and parking directional signs. The rear elevations of commercial structures facing these parking areas should be upgraded. A "pedestrian arcade" should be constructed, through the existing buildings, to provide a direct connection from the parking areas to the center of the commercial area.
  - Construction of new housing in and around downtown should be encouraged to increase the walk-in market.
  - Attention must be given to preserving and enhancing the historic resources of downtown which are the essential fabric of the district.
- **Economic Development Plan and Tax Increment Financing.** Also in 2005, City Council approved an Economic Development Plan for the East College Area in support of anticipated Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

for the East College Project. The TIF provided important public leverage for the project now under construction and demonstrates the City's ability to participate financially in major redevelopment projects.

- **Additional Programs.** The City of Oberlin also operates the following programs which support business maintenance and improvements:
  - Façade Loan Program
  - Business/Building Improvement Program
  - Oberlin Business Revolving Loan Fund Program

### III. Downtown Revitalization & Development Plan: Update 2010

The Updated Oberlin Downtown Revitalization and Development Plan are described in this section.

#### **Mission**

Consistent with prior versions of the Downtown Plan, the mission is as follows:

- Downtown Oberlin will be the center of life for the community as it has been for over 175 years. People from Oberlin and surrounding communities will come to Oberlin's CBD to meet cultural, civic, entertainment, and shopping needs in an authentic, historic environment.
- It is recognized that this vision for maintaining and enhancing the future of Downtown is a large and continuing undertaking. Oberlin has active organizations and individuals working to make this vision a reality.

#### **Partners & Collaboration**

There are three key partners and collaborators pursuing the vision for Downtown Oberlin.

- **Oberlin Main Street-Chamber**  
Main Street Oberlin Inc. and the Oberlin Chamber of Commerce merged into a single non-profit organization in January 2010. This merger is intended to create a stronger organization with greater personnel and funding resources and with improved operational efficiencies.

The merged organization will be directed by a single board of trustees elected by and accountable to a membership open to individuals, local and regional businesses, industry, institutions, and other nonprofit organizations.

The new organization is anticipated to continue similar events and activities that OACC and MSO have provided in the past, including Freezin' Arts Fest, Spring Egg Roll, Chalk Walk, Summer Concert Series, Family Fun Fair, City-Wide Garage Sale, Doggie Doo, Downtown Trick-or-Treat, Arrival of Santa & Lighting of the Friendship Tree, and Festival of Trees. The merged organization will also continue other OACC and MSO activities, including providing relocation and tourist information, assisting economic development and business promotion for downtown and the larger Oberlin community, and facilitating downtown and community beautification. The new organization intends to maintain state and national Main Street program accreditation through Heritage Ohio and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

- **City of Oberlin**  
The City of Oberlin recognizes the important role of Downtown in the fabric and function of the community and has long been committed to preserving and enhancing the Downtown.

The City, through its Department of Planning and Development, is the lead organization funding, preparing and implementing the Downtown Plan. While all segments of the municipal organization are united in support of Downtown, key participants include:

- City Council. Council reviews and adopts the Downtown Plan, gives policy direction to the activities of City Staff, and approves funding for municipal projects.
- City Planning Commission/Design Review Subcommittee. The Planning Commission is charged with recommending zoning map and text amendments as well as reviewing and approving (or denying) specified projects such as new structures, parking, signs, and related developments. The Design Review Subcommittee reviews exterior improvements, such as changes to facades and signs, and makes recommendations to the Commission. These activities are clearly critical to the economic and design quality of Downtown.
- Office of the City Manager. The City Manager directs the implementation of the City's downtown policies through the city departments.



- Department of Planning and Development. The Planning and Development Staff prepares and updates the Downtown Plan, maintains continuing communications and coordination with Downtown stakeholders, and pursues grants and other resources. The Department Divisions - Planning, Economic Development and Housing, Building and Recreation – all play important roles in support of Downtown projects and programs. The Department provides staff support for the activities of the Planning Commission, Design Review Subcommittee, Zoning Board of Appeals, Oberlin Community Improvement Corporation, and Historic Preservation Commission and also represents the City at many meetings of local civic organizations.
- Department of Public Works. The six divisions of the Public Works Department: Administration; Engineering; General Maintenance Division, Building and Grounds Division, Water Division, and Waste Water Division – are directly involved in continuous maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure essential to a functioning downtown.
- Oberlin Municipal Light and Power System. OMLPS is a community-owned, not-for-profit electric utility created by the local residents in 1934 to provide high quality, affordable services tailored to the unique needs of the Oberlin Area. OMLPS distributes, transmits, and generates electric power to over 3000 residential and commercial customers including all located in Downtown Oberlin. Continuous operation, maintenance, and upgrades to the power system are essential to a functioning downtown.
- Police Department. The Oberlin Police Department’s mission is to enhance the quality of life in our community through the protection of life and property, fair and unbiased law enforcement, and community partnerships. The Department pursues this mission in Downtown by maintaining ongoing communications and cooperation with local businesses.
- Fire Department. The activities of the Fire Department include fire prevention, fire suppression, first responder/emergency medical, hazardous material mitigation, special rescue, fire/code enforcement, fire investigation, training, and public education. These activities are critical to ensuring the safety of workers and visitors in the Downtown district and protecting the built environment.
- **Oberlin College.** Oberlin College has a long history of involvement in downtown issues and activities. The College’s students, staff, and visitors are critical to the market for downtown goods and services. Likewise, downtown merchants are recognized as essential to meeting the needs of that market. The College is also the owner and/or tenant, either outright or through affiliated organizations, of several important downtown properties.

The relationship between Oberlin College and downtown generates important resources for both entities as well as creating some serious strains such as parking impacts. Representatives of the College, City, and downtown merchants and property owners periodically interact to address some of these issues and to collaborate on projects of common interest. The College recognizes the importance of a viable and attractive downtown and the College’s continued involvement in downtown interests is anticipated.

## Accomplishments in Downtown Oberlin 1998-2009

It is important to recognize and appreciate the impact of the previous Downtown Plans and the efforts made by various parties to implement them. A brief review of these accomplishments makes clear that the downtown is a continuous "work in progress", that progress has been and is being made, and that Oberlin has effective tools for continuing to maintain and improve this vital community core area. A review of accomplishments should also give confidence to participating parties, to potential future investors and merchants, and to potential grant funders that involvement in downtown Oberlin is worthwhile.

The following tasks set forth in the previous versions of the Oberlin Downtown Plan have been accomplished or are in underway to some extent.

- Promote preservation of architectural heritage.  
*This is a continuing task which benefits from the work of the property owners, merchants, Oberlin Planning Commission and Design Review Subcommittee, and the Oberlin Heritage Center.*
- Total replacement of all street furniture within five years.  
*This task is partially accomplished and continues. To date, the City has replaced approximately 1/3 of street furnishings. Oberlin Main Street-Chamber has conducted a survey of street furnishings and made recommendations to the City for additional installations and repairs.*
- Address numerous issues that surround privately-owned off-street parking.
- Long range strategy regarding the ownership and improvements of off-street parking.  
*The above two are continuing projects due to the diversity of properties, ownerships, and businesses impacted. Oberlin Off Street Parking Inc., in coordination property owners and businesses has made improvements to the public parking area in the west block. A great need for improvements remains in the east block.*

*Among recent efforts, the City, Oberlin Main Street-Chamber, Off Street Parking and Oberlin College assessed existing parking facilities and the impacts of College students and staff on the parking facilities which are also utilized by the downtown businesses and patrons.*

- Review of the "Sign Code" for the central business district to make it more compatible with the district's historic nature.  
*The City Planning Commission and Staff are in process of reviewing the existing sign code. A draft of potential amendments has been prepared. The impact of the amendments on existing signs is under evaluation.*
- Increase parking in the district through the use of angled parking on South Main between Vine and Groveland Streets and potentially on the north side of West College Street.  
*A proposal to replace parallel parking with angled parking on the north side of West College has been approved by the Planning Commission and is currently under consideration. No action has been taken on the South Main portion of this recommendation.*  
  
*Parking reconstruction in the form of angled parking in the Vine/Groveland Streets section of South Main Street may be delayed until a redevelopment of in this area.*
- Address the deterioration of curbs and sidewalks in the district with ongoing maintenance and replacements  
*The City has made incremental repairs and replacements to curbs and sidewalks. The age of these improvements may necessitate a more comprehensive reconstruction.*
- 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  
*This strategy is an ongoing need which continues to be addressed with several activities coordinated by the City and MSO. Special event banners, hanging flower baskets, and street planters are installed and maintained in the public domain. These installations require continuous maintenance and seasonal replacement. As noted in the survey of conditions, many of the planters are in need of replacement or repair.*

*The aesthetic appearance of private signs, storefronts, and window displays depends upon the efforts of building owners and business operators. While some are in excellent condition, some require repair, replacement or update.*

- Improve the appearance of the rears of buildings through building improvements, screening dumpsters, attractive low landscaping, fencing, etc.
- Enhance the appearance of building rears, create multiple, attractive corridors from parking areas to storefronts and combine with visible attractive signage.  
*This task has been partially accomplished, notably in the rear areas of the west block. The City has relocated above ground wiring to underground service. Corridors and directional signage is still needed. This process must be continued on the east block.*
- Strengthen the visibility, safety, and attractiveness of pedestrian crosswalks.  
*The City has reconfigured, repainted, and re-signed the pedestrian crosswalks in the key crossings and intersections in the district. Additional work should be done in the Lorain/Main intersection recommended to be part of the district.*
- Cultivate individual habits of coming downtown through special events and festivals.  
*Oberlin Main Street-Chamber, with the support of the City, has conducted an ongoing series of annual special events and festivals which have been successful in drawing people to Downtown. A commitment has been made to continue these events.*

**Recap of Market Study and Promotional Programs**

The Updated Market Analysis findings indicate that the key market segments served by Downtown Oberlin are: (1) Oberlin College students and staff; (2) permanent residents of Oberlin and surrounding communities and non-College daytime workers; and (3) shoppers and visitors from beyond a 5-mile radius, including parents, alumni and other visitors. These market segments each contribute roughly one third of the total.

All five major retail merchandising groups are represented Downtown, including convenience goods and services, home and auto, fashion goods, leisure goods, and dining and entertainment. The weakest representation is in the fashion goods category. While competition is scattered throughout the surrounding area in smaller concentrations, Midway Mall in Elyria is the major concentration of competing retail. The new commercial district at SR 58 (South Main) and US 20, one mile south of Downtown, is also creating increasing competition.

It is unlikely that Downtown can compete with chain stores and shopping malls. It is thus essential to supply the retail needs which small and independent retailers can better satisfy – superior customer service and product knowledge, unique specialty items, convenience, pleasant atmosphere, and support for community causes. More attention should be given to attracting the student market (which may also attract a wider youth market from the region) and more attention given to the fine dining and art gallery markets.

Current marketing and promotional programs include the following:

- Frequent OMSC-sponsored networking events and opportunities among local business owners
- Frequent festivals and other special events which attract Oberlin residents, Oberlin College students, and other visitors to Downtown
- Local and regional advertising including print media, radio, and cable television

**Strengths and Weaknesses, Assets and Liabilities, Problems and Opportunities**

Downtown Oberlin benefits from a number of strengths/assets and is impeded by several weaknesses and liabilities. These include the following:

Downtown Oberlin	
STRENGTHS/ASSETS	WEAKNESSES/LIABILITIES
Presence of Oberlin College brings students, staff, and visitors to the market	Limited space for new development of contemporary commercial structures
As the largest community in southern Lorain County, Oberlin is an important sub-regional center for business and personal services	Increasing competition from newer shopping centers, including but not limited to the area at US 20/SR 58, one mile south of downtown
National and regional reputation as historic and arts community hosting a prominent institution of higher education	Limited parking available for patrons
Relatively dense and focused district form	Gaps in retail frontages
Historic structures with relatively well-preserved features in fair to good condition	Area of public uses in central Downtown creates separation between retail-dense north end of downtown and additional retail/service uses in south end
Surrounded by residential neighborhoods	Age and deterioration of buildings requires continuous and expensive repair/maintenance
Presence of tourist attractions such as Allen Memorial Art Museum (temporarily closed for renovation)	Aging pedestrian amenities, landscaping
Presence of public uses such as post office, library, city hall, municipal court	
History of joint projects among property owners, merchants, non-profits and local government	
Established program of activities to attract patrons and bring community to Downtown	
Location at the intersection of State Routes 58 (Main Street) and 511 (Lorain Street)	Distance from major freeways

### Issues and Trends

Downtown Oberlin is in the fortunate position of serving as the center of a stable community which hosts a historic and dynamic educational institution, Oberlin College. The continued presence and health of the College ensures that a significant part of the downtown economy is relatively stable.

The non-College population/resident market is also relatively stable, with planned residential subdivisions pointing toward potential for increases in that market segment. The spending for day-to-day needs of these residents, however, has been increasingly drawn to national retailers in shopping centers and stores outside of Downtown and outside of the community. This is consistent with shopping patterns throughout the nation. As a result, Downtown has seen a loss of shopping goods retailers (notably clothing) and with some infill by restaurants/carry out food service. More attention has been given to attracting visitor spending with food and art/craft offerings.

At the same time, conditions of the historic structures and the lack of convenient parking impact the attractiveness and suitability of Downtown for some retailers.

These issues and trends pose challenges for Downtown, its merchants and owners, and for the City of Oberlin in adjusting to and taking advantage of current market conditions. It is the purpose of the Downtown Revitalization Plan, together with the ongoing projects and programs of the OMSC, to address these challenges.

### Overall CBD Revitalization Needs

The revitalization needs of Downtown Oberlin are detailed in other parts of this Plan and in the OMSC Study. They can be grouped as follows:

- **Building Improvements:** The age and conditions of many of the historic commercial structures in downtown are substandard. Some have been impacted by façade changes and repairs which are poorly designed and/or inappropriate for their historic characters. These conditions can be unattractive to potential patrons and impact the overall appearance of the Downtown. Substandard interior conditions (deteriorated roofs, substandard electric and plumbing systems, etc.) are unattractive to potential tenants.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Infrastructure improvements are needed throughout the Downtown as identified in other parts of this Plan document and in the OMSC Study. These include needed repairs and upgrades to curbs, pedestrian pavements, pedestrian and bicycle amenities, landscaping, and electrical components.
- **Economic Restructuring:** Downtown Oberlin must continue to strengthen its ability to take advantage of the identified college student, college staff, and resident markets. It must also continue to work to recruit, strengthen, and recruit businesses to serve those markets resulting in an expanded presence for Downtown Oberlin in the region.

### Vision/Mission Statement

Building upon the work of previous planning and improvement efforts of the City and of Oberlin Main Street-Chamber (OMSC), and supplemented by the recent working meetings of OMSC Committees through late 2009 and early 2010, the mission for Downtown is as follows:

The mission of Oberlin Main Street-Chamber is to strengthen, promote, and broaden the economic base of Oberlin, with an emphasis on enhancing the vitality and preserving the historic integrity of downtown.

### Goal, Objectives, and Projects for Achieving Mission

In pursuit of the Mission, OMSC has set the following goal, objectives, and activities:

**GOAL:** To strengthen and broaden the economic base

**OBJECTIVE:** Retain, strengthen and recruit businesses

1. Networking events for business and community members
2. Fill vacant spaces downtown and in commercial districts
3. Build and maintain relationships with existing businesses

4. Build and maintain business-to-business resources database fore entrepreneurs and existing businesses
5. Business incubator

OBJECTIVE: Develop financial incentives and capital for business development and building rehabilitation

1. Apply for CDBG funding with City of Oberlin
2. Develop funding stream for entrepreneurs

OBJECTIVE: Provide businesses with tools to evaluate and improve sustainable attributes and strengthen this economic niche in Oberlin

1. Develop green business certification program
2. Encourage businesses to adopt green practices

### **Downtown Revitalization Concept**

The concept for revitalization of Downtown recognizes the essentially stable conditions of the district, the necessity for maintaining and improving the historic structures, the necessity for maintaining and upgrading the infrastructure (notably walkways and pedestrian amenities), and the need to continue to attract new and replacement businesses in response to the realities of the market.

The elements of the revitalization concept are:

- **Building Rehabilitation and Updates:** Obtain CDBG funding to leverage private reinvestment in existing structures. Building improvements will respect and enhance historic features, promote long-term structural stability, and make some spaces more suitable as locations for new or expanded businesses.
- **Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Updates:** Obtain CDBG funding to be used in concert with local municipal funds to finance improvements to the infrastructure. These improvements will include upgrading a major gateway intersection (Main and Lorain Streets), highly visible pedestrian safety and amenity features, and less visible but important electrical system upgrades.
- **Economic Restructuring:** Utilize local organizational resources, notably the Oberlin Main Street-Chamber and City of Oberlin, to create and maintain resources which assist existing businesses and property owners to build market base and to encourage and support the attraction/creation of new businesses.

## Downtown Oberlin Strategies: 2010-2014

The proposed activities for Downtown Oberlin in the next five-year period are described below. They include continuing activities from the prior Downtown Plan as well as new activities. These have been outlined consistent with the Main Street program, that is, grouped in the categories of Organization, Promotion/Marketing, Design, and Economic Restructuring.

It is apparent from this list that the immediate needs, potential projects and “wishes” for Downtown are numerous. Resources are, clearly, limited. For this reason, highest priority recommendations are highlighted for earliest planning, design, and implementation. (See check marks: ✓)

### Organization

- ✓ **Main Street Certification.** Seek renewal of the certification of the Oberlin Main Street-Chamber program.
- ✓ **Promote Business Networking.** Continue to facilitate interaction and relationships among Downtown businesses through networking events. The OMSC calendar for 2010 has planned 21 networking event opportunities.
- ✓ **OMSC Website.** Continue to maintain and expand the existing website at [www.oberlin.org](http://www.oberlin.org). Upgrade the OMSC website to reflect and emphasize the Main Street program principles.
- **Expand Official Downtown Area Boundaries.**
  - ✓ Approve expansion of the official Downtown area along the Main Street right-of-way north to and including the Lorain Street intersection. The intent of this expansion is to make this critical section of the right-of-way eligible for funding of improvements.
  - In future years, consider extending the boundary of downtown in one or more of the following three areas:
    - South of Vine Street to Groveland Street to take in the existing business area to encourage its improvement.
    - The proposed Oberlin College Green Arts District bound by Main, Lorain, Pleasant, and East College Streets.
    - West on College Street to Professor Street to incorporate that frontage and to encourage consistent street, pedestrian, and bicycle improvements.
- **SID (Special Improvement District).** The OMSC and the City should investigate the potential for creating a Downtown SID (Special Improvement District) as permitted by state law. (See Ohio Revised Code, Chapter 1710: Special Improvement Districts.)

The purpose of a SID is to develop and implement plans for public improvements and public services that benefit the district. To create a SID, property owners establish a nonprofit corporation and petition the City to establish the District. The City may then levy a special assessment on properties in the district to finance improvements and services. The proceeds of the levy are used by the SID to plan and implement a broad range of activities which benefit the assessed properties through the nonprofit corporation which is controlled by the property owners.

The SID is a tool which may generate resources for the Downtown District and create an owner-controlled entity providing some of the commercial management advantages of a shopping center.

Promotion/Marketing

- **District Image.** Identify an image for the district and market that to residents and visitors. This strategy was recommended in previous plans. The recent Conditions Assessment and Recommendations report by OMSC re-emphasizes the need and suggests an image which is described as “progressive, sustainable, and arts-oriented.” This descriptive phrase, or a variation thereof, should be vetted and adopted by downtown stakeholders and used as the guiding concept for downtown marketing, programs and improvements. It is suggested that some additional language which emphasizes the role of the downtown in meeting the goods and services needs of the community also be considered.
- **District Marketing.**
  - **Website.** Maintain and expand the existing website at [www.oberlin.org](http://www.oberlin.org). Consider creating a new downtown website to which individual businesses may be linked.
  - **Create business website links** to existing website.
  - **Joint Advertising** – seasonal and special events....marketing together as a shopping and experience destination.
  - **Downtown Shopping Guide.** Create both a website version and print version.
- ✓ **Special Events.** Encourage the merger of arts and cultural events with retail opportunities. Continue to cultivate individual habits of coming downtown through special events and festivals to promote the image of the district, to expose shoppers to the businesses, and to continue to cultivate shopping habits.
- ✓ **Continue the annual programs** conducted in Downtown. The planned program of events for 2010 is as follows:
  - Freezin' Arts Fest: Ice carving and winter-themed activities. Downtown Oberlin in February.
  - Spring Egg Roll: Egg hunting for children 0-8 at three outdoor locations. Downtown Oberlin in March / April.
  - Big Parade: Annual College and community parade and festival celebrating spring. Downtown Oberlin in May.
  - Summer Concert Series: Friday evening concerts at Tappan Square bandstand. Downtown Oberlin in June, July, and August.
  - Juneteenth: Parade, festival, and educational events celebrating the traditional end of slavery. Downtown Oberlin in June.
  - Chalk Walk: Professional artists and the public create chalk art on sidewalks. Downtown Oberlin in June.
  - Family Fun Fair: Summer carnival with vintage car show, entertainment, and kids' activities. Downtown Oberlin in August.
  - Culture Festival: Cultural diversity festival in Tappan Square. Downtown Oberlin in September.
  - Doggie Doo & Pooch Parade: Dog-themed festival and fundraiser for animal shelters in Tappan Square. Downtown Oberlin in September.
  - Downtown Trick-or-Treat: Halloween trick-or-treat in downtown Oberlin in October.
  - Santa's Arrival & Tree Lighting: Downtown arrival of Santa and annual lighting of downtown community Christmas tree. Downtown Oberlin in November / December.
- ✓ **One-time opportunities.** OMSC and local merchants should also be alert to and prepared to take advantage of one time events which occur in Oberlin, at Oberlin College, and at Oberlin Inn, especially those which bring visitors and potential shoppers to Downtown. Examples of upcoming one-time events include:
  - Opening of the Kohl Jazz Center.
  - Re-opening of the Allen Memorial Art Museum (Spring 2011).
- ✓ **New Large-scale Festival.** The creation of a new large scale festival in the district was recommended in the 2003 Plan.....begin preliminary planning for this event to be held in 2012?



- **District Cultural/Heritage Features.**

- **African-American Heritage Tour.** Promote cultural and heritage tourism opportunities through promotion of an African-American heritage tour.
- **Walking Tour.** Promote cultural and heritage tourism opportunities through creation of a walking tour brochure with the Oberlin Heritage Center.

### Design

- ✓ **Seek Grant Funds.** Apply for a Tier II Grant to fund to assist in financing needed improvements. Possible projects include relocating the power outlets from the curbs, upgrading sidewalk pavers, additional street furnishings and building improvements.
- ✓ **Main/Lorain Street Intersection Upgrade.** Upgrade the signalized intersection of Main and Lorain Streets.
- ✓ **ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Compliance.** Reconfigure some areas of on-street parking to comply with ADA requirements.
- ✓ **Upgrade Pedestrian/Bike Facilities and Sidewalk Environment.** As noted in this Plan and as underscored in the recent Conditions Assessment and Recommendations report by OMSC, the conditions of facilities for pedestrians and cyclists are deteriorated and require significant improvement. While the City has worked to repair and replace these features incrementally, a more comprehensive improvement program is needed and would have a great impact on the downtown environment. Attention should be given to some or all of the following:
  - Continue the replacement of street furniture.
  - Consider replacement of outdated planters.
  - Install additional bike racks.
  - Repair and/or replace waste receptacles.
  - Consider adjusted locations for streetscape features to ensure maximum functionality.
  - Prepare a long-term plan for upgrades and replacements.
- ✓ **Electrical System Upgrades.** The safety, dependability and capacity of the municipal electrical service system are essential to the operations of all businesses in downtown Oberlin. The city should continue to maintain, reinvest in, and improve this critical utility system.
  - ✓ Replace underground electric distribution circuits serving street lights and outlets on Main Street – will require repair/replacement of some curb sections (budgeted project for 2010).
  - ✓ Replace underground electric distribution circuits serving street lights and outlets on East College and West College – will require repair/replacement of some curb sections (planned project for 2011).
  - ✓ Continue to seek funding for and implement additional electrical system upgrades.
- ✓ **West College Street Pavement Improvements.** Repave and improve drainage on West College Street.
- ✓ **Building Improvements.** The age, condition, historic character, and economic circumstances of downtown structures justify additional efforts to assist owners in financing improvements which ensure their preservation, restoration, and economic viability in the present. The City should pursue additional funding to leverage private building reinvestments.
  - ✓ **Urban Design Guidelines.** Encourage adoption of urban design guidelines related to the buildings and street surfaces.
  - ✓ **Handicap Access to Buildings.** Seek ways to improve handicap access to existing buildings, especially to upper floors. Consider locations in which jointly operated elevator facilities may provide access to the upper floors of two or more buildings.

- **Improve Off-Street Parking.** Continue to pursue improvements to off street parking coordination, operations, and maintenance. The availability of parking for downtown patrons and employees is a concern in Downtown Oberlin.
  - ✓ **Parking Directional Signs.** Install on-street signs which direct visitors to public off-street parking.
- **East Block Pedestrian Facilities.** Plan and construct a functional network of pedestrian facilities through the east block to improve pedestrian movement among the Library, New Union Arts, East College project, the planned Green Arts District, and public parking facilities in this area.
  - ✓ **Off-Street Parking.** Efforts to promote rear area parking coordination and redevelopment must be continued. OMSC and the City should take the lead in identifying potential parking improvements and facilitate action in coordination with property owners.
- ✓ **Update Sign Regulations.** Complete the Zoning Code amendments regulating signs in the Downtown. The intent of these amendments is to permit signs which are compatible with the downtown environment and its historic features, attract attention to businesses from pedestrians and drivers, and encourage creative expression.
- **Preserve and Enhance Architectural Heritage.** Continue to promote preservation of architectural heritage.
  - ✓ Seek funding for educational resources (documentation, presentations, “building doctor” workshops) which inform building owners about their historic architectural resources and about appropriate methods for maintaining, repairing, and upgrading their historic structures.
  - ✓ Seek funding to assist owners with professional evaluation and design of improvements and for appropriate historic preservation improvements.
- **Sustainable Storm Water Improvements.** Investigate the potential for upgrading elements of the downtown storm water system to be more sustainable and to reflect contemporary storm water management methods.
- **Public Art**
  - Identify locations for the installation of new public art including sculptures, landscape designs, and wall art.
  - Encourage maintenance and promotion of the Athena Tacha sculpture “Streams” in MLK Park.
- **Sustainability Initiatives.**
  - **Green Roofs and Solar Panels.** Seek funding and technical assistance to evaluate the potential for installing sustainable features on downtown historic structures.
  - **Solar SID.** Evaluate the potential for creating a Downtown Solar SID as provided in state law. Promoting solar energy in the Downtown would not only contribute to a more sustainable district and structures, but contribute to the green and sustainable image of Oberlin.
- **Business Storage Facility.** Evaluate the physical and economic potential for creating or attracting a storage facility in downtown for use by downtown businesses since many businesses have limited storage space in their buildings. If sufficient demand is present for such a facility, alternatives for creating it could include a private storage service, a co-op owned and operated by local businesses or a non-profit. It could be located within a new parking garage or other new building.
- **Create attractive gateways** into the community and the downtown with attractive architectural elements and signage. This strategy was part of the 2003 Downtown Plan and has not been implemented. The value and potential of creating attractive gateways has been re-emphasized in the Conditions Assessment and Recommendations report prepared by the Oberlin Main Street-Chamber Design Committee.
- **MLK Park Improvements.** MLK Park is located in the southeast corner of Downtown and provides an attractive transition and interface between downtown and the residential neighborhood abutting to the south east. Improvements to the park would improve this relationship.
  - Construct a gazebo/pavilion to encourage park use.
  - Install park lighting to promote safety.
  - See also the Public Art item below addressing the “Streams” sculpture located in MLK Park.

- **Directional/Informational Signage.** Install additional directional and informational signage in downtown and along corridors leading to it.  
This strategy was also part of the 2003 Downtown Plan, has not been implemented, and has been re-emphasized in the Conditions Assessment and Recommendations report.
- **Upgrade Bikeway Connections.**
  - Connect the commercial district to existing and potential future bikeways and maintain the district's bicycle friendliness with signage, bike racks, etc.
  - Promote better way-finding signage to Downtown from the "North Coast Inland Trail" (bike path).  
*Connecting the downtown to the North Coast Inland Trail bikeway is still a need. In addition, Downtown could be better linked to other parts of the community when additional bikeways, as recommended in the Citywide Comprehensive Plan, are constructed.*

### Economic Restructuring

- ✓ **Upper-Level Re-use of Vacant Space.** Promote re-use of 2<sup>nd</sup> stories and above with non-retail uses such as offices and residences.
- ✓ **Financial incentives** to encourage private business owners to undertake sensitive adaptive reuse such as upper floor residential or office.

These related strategies were set forth in the 2003 Downtown Plan and should continue. The intent is to increase the density of activity and the close-in market for downtown businesses.

The East College Project will result in new businesses and residences in the Downtown. Their success will be an indicator of the potential for additional office and residences in rehabbed spaces in existing downtown buildings and perhaps for additional infill construction in and around downtown.

A source or sources for financial incentives should be found. These may include CDBG grants, tax abatements, or others incentives. Assistance for interior rehab improvements needed to support offices or residences may be most appropriate coupled with grants for exterior, roof, and systems improvements which benefit the entire structure.

- ✓ **Outdoor Dining and/or Street Vendors.** Establish regulations to permit street dining/cafes and street vendors. The City is considering if and how to permit outdoor dining and/or street vendors in the Downtown. These uses have the potential to add to the level and variety of activity in the downtown, particularly during good weather and during local events which attract visitors.

As in other communities, there are issues to be addressed with these uses such as impacts on existing uses (e.g., additional parking demand and noise from outdoor dining impacting residential uses) and fair treatment of existing businesses.

Careful regulation of outdoor dining can make it compatible and a positive addition to the downtown mix. Consideration may be given to reserving street vending opportunities to existing businesses as a means to supplement their year-round investments in and support of the downtown and to ensure responsible operation. Later adjustments to the programs might open the door to other businesses.

- **Retail Clustering.** Cluster new compatible retail with similar existing retail.  
This strategy was part of the 2003 Downtown Plan. It is presumed to recognize the value in some retail environments of grouping similar uses in order to create a critical mass which attracts shoppers to the greatest number of retail stores.

The concept is more easily implemented in a shopping center in which a single owner controls leasing, but is more difficult in a traditional downtown in which the individual owners may have less incentive to reserve vacant space for a specific use category.

Where a market for retail space is strong and active, owners may not object to a zoning provision which reserves first floor spaces in some or all areas of downtown for retail uses. Where potential retail tenants are limited or where other uses have potential to yield higher rents, owners are likely to resist.

Non-regulatory strategies for encouraging retail clustering may be most acceptable and effective. These strategies may include: identifying those locations where retail clusters will be most viable, actively recruiting potential retail uses to the district, and aggressively informing and encouraging property owners to obtain such tenants.

Downtown Oberlin Revitalization Program		
Detailed Implementation Strategy 2011-2012		
Phase I: Year 2011		
Tasks	Responsible Parties	Estimated Costs and Sources
Building Improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Coordinate and finance improvements to 10-15 structures</li> </ul>	Private owners and OMSC	\$100-150,000 Private funds \$100-120,000 DTR funds
Infrastructure Improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Reconfigure on-street parking to comply with ADA</li> <li>◦ Design upgraded Main/Lorain intersection</li> <li>◦ Install/replace pedestrian and bicycle amenities</li> <li>◦ Replace underground electric circuits East and West College Street</li> <li>◦ Install parking directional signs</li> </ul>	City of Oberlin	City funds- TBD \$30,000 DTR funds
Economic Restructuring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Meet with owners of vacant and under-utilized spaces, obtain info, collaborate on marketing</li> <li>◦ Update programs to collaborate and take advantage of Oberlin College/Green Arts District plans and projects</li> <li>◦ Plan business incubator</li> <li>◦ Design green business certification program and promotional resources</li> <li>◦ Build relationships with banks/credit unions and develop business micro-loan program</li> </ul>	OMSC	OMSC funds, staff and volunteers
Marketing/Promotional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Continue business networking activities</li> <li>◦ Continue patron-oriented festivals and special events</li> <li>◦ Develop business-to-business resource database</li> </ul>	OMSC	OMSC funds, staff and volunteers
Phase II: Year 2012		
Tasks	Responsible Parties	Estimated Costs and Sources
Building Improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Coordinate and finance improvements to 10-15 structures</li> </ul>	Private owners and OMSC	\$100-150,000 Private funds \$100-120,000 DTR funds
Infrastructure Improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Repave and improve drainage on West College Street</li> <li>◦ Construct upgraded Main/Lorain intersection</li> </ul>	City of Oberlin	City funds - TBD \$100,000 DTR funds
Economic Restructuring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Implement business incubator</li> <li>◦ Implement green business certification program</li> <li>◦ Promote sustainable/green business practices</li> <li>◦ Implement micro-loan program</li> </ul>	OMSC	OMSC funds, staff and volunteers
Marketing/Promotional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Continue business networking activities</li> <li>◦ Continue patron-oriented festivals and special events</li> </ul>	OMSC	OMSC funds, staff and volunteers