

CITY OF ST. CLAIRSVILLE, OHIO

Historic Downtown District Revitalization Plan

Phase III

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Phase I: Streetscape

Phase II: Building Restoration/Reuse
Architectural Standards & Architectural Assistance
National Register of Historic Places Designation
Loan Programs
Courtyard Elderly Housing Project

*(For an overview of general issues, read the headings and the **highlighted** areas herein).*

PREFACE

This is a plan designed to advocate a strategic course of action for the betterment of the City of St. Clairsville's Historic Downtown District. This plan is written pursuant to considerable research, observation, reflection, and listening to citizens' personal viewpoints. This report is written to also produce additional discussion and formal consideration of these issues by the officials, business owners and citizens of St. Clairsville proper.

CONCEPT

The National Main Street Center advocates a four-point approach to downtown revitalization:

- Organization
- Design
- Economic Restructuring
- Promotion

This plan serves as a blueprint to the realization of these four goals.

NOTE: The views expressed herein are the author's, and not necessarily those of the City of St. Clairsville Administration.

BACKGROUND

In a 1986 speech to the St. Clairsville Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of St. Clairsville proposed and subsequently created a city Revolving Loan Fund that could be used in part for a downtown rehabilitation project.

In 1988 the City of St. Clairsville and the St. Clairsville Area Chamber of Commerce led an effort to plan the construction of a **new streetscape** for the downtown area. The Chamber led an assessment petition effort, and the city coordinated planning and construction, as well as writing and administering all of the grants for the project. In 1991 construction began on the placement of new **sidewalks, landscaping, underground wiring, decorative lighting, new signage, benches, a Court House plaza area, removal of parking meters, improvement of city parking lots**, etc., at a project cost of \$1.2 million. The project was completed in 1992.

In 1991 the city also led an effort to rehabilitate or renovate the building facades in the downtown area. **By 1998, 29 facades had been redone** constituting 55 percent of the total facades in the downtown. (As an indication of the dramatic results of this program, by 1993 20 facades constituting 38 percent of the total had been rehabilitated). Currently 3 restored facades are being planned.

According to a study published by Belmont Technical College in September 1997 **over \$5 million dollars had been spent in the downtown area by the public and private sector on streetscape and facade restoration under those initiatives**. Since that Belmont Tech study, the city estimates that an additional \$350,000 has been expended to the date of this plan.

In addition to the economic development loan fund created by the city in 1986,

St. Clairsville subsequently created two additional loan funds. One funds restoration/rehabilitation projects within the Historic Downtown District and a third funds improvements to housing in the city. Together these funds offer approximately **\$800,000 in revolving loans** to city businesses and residents.

In 1991, the city and the Chamber of Commerce **created by ordinance the Architectural Board of Review** and a set of design standards in order to guide the development of the downtown, protect its resources, and protect the investments that are made to the Historic District. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation there are over 2,000 of these districts in the United States.

The Architectural Board of Review created an **architectural assistance program** whereby district owners are afforded free architectural consultations and basic drawings to assist them as they improve their properties. Architectural Board members and the consultants have lent their expertise in planning, design, landscape, engineering, architecture and finance to businesses in the district.

The Architectural Board and the city employed a consultant to nominate the Historic Downtown District to the U.S. Department of the Interior's **National Register of Historic Places**. This designation was made in March, 1996. In addition to the honor and distinction of this designation, it also enabled building restoration to be eligible for a maximum twenty percent Federal Historic Tax Credit.

In September, 1997 the **Courtyard Elderly Housing Project** opened in the city offering 24 residential units, and one corner commercial space at a cost of \$1.4 million. This project used the Historic Tax Credit Program, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program,

and a \$500,000 grant to the city which was distributed solely as a loan to the developer (less city administrative expenses). In the course of this project the city and the developer convinced the State of Ohio to change the formula by which low income housing tax credits are awarded statewide. It was also the first time in Ohio that this funding package was used, according to the Ohio Housing Finance Agency.

The city put its Architectural Board Permit application online in 1998 at www.stclairsville.com. The city linked its National Road Bikeway to the Historic Downtown District in 1998 at the hub on Woodrow Avenue. A Historic Downtown Walking Tour Brochure was developed and distributed from this hub. (This paragraph added to the Internet version of this plan only).

Principally through these efforts, the City of St. Clairsville has become a model in this area and in Ohio for downtown rehabilitation.

THE STATUS

Much has been done as this record shows to improve the downtown, yet much could still be done. The justification for further action is to build additional value in the target area. If additional value is not built into the area the active use of the downtown will be of limited daily duration (i.e., about 7:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.). Instead of being a vibrant core area of this city, the downtown now appears to be a ghost town after these hours. This characteristic inherently indicates a less valuable downtown area, and this ultimately leads to marginal maintenance and use, along with the risk of ultimate decline.

“Regardless of its aesthetic qualities, a built environment requires the presence of people to produce a desirable, appealing place. The presence of human activity throughout

the day is critical. Not only do people make a business district look more vital, they will in turn attract more activity since people are drawn to bustling, lively places. The level of human activity is a function of economics (multiple functions attracting diverse users) and physical setting (heritage, aesthetics, and pedestrian accessibility). Human activity is also closely related to the image a commercial district projects: Small numbers of people translate into the perception of a lifeless, undesirable place.” (Main Street News, September 1999).

Secondly, many of the buildings now show some early signs of decline even including those that were improved in the early 1990’s using public/private funds. Many of the individual buildings now have fine facades, while the rest of the building is in a poor condition. It is assumed that this condition largely exists because of a lack of adequate income or interest to maintain these structures.

Third, there still exists a desire to tear down buildings for parking lots or vacant land despite a nearly full occupancy rate. The county wants to destroy a structurally sound-architecturally-exquisite jail and sheriff’s residence while it rents property for its needs. Also vacant lots exist offering infill opportunities for the downtown. Some speculators have let these vacant gaps in St. Clairsville’s downtown exist for years with weeds growing on them, thus devaluing the whole of the area.

Fourth, the area viewed from the alleys and the alleys themselves appear blighted and haphazard.

Fifth, retail establishments are rare in the downtown, even though the structural rehabilitation has spurred some new interest in downtown niche retail. This spark needs to be enhanced, coordinated and paid attention to before it burns out. A handful of small shops will probably struggle if not fail, but a strong number of shops could be a draw and could succeed, especially if organized around at least one strong anchor.

It seems the city is at a critical juncture if we are going to build on the momentum largely produced between 1990 and 1997 for total restoration of the downtown's infrastructure, buildings and a diversified economy.

St. Clairsville has done a great deal, but the framework of restoration as most clearly and successfully identified by the National Main Street Program is not yet fully in place here.

It appears that the city's "bottom line" condition of the downtown is principally attributable to "the bottom line"... economics. If we are to keep the Historic District buildings viable, improve those businesses and buildings that are not viable over the long run, eliminate the desire to tear down buildings, keep buildings maintained by the private sector on its own initiative without the leverage of more public grants, if we are going to improve all of the architectural district's properties and not just Main Street and improve more than the facades while the rest of a building rots and the alleys debilitate, and if we are going to control signage, keep the downtown active, and provide small business services, income and improvements opportunities, save anchor buildings such as the jail and the Clarendon; if we are going to keep the gains we have made; if we are going to capitalize on some of the retail opportunities at the mall by "spinning" off of them, or capture some of the retail dollars now leaving this area, and if we are going to position ourselves to catch onto the emerging trend of a return to downtown retail, then we must proceed to the additional steps outlined herein.

THE PLAN

I. Structural Improvements

Alley Infrastructure

A tour through the downtown's alleys will bring back memories of what Main Street's character used to resemble in 1988. **We should make our alleyways more hospitable and pedestrian friendly.**

We need to restore the alleyways in the district. They need to be straightened and repaved. Storm drainage needs to be placed or improved. Concrete curbs are a suggested addition.

The overhead utility lines need to be cleaned up either by burying all lines, burying only the secondary services from the main to the buildings, or at least by softening their appearance with landscape techniques. Some rebuilding of these lines may also help to clean up this aerial clutter.

The placement of trees along the alleys would add visual depth, create a defined public alley space, and serve as shade for the backyards of many structures and parking areas.

It has been suggested that a series of coordinated garden spaces could be built along the alleys to make them more pedestrian friendly and attractive. Perhaps this could be initiated simply through planning and the coordination of private effort, or less preferably by acquiring a public easement in areas along parts of the alleys for public sector care.

Pedestrian scale lighting and site amenities should be added.

Perhaps a portion of the pavement could be striped off for a pedestrian walk zone paralleling the pavement, or perhaps a narrow elevated sidewalk could be built in the heaviest





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traveled areas such as the alley from the Court House to State Route 9 and from the library to State Route 9.

Still another approach would be to allow pedestrians and motor vehicles to share the small alley space, but use traffic calming techniques to slow vehicles thereby enhancing safety and pedestrian access.

Alleyway Area Development

Since the Main Street has nearly a 100 percent occupancy rate of existing buildings, there may be enough demand for a downtown location which when combined with a fixup of the alleys, may encourage investment along these alleyways. As an example, **the alleys could provide an office opportunity for a business looking for a less costly space than the main street. The alleys could give existing businesses a place to which they can expand.** To encourage this use, the alleys need to be made more attractive, open space needs to be identified, and the city's zoning needs to be changed to allow for more than one structure per lot in this area. At this point this idea may not seem realistic, yet historically people lived in the now dilapidated houses along these alleys, a few of which remain.

The alleys will continue to be relied upon for much of the parking needs of the district so people will automatically be drawn to them. It is logical then that they would be ideal for garages, and the garages would be ideal for a second story garage apartment. This would allow the existence of low income housing to middle class norms,





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and this would in turn add to the customer base for the downtown. Garage apartments and second floor Main Street

residences would enhance the safety of the alley area, and would add vitality to the downtown area. German Village in Columbus is but one successful example of alleyway housing/development. The Longaberger Company in Dresden, Ohio also makes excellent use of the alleys, as do many large cities. These communities may not be comparable to St. Clairsville, but the alley development can work here if done properly and in the context of an overall redevelopment plan.

Any garage apartment must be designed to “appear” as a secondary structure to the building with which it shares a lot. And it must match the architectural character of the companion building and those adjacent.

The city needs to expand Architectural Board authority to the alleyways if alley development is to be successful.

Parking

A City/Chamber consultant’s, (E.G.&G.) parking study dated 1989, documented a deficit of 88 spaces at full building occupancy during that time in the downtown. If we use coordinated parking in the alleys we would reduce that deficit. No effort has been made to implement that study which was sponsored by the Chamber, the City and the private sector.

Correcting the parking problem requires a multifaceted approach. All or part of the following could be implemented:

First, the slag lots need to be paved. Because the lots are built on a grade they erode and are treacherous to walk on as the slag rolls underfoot. Also, it is impossible to paint parking spaces on a slag surface, so the use of the available space is inefficient without the spaces being marked off. The erosion and slag keeps the alleys littered with debris.

Second, the consultant's proposal of coordinated parking has been used in other places and is not just an idea they alone espouse. Coordinated parking means that nearly everyone's private lot is opened to public parking. Owners use color-coded bumper blocks, or striping to designate spaces that are reserved for employees, the owner, and then a third color is used to designate public spaces. This approach would expand opportunities for parking, thereby creating a surplus.

Third, parking along Newell Avenue could be paved in the area near the City Building. This would offer parking one block off of Main Street, and about one block from the Court House. Eight spaces could be gained around the city's single pedestal water tank and steps could give pedestrians access to the nearby sidewalk.

Fourth, an elevated lot could be built behind the Court House or at the library area lots. The cost here is extremely high compared to the options, and other methods should first be employed. A Court House lot is an ideal Ohio Capital Bill Project, and a valid use of county funds.

A coordinated signage system is needed to direct motorists to these areas. (See

Fifth, a series of steps should be built on the west side of the city's lots to extend from these lots into the adjoining alley to give better pedestrian access.

Sixth, the city's lots on South Market must be reserved to hopefully someday serve a redeveloped Clarendon Hotel.

Existing Buildings

The existing buildings need further rehabilitation or at least adequate maintenance. Emphasis here should be on structural repairs and long term stability, Ohio Building Code issues, and significant appearance issues such as windows properly sized for

their openings, coordinated colors, correction of water damage, repair of sagging porches, removal of clutter, adequate electrical services, etc.

Downtown Survey

A basic first step is to survey and specifically quantify existing conditions. This is needed for various purposes such as a prerequisite for grants, to be able to understand the percentage of land use by type, identification of opportunities for infill and reuse, setting the stage for retail retention and expansion, etc.

This survey should entail such items as determining the amount of floor area of each building, percent of floor area devoted to office, retail, residential, manufacturing, and governmental use, etc. Also it should determine such items as the number of people who are in the district on average each day, along with new traffic count data. For a complete description of items to be surveyed, see the Ohio Department of Development's Application for Downtown Competitive Program Grant Funds.

Vacant parcels can be identified on Main Street and along the alleys too. These lots can be listed on the city's Geographic Information System (GIS). The GIS should also be used to store specific table data for each building in the district (i.e., year renovated, cost, work description, colors, a digital photo of each building in the district, etc.). The survey must include data on the condition of each structure (per a predetermined scale of 1 to 5 for example, and the rating should be assigned by an architect, engineer, trained inspector or builder), age of the structure (can be obtained from the National Register Inventory), and the

survey should document the use of the building. A description of the available infrastructure should be included in the survey and is attainable through the city's GIS.

A marketing brochure containing area specific demographics should be assembled based on survey results for use as a tool to attract new businesses, particularly franchise operations or chains.

General Statement

The factors which influence the success, failure, vitality, or desolation of a downtown are both numerous and complex. St. Clairsville's downtown area is relatively small. Geographic constraints make it even smaller. The availability of land and buildings is limited. Deleterious effects produced by a dilapidated property or the negative long term effects of vacant property are thus magnified and give a harmful impact upon the whole of the area.

Many area communities have decayed virtually beyond repair while local officials hope for the private sector to swoop in and rejuvenate them. Has this ever happened? But with action from the public sector, private sector partnerships can be formed, downtown can achieve publicly valuable rejuvenation in the broad interest of the public good, and the good of the downtown area. Since downtown is the core of the city, benefits to it are a benefit to the entire city.

Downtown rejuvenation is difficult to achieve because of the multiplicity and interrelatedness of properties and issues. Absentee owners, slumlords, owners who want to siphon every last dollar from a property while not reinvesting in it, owners who can afford to retain vacant property while they too wait for that private sector gold mine to sweep in and offer them twice what their property is really worth, all make it impossible to bring some

semblance of rejuvenation to their properties and this failure harms the community as a whole.

When some rejuvenation starts, a window of opportunity opens and gives momentum that must be seized or it will be lost. If this momentum is lost, the opportunity for comprehensive revitalization (i.e., National Main Street Center Four Point Approach) is lost with it. St. Clairsville's window has been open for a decade, and the window is starting to close, so if the city's promise of comprehensive rejuvenation is not to be lost action must take place now.

Eminent domain can be used to acquire vacant parcels of raw land, and/or run down buildings.

Redevelopment efforts across the country have dealt with these types of situations by acquiring vital properties and redirecting their reuse to the public interest even if that means redirecting its ownership to the public, quasi-public, or private sectors. The latter type of ownership comes with strings attached guaranteeing public benefit. This acquisition and redistribution uses willing buyer-seller transactions, but if necessary, eminent domain.

II. Downtown Opportunities

There are a number of opportunities that could be offered by our existing buildings:

Rowhouses - (Myers Law Offices to Prime Time Video excluding Starfire)

These are among the oldest structures in the district. They are situated on deep lots most of which are not built upon. These deep lots offer excellent opportunity for building expansion, parking, garage apartments, gardens, and open space.

The rowhouses themselves offer opportunity for reuse. Why reuse? **Their current condition is not good and their future is not bright as they continue to decay with little reinvestment.** The bulk of the rowhouses are used for rental apartments. Some of the rowhouses received grant funds from the city in 1992, but even the free improvements made then are not receiving any maintenance. One owner refused grant funds to pay for the material, labor and equipment to paint his building facade.

If even some of these buildings could be acquired by one owner, they could be reused as commercial space for a series of adjoining interconnected shops. Evidence in one case shows that two of the buildings were tied by an interior door, so a connected use may have occurred historically to some degree.

Secondly, if rehabilitated, the rowhouses could ideally be reused as housing.

To guide their redevelopment one interested owner of all six houses should be sought.

Another option is to purchase them for resale under certain reuse rules that would include rehabilitation, maintenance, and occupancy provisions. They also could be owned by the city or a nonprofit corporation, and leased out as another way to control their use for certain retail types of occupancy, or to guarantee their maintenance.

Clarendon

The most discussed site for reuse is the old Clarendon Hotel. It is one of the largest and most significant buildings in the downtown district, if not the most significant (excluding the Court House and jail). **At the beginning of the building restoration process, four large anchor buildings were identified in the downtown: the Court House, the Courtyard, the**

Masonic Temple and the Clarendon. All of these have been addressed in the restoration process except the Clarendon which exists as a blight in the center of the downtown.

The Clarendon has not been ruined by the remodeling process. In fact, there has been no significant visible investment in the building. The hotel has a historical association with the National Road, which could enable it to be eligible for certain public grant programs.

The Clarendon exists as a slum hotel in the center of St. Clairsville's downtown and across from the Court House plaza. The word "hotel" is a bit of a misnomer at this point, in that many of the current tenants are residents of the "hotel". The city police have a large number of calls to the structure every year to deal with some of its tenants. A great deal of public interest is expressed as, "What can be done with the Clarendon"?

The Clarendon has the character to become an anchor of the downtown on a par with the Court House. It could be reused for a hotel. At the current time three national hotel chains are said to be looking for space near the city. Anecdotal evidence suggests that existing hotels run at a high occupancy rate. A redeveloped Clarendon could take advantage of the city parking lots on South Market Street.

A midscale restaurant suitable to a historic inn and the St. Clairsville demographic profile, and set in a rehabilitated Clarendon, is a popular request of the city administration. There is the probability that a "spot specific" liquor permit could be approved by the voters if the license pertained to a qualified restaurant application.

The Clarendon offers opportunity for first floor retail and upper floor office space or housing as an alternative reuse.

It is hard to believe that this structure could not be successfully restored and operated within the St. Clairsville market given the Clarendon's architectural character, location and market demand for downtown St. Clairsville property.

Should the city continue to permit this major structure to debilitate in an otherwise prospering city and downtown area? Should this blight continue to exist, or should the city take a proactive approach to improving or acquiring this property?

If the Clarendon is to be reused, other housing opportunities should be found for its tenants. If the city is involved in the project this should be a mandatory consideration.

Perhaps this project could be linked with the rowhouses wherein high quality low income housing could be provided in them to house displaced Clarendon residents.

Property on the alley behind the Clarendon could enhance this hotel redevelopment concept.

Thomas House

This building and its furnishings could be developed as upscale lodging in concert with a redeveloped Clarendon, or it could be developed as a museum, an inn, or as a stand-alone project. Reportedly, it is a well-preserved structure inside and out, containing excellent period furnishings.

Old Theater Building

One basic downtown restoration approach is to reestablish an entertainment element to the downtown (i.e., restaurants, movies, etc.). One of the best anchors for a downtown is a movie theater. It is hard to compete against the national chains for first run movies so a niche needs to be developed.

Perhaps “second run” movies could be linked with a restaurant atmosphere to provide the uniqueness necessary for a dinner theater. The old theater on Main Street still contains the sloping floor and presents the structural opportunity for reuse as a theater. Theaters are a good way to build some evening activity. Evening activity will benefit other existing businesses and will lead to other types of development in the downtown.

Lundy House

The home of the nationally famous abolitionist Benjamin Lundy could be developed as a tourist attraction. If people are to be drawn into the downtown, we need to reward their experience once they are here. These types of uses seek to draw upon the resources we have so as to provide that reward through the use of nostalgia and historical interpretation. This historical reuse could be important to instruction in the nearby schools. A historical researcher should be employed to better document Lundy’s work in St. Clairsville.

Infill – Alleys

The open space offered in the alleys needs to be directed towards retail opportunity, housing, parking, garden/park space, or low traffic volume office opportunity.

Infill

Despite the high occupancy rate of existing properties it is an enigma that there are still a few vacant lots in the downtown. In some cases these areas have been vacant for years. The community needs to enable the development of these lots. Also, despite the high occupancy rate of existing buildings, there are still occasional demands to tear

down a building for parking or open space. We need to close existing spaces in the downtown fabric, not create new ones.

How do we build a retail component when the building occupancy rate is at a high level already? Where will the space come from in which to open a new business?

The answers may lie in part in developing the infill areas we have. Examples of these vacant spaces are at 121 East Main (Kacsmar open space), 196 West Main (Lestini open space) and Lot 49B (next to Raymond Sign). Some of the city's vacant parcels have been held for years as a void in the fabric of the downtown, bearing weeds and debris.

Jail/Sheriff's Residence

In communities all across the country, it has been repeatedly proven that economic development is synonymous with historic preservation. In a 1997 survey of its membership the National League of Cities listed historic preservation as the seventh most commonly used economic development tool out of a list of 45 alternatives.

Despite this national trend, seemingly most Belmont County Officials want to destroy the jail and residence to build a new building, parking lot, plaza, or some combination of these. But, **a rehabilitated Jail/Sheriff's Residence offers numerous opportunities for reuse** which most logically would include county offices, a relocated law library, etc. Some reports are that elsewhere, jails have been redone into a novel type of inn. With the high demand for office space, one would think that a mix of public/private development would be possible, if the obvious benefits of direct county use continues to be ignored.

The jail and residence are two of the city's most significant structures. The buildings are not being preserved pending reuse. Calls to stop water infiltration and to at least heat them to 50 degrees so as to stabilize their status have been ignored by the county

commissioners. **Evaluation of the structures indicate that the buildings are sound, their problems are mainly cosmetic, and their reuse can be economically accomplished versus new construction.**

The county began leasing space for a title office in St. Clairsville's downtown in 1999, and while the city appreciates the title office's downtown presence, the lease could fund a large principal amount that could be directed towards jail reuse. The county is searching for a building to buy, or a site on which to build a senior citizens center, but they ignore the prospect of renovating the jail for this or other use. **This community, through its leaders and Chamber of Commerce, should actively work with the county to change the latter's predisposition to demolish this structure. This should be an issue that is brought to the "front, not the rear burner", where it now is.**

The previous county commissioners have done excellent work in rehabilitating the exterior of the magnificent courthouse, which shines for miles in the evening as a visual monument to their work. The same care that the county brought to that issue should be extended a few feet across the plaza to the jail.

For a detailed presentation of the Jail/Residence, see the Belmont Technical College report dated September, 1997 available from the City of St. Clairsville.

III. THE PROGRAM

Financial Mechanisms

Money will drive all of the issues identified herein, so it is emphasized that various funding scenarios are possible. In every major project the city has undertaken, financing has the "idea" stage. The concepts described herein are no different. It is

important that the ideas are first set forth, interest and discussion generated, and then implementation of the ideas gains momentum. Historically, this has led to a successful project specific funding plan. The approach to the issues here should be no different. These goals and objectives are financially attainable, at least in part, in the short term (i.e., 1-5 years) and even more so over the long term.

It is anticipated that some combination of the following mechanisms should be pursued and may be a potential source of financing for the concepts set forth herein:

- City Funds
- City Revolving Loan Funds
- Municipal Notes/General Obligation Bonds
- Reprogrammed Congressional Appropriation or New Appropriation
- County funds

- Ohio Capital Bill Grant
- TEA-21 Grant
- Ohio Department of Development Programs
- Appalachian Regional Commission
- Economic Development Administration
- Historic Preservation Tax Credits
- Low Income Housing Tax Credits
- St. Clairsville Area Chamber of Commerce
- Small Business Administration
- Tax Increment Financing
- Private Sector General and/or Limited Partners
- Private Sector Funding

- Farmer’s Home Administration
- Tax Abatement to leverage private sector funds
- Creation of a lower interest revolving loan fund through local banks
- Ohio Public Works Funds

In the instances described herein, where St. Clairsville’s local government has been suggested to become the “developer of last resort”, the city could serve as a “short term vehicle” to guide the development of a property and then transfer it out of city ownership. In this way the cost to the city will be limited only to carrying costs over the short term (i.e., principal, interest on a loan, insurance costs, utilities, etc.). Alternatively, the city could hold the property long term, or lease it to a nonprofit corporation or a for profit corporation. In any case the city should guide the long-term use of the property if it becomes involved.

Retail Analysis & Assistance

Either **the Chamber needs to help target the issues of this report**, or there needs to be a group formed as a subset of the Chamber of Commerce, or a group unto itself that consists of business interests only within the St. Clairsville city limits. If the latter, this should be a group that advocates only for city businesses, which is especially necessary since there is so much competition at the edge of the city limits.

National retailers, malls and shopping centers all employ experts in the siting of their stores, the selection of their merchandise, the display of their goods, etc. They are able to bring experts to the various facets of retailing.

Local businesses do not have the luxury of outside consultants and varied specialists, but there needs to be some expertise lent to these same issues in our downtown by experts in the field. **Consultants should be employed to help existing business and to develop new retail businesses.**

The current hot development trend in the trendiest shopping areas in the country is a return to retail in downtown areas.

The Internet promises to enable local downtown businesses the opportunity to reach distant markets and again “reshuffle the retail deck”.

Developers are building Main Streets, lining them with stores and second floor apartments. “The first malls have been cannibalized by newer malls, and the malls by shopping plazas, and now even Wal-Mart is experimenting with smaller stores in smaller markets”. (Andres Duany, Architect, Louisville, KY 1996). Now developments all over the country are being built around a master planned and newly built downtown. Examples close to St. Clairsville are Easton and Polaris respectively, near Columbus. If a newly developed master planned (i.e., fake) downtown can succeed, surely an authentic one can be successful under proper guidance.

Using proven basic techniques a downtown can be brought back to life over the long term.

St. Clairsville is in the center of an emerging traffic pattern as the retail hub of this region. Over 200 stores are located at the edge of the city. This existing retail destination advantage, our proximity to I-70, the National Road as our Main Street, our basis as the county seat, our restored built environment, and the heavy traffic in the city all give us great momentum for retail development. The people are already here, we just need to get them to stop. We need to build a market to make it worthwhile for them to stop!

The future construction of Route 22 connecting to both I-70 and U.S. 40 west of St. Clairsville will create a new traffic and development magnet pulling new businesses to the already emerging area west of the city. Our downtown will be in the middle of these two

major traffic destinations/generators, being the mall on the east and the Route 22 area of development on the west. The county's plan to provide wastewater service west of St. Clairsville will fuel this development. This probable new development will create even more traffic and retail opportunity in our downtown.

One of the main goals of any retail consultant must be the identification of niche markets. What services aren't the mall and plaza providing? What do people choose to buy out of this area? What do they provide that a St. Clairsville business can piggyback on? (I.e., If the mall sells lawn mowers, can a downtown business be formed to repair these mowers?)

We need to work with businesses that share identified niches. We have then got to help them survive and grow. It doesn't take a professional to spot some retail mistakes in St. Clairsville's downtown, but a professional is needed to develop and advocate change. St. Clairsville and/or hopefully the Chamber of Commerce needs to hire that professional help.

One idea that needs to be developed is "clustering" of like businesses. One example in and near the downtown is the number of businesses that deal with home furnishings. They include the Design Studio, Window Fashions by Beth, and C & G Custom Sewing. (Regretfully, Bella's and the Furniture Mill were relocating from the downtown in late 1999, while Mel's was opened in the corner of the Courtyard). If similar businesses were marketed cooperatively it would be a customer draw. If one business doesn't have what a customer wants, customers could easily visit another similar business. This also will produce greater shopper interest/circulation, which will help other St. Clairsville businesses. Collective advertising costs could be shared more efficiently/effectively than individual ads.

Other clustering ideas should be developed.

Retail assistance could be city wide, and not confined to just the downtown.

An anchor establishment such as a redeveloped Hotel Clarendon is needed. A series of shops is needed to be successful to create an adequate shopper draw and increase buyer circulation in the downtown. Current public downtown anchors such as the library, county government and banks need to be kept downtown.

Nationwide, Americans make sixty percent of their purchases at national chain department stores (National Main Street Center, 1999), so their market force is considerable. One chain type anchor could not find an adequate site in our downtown after trying. Locating one here would be a great benefit to the downtown.

Another idea for retail assistance is to pool resources with other local communities to employ a Main Street Manager who would prorate his work time among several towns, and be paid prorata by these towns. This would bring professional Main Street management to, for example, three towns with each town bearing one third of the cost. The manager would develop a National Main Street Program in each town, and work to implement this plan!

Another proposal is the creation of a publicly owned fiber optic system to enable high speed data transfer to serve the downtown area. This promises to open entirely new markets to local businesses. The city and possibly Ohio University, as well as Belmont Technical College can assist by training businesses on how to create and manage their own web sites and develop markets around e-commerce.

The Need to Build Value

All of these ideas are meant to build a better economic condition for St. Clairsville businesses, so owners will have the capital to maintain their properties, employ, offer new/better services, while adding vitality, value and quality to the downtown.

The practice of tearing down buildings for parking lots or open space must stop. The buildings create the space that is the downtown! The visual lines created by the buildings is what gives the area much of its character. When a building is removed that line is harmed. Here's an example: Which looks better, the south side of Main Street at the midblock between the Courthouse and Route 9, or the north side? Our downtown is too small, and most of our buildings lend too much character to have them torn down.

To stop that, **City Council should pass an ordinance that prohibits the demolition of any building unless another Architectural Board of Review approved structure will be immediately built in its place. The replacement should be guaranteed** by bonding, security, or by owner relinquishment of the property should he not act pursuant to agreement. For an even more restrictive example, in Charleston, South Carolina no building may be demolished.

The holes that exist at 135 West Main and 121 East Main should be closed with brick/stone walls that could in part use wrought iron and landscaping. This would enable better streetscape design lines, while still giving visibility from the street.

The St. Clairsville public needs to be reminded and educated as to why controls (i.e., architectural review, sign ordinances, zoning, etc.) are needed to protect investments. At the same time we need to legislate against the extreme while still giving room for individual expression within the context of appropriateness. **A public involved planning process surrounding this plan needs to help develop these concerns.** A downtown newsletter and the city's and chamber's web sites need to stress these "awareness goals."

A professionally judged award program should be developed to select the best building restoration, landscaping, and signage package respectively. The award could

be given every 3 years. (If no suitable project is developed, no award would be given.)

Perhaps an award could carry significant benefits to the owner, such as publicity and say a week's vacation package, etc. This concept would heighten awareness.

A Vehicle to Shape the Agenda

If the city's destiny and thirty year old problems are going to be changed, a pro active approach is needed. How can we save the rowhouses or the Clarendon? How can we infill vacant spaces, and how can we control the reuse of these properties? How can we give business owners a chance to obtain vacant space over the economic power of banks and attorneys who may want the same space? (The professional's economic power has been good for our city, but the mix of other uses are in bank/attorney's interest as well).

It is hereby suggested that a non-profit organization be formed to obtain select properties in order to resell or lease them while keeping controls in place as to how the property is redeveloped and used. Alternatively, but less preferably, the city government could serve in this role.

A willing buyer – willing seller approach should be pursued. Some of the properties are so critical to the function of the downtown, and some of the properties are now conveying such a longstanding negative impact to the downtown that some have advocated that an appropriation (eminent domain) action be pursued against the property in the instance of an owner who rejects reasonable offers. If this step is considered further, it should only be pursued in the context of a further defined redevelopment process, and pursuant to strategic planning sessions with community leaders. But in view of the scope of the problem, it is an avenue that should be seriously considered in the public interest.

This redistribution of private property in the public interest has considerable precedent in redevelopment efforts. One example, is Columbus's City Center Mall.

Another idea is for nonprofit organizations to acquire dilapidated property and then donate it or transfer it by lease/sale at a reduced cost to those who will warrant to restore it in accord with preapproved plans.

Marketing

St. Clairsville is underutilizing its location, its rehabilitation work, and its National Historic District designation.

Brochures could be placed in rest areas on I-70. Better still, the Ohio Department of Transportation should be contacted to place signs at the appropriate exits on I-70 noting our National Historic District. This is done in other states. And interstate signs in cities frequently point to their downtown areas. Less preferable would be to use interstate billboards on both the east and west side of the downtown to attract visitors.

Signs should be placed at the gazebo and the Thomas Hub on Woodrow Avenue to direct bikeway users to the downtown. Historical interpretation should be stressed, particularly in view of the National Road's potential designation as a National Scenic Byway, and the grant funds that may enable. The Historic Tour brochure the city researched, prepared and published needs the help of others to distribute.

Another attraction could be a guided court house tour held at regular intervals, using historical interpretation and a trip into the tower atop the court house for a spectacular view developed around a professionally prepared program.

The old mill on South Sugar offers similar opportunity and needs to be adaptively reused. Tables with umbrellas on the court house plaza would be appropriate for summer

lunches. Brainstorming sessions should be held to reach other marketing/promotional concepts.

Farmers Market

Farmers markets are a frequent tool used to enhance downtowns. Ours is held at the Fairgrounds, which is remote from the downtown and thus limits spinoff business. It is convenient for its immediate use, however it is not well sited to maximize sales. The event is held on Saturday when most of the community's government and professional employees are at home.

It is hereby advocated that a 20' X 50' or 20' X 70' tent be purchased and placed on the courthouse plaza for the summer and harvest season. If more room is needed, the courtyard between the jail and the Court House would offer ideal space. The tent should include roll down sides. Evening and/or Saturday events could use parking next to the courthouse. Banners on Main Street can direct traffic to the market. Business for the farmers market should increase as should that of downtown businesses. **If the current market does not want to relocate, a new one should be formed.**

Maintenance

Downtown maintenance must be improved. There are two general options which could improve maintenance:

1. Public Areas – A Special Improvement District could be formed (also called a Business Improvement District (BID)). This is a special taxing district wherein an additional level of service can be contracted for beyond that available to the rest of the city. Such a district is authorized by the Ohio Revised Code Section 1710. Here is an example of why such a BID is suggested: The City and the Chamber of Commerce has

asked every owner to sweep the sidewalk area in front of their building into the street every Thursday. The city has hired a street sweeping company that then sweeps the street every Friday morning. The problem has been that few owners have regularly swept the sidewalks. Litter, leaves, and debris are scattered in many areas, particularly in stairwells, around steps, corners and tree pits. If a Special Improvements District was created the city would assume responsibility to clean these areas on a regular basis, just as we do the street, thereby enhancing the image of the city and the downtown, but the property owners would pay for this additional level of city service.

Likewise, additional services such as police, paving, etc. could be contracted for.

2. Private Areas – A minimum maintenance ordinance could be developed which requires

owners to keep their buildings and property in an adequate state of repair or condition so as to insure the public's health, safety and welfare. This minimum standards code could address such items as requiring painting, structural integrity, etc.

Next Steps

The “stakeholders” in this matter need to come to the table and enter into discussion of these issues. A logical starting point could be a meeting between City Council/Officeholders, Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Architectural Board of Review, Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and the special Zoning/Planning Committee, if there is interest by any of these. The issues could then be broadened to reach the owners in the downtown area, the general public and community leaders. These meetings should be directed at the various issues and approaches set forth herein and the addition of other identified issues.

Once a plan is reached, a policy can be formalized by plan, ordinance, procedure, etc.

A starting point is to send this plan, at least in summary form, to the aforementioned groups (i.e., Mayor, Council President, Council members, Chamber members, etc.) Then one of these should arrange a meeting to discuss it. If only one person, or one group is interested in an additional downtown program and improvements, there is no point in proceeding. A lack of interest will result in a return to the type of conditions prevalent in the early 1980's, such as declining public infrastructure, buildings and retail.

If there is interest in additional improvements, a planning process should proceed. It could be led by the city, by a consultant(s), the Chamber, or a subgroup thereof.

Yet another step would be to move to form a nonprofit corporation headed by select representatives of downtown interests to initiate and coordinate the project in whole, or in significant part. A nonprofit corporation could bring the advantages of a private sector model in terms of operation, yet retain public sector advantages such as tax exemption in coordination with the city's power of eminent domain, etc.

The implementation of any one, or combination of items herein will help. The planning process should select and prioritize these and any other ideas.

IV. A SUMMARY OF NEED

Why Address These Issues?

Does anyone care whether downtown offers mixed use, is renovated or the restoration gains we have made are lost, or preserved, and expanded upon? How can the city reasonably enter into ideas such as becoming a property owner or a landlord? Who could run a nonprofit corporation to direct all this? Where will the money come from?

Admittedly, the ideas proposed herein are aggressive and many will feel excessively so. But others will agree that bitter medicine is needed to solve such long running problems as the decline of St. Clairsville retail or the blight of the Clarendon. In the case of the rowhouses or the Clarendon, the city seems to be the developer of last resort. Public funds cannot be granted every five years to paint the rowhouses, and if repairs are not eventually brought to these and the rest of the downtown buildings, they will eventually become unusable. These aggressive ideas are proven tools for this type of work in other areas of the country.

Dilapidated buildings pose risks to the public health, safety, and welfare. Poor electrical systems can cause fire. Old chimneys on several Main Street buildings appear on the brink of instability. Walls are bowed at various structures. Spouts discharge into foundations. Some owners don't seem to understand or appreciate the need for ongoing maintenance. Even several owners with thriving businesses neglect their downtown buildings. Already, peeling paint has been left for several years on structures rehabilitated in the early 1990's. Absentee owners sit on weed and debris ridden property for decades with no prospect to close these gaps in the fabric of the downtown. Sloppy signs are again reappearing. Will history show that owners just let the buildings and streetscape again decline? Will apathy return or has it already? The answer must be to build demand and economic value. The methods herein will do that.