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I. Introduction

The City of Bowling Green is blessed with a beautiful and vibrant downtown business district (*see Map: Study Area*). Visitors enjoy a new streetscape, great architecture and plenty of places to shop and



eat. Businesses enjoy a constant base of repeat and new visitors often generated from the local university, Bowling Green State University (BGSU). The City and its residents are fortunate to have these assets available.

The level of activity, investment and interest in downtown has changed dramatically since the last Downtown Plan (1987) and since the Heritage 2000 (H2K) streetscape improvements in 2000. From these physical improvements grew a desire to embrace a planning process that improves the downtown's functionality, safety, character, and social vitality.

This Plan should work in unison with other sections of Bowling Green's updated comprehensive plan to encourage growth and development which produces substantial net benefits and minimizes undesirable consequences. As the elements of this Plan are laid out, it is important to note certain guiding principles that will direct the approach of this plan. These principles are:

Downtown as a destination

The Plan foresees a vital downtown known within the region as a center of distinctive shopping, impeccable dining, and a place for stimulating experiences. In essence, downtown Bowling Green should encompass a diverse mix of activities, historical uniqueness, and distinctive architecture and urban forms that engender a special excitement reflective of a unique community.

Downtown as a home

This Plan supports a mix of living options downtown, particularly in the upper floors of buildings in the downtown business district. In addition, the downtown's best supply of housing is found in its own and adjacent neighborhoods. The residential neighborhoods which are part of this downtown core study area, as well as those contiguous to the downtown provide living options within a five to ten minute walk. This Plan encourages policies that protect and improve these neighborhoods.

Downtown prosperity built upon public-private partnerships

The continual revitalization and unique character of the downtown should be perpetuated through the public-private partnerships that currently exist. In this manner, the City of Bowling Green will have to recognize which endeavors it wishes to implement and which are better suited for cooperative arrangements by the private sector.

From these partnerships, it is vital that the following items are addressed in the future:

1. Developing a clear vision of what Downtown Bowling Green intends to be. For example, should the Downtown be an entity



modified to compete with gigantic retailers, or should it be one that utilizes its friendly atmosphere to sell distinctive goods and services not found elsewhere?

2. Developing a capital improvement plan for the downtown to ensure that the streetscape and other physical amenities, like benches, planters, and light fixtures, are properly and perpetually maintained. The plan should clearly define the maintenance activity, maintenance schedule, and the party responsible. Currently, the downtown streetscape and amenities are maintained through an implied relationship between Main Street BG and the City of Bowling Green.
3. Optimizing parking opportunities. Parking vacancy and turnover should be periodically reviewed to ensure for adequate parking. Furthermore, every effort should be taken to have BGSU officials add the downtown location to their shuttle bus route. This will help to free up additional parking spots for other customers.
4. Improving methods for truck loading and unloading. The three “areas of concern” highlighted in this Plan should be addressed to ensure that traffic flow and pedestrian safety is maintained.
5. Developing parking fees that are not only affordable, but competitive enough to promote parking turnover in the most sought after parking areas. The City and downtown business representatives recently approved an increase in meter rates in September 2005. It is recommended that rates be reviewed periodically and changed accordingly.

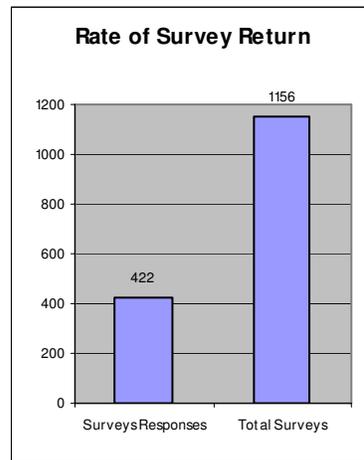




6. Improving pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow through effective directional, way finding and parking signage.
7. Continuing the H2K theme throughout the B-3 district and other contiguous areas if opportunities and resources are available. Future improvements within the Special Improvement District (SID), such as benches, bike racks, lighting, and other improvements should also be reflective of the H2K theme.
8. Promoting appropriate and uniform outdoor dining and “A” frame advertising regulations for the public sidewalks.
9. Pursuing the creation of additional public areas in the downtown.
10. Continuing to fortify Downtown Bowling Green as a niche destination, rich with dining, shopping, and social activities.

I. Summary

The public participation process was a vital portion of the overall framework that guided the recommendations, graphics, and strategies that are included within this document.



A downtown survey was utilized during the initial phase of the study period, which began in the middle of December 2004 and lasted approximately four months. When the survey and comment period ended, 1156 surveys had been distributed through a variety of methods to a targeted audience comprised of downtown merchants and employees, shoppers, property owners, and other

community and social groups. This method of targeting groups and individuals familiar with the downtown (or those who had a stake in the overall success of Bowling Green's downtown) worked well and is predominately the reason for the high rate of return. Approximately 37% of all surveys that were distributed were completed and returned. A majority of surveys that were completed (39%) were completed by downtown employees, followed by downtown business owners/property owners.

The recent downtown streetscape and other improvements that resulted from the H2K planning efforts continue to receive favorable reviews from downtown shoppers and residents alike. However, as with most downtowns, their composition of businesses, property owners, and consumers change over time.



Public Participation

The primary component of this survey was not only to engage and have a dialogue with the downtown's biggest supporters, but to also get a better understanding of what could be done to ensure that the economic livelihood, safety, and historic feel remains the same as it is today or is profoundly better in the future.

To ensure this happens, the results of this survey set the tone for additional activities embraced in the Downtown Section. Activities like: Modifying the H2K improvements to provide a better downtown shopping and visiting experience. This will include examining pedestrian safety and flow issues, lighting, parking, wayfinding and signage issues, outdoor dining and advertising issues, the promotion and retention of historic standards, and marketing.



II. The Downtown Survey

A. Demographics

The first page of the survey covered a series of demographic questions. Results of the survey indicated the following with regard to the survey sample:

1. Average household size noted from survey respondents was 2.7. 207 of 422 respondents, or 49%, noted having two persons in their households. The remaining size of households was as follows: 3 (13.98%); 4 (13.03%); 5 (6.4%); 6 (2.84%); 7 (.24%); and 8 or more (1.66%).
2. Thirty-five percent (35%) of survey respondents lived in Bowling Green for over 30 years, whereas roughly 18% of survey takers were not residents of Bowling Green. Twenty-one percent of respondents noted living in Bowling Green less than 10 years, and roughly 26% reported living in Bowling Green between 11 and 29 years.
3. Seventy-three percent (73%) reported owning their own homes, while 23% of respondents noted renting. Of those that rent, over 60% said that they would consider renting a home or apartment in the downtown area.
4. Fifty-six (56%) percent of survey respondents were female, and 34% male. Less than 10% reported completing the survey with a significant other.



5. The ages of the survey respondents was extremely varied: 16% of respondents were 24 years old or younger; 13% were ages 25-34; 14% were ages 35-44; 21% were ages 45-55; and 38% of respondents were 56 years of age or older.
6. The educational backgrounds of the survey respondents was also extremely varied: Over 37% of respondents reported having a graduate degree or higher, 24% a Bachelor's Degree; 6% reported having an Associates Degree or technical college experience; 24% reported having "some college," and 9% noted having high school diplomas only. Only two percent of respondents noted having less than 12 years of education.
7. The majority of survey takers reported either having "professional" occupations (27%) or service and sales-related occupations (24%), and approximately 14% reported being retired.
8. Major sources of income reported were: 36% service and retail; 19% retirement or social security; 17% university-related; 15% "other"; 9% government; and 5% manufacturing.

B. Professional and Retail Services

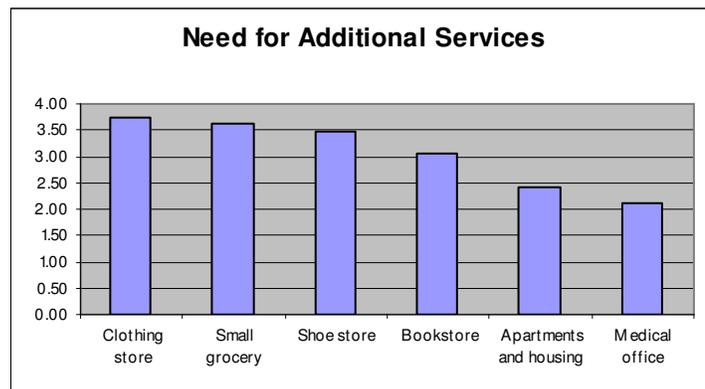
Bowling Green respondents were asked whether they purchase certain goods and services in downtown Bowling Green (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "often"). Survey respondents could select from 29 various categories.

The most common purchases or utilized services in the downtown included: banks (4.23), restaurants and eateries (3.68), gift shops (3.30), coffee (3.28), hardware (3.18), crafts and floral items (3.18),

beauty and barber shops (2.92), and convenience items (2.87). The least purchased services include: tattoo parlors (1.40), massage therapy (1.53), tanning shops (1.56), travel agencies (1.92), clothing and apparel (1.95), and insurance (2.05).

When asked which items and services were most needed in downtown Bowling Green, respondents indicated clothing store (3.73), small grocery (3.63), shoe store (3.45), and bookstore (3.07).

Least rated services or items were apartments and housing (2.42) and medical offices (2.11).



A review of the open-ended responses indicated that respondents were largely interested in having more diversity in restaurants, especially those more “ethnic” in nature, and also having a pharmacy or drug store downtown.

C. Frequency Visiting the Downtown

When asked how often they shop in downtown Bowling Green, 30% of the respondents mentioned several times weekly, with 34% shopping in the downtown at least once a week. 23% percent noted purchasing services “once monthly” and 11% said “several times yearly”. Only two percent of respondents indicated never shopping in the downtown.

Survey respondents were able to rank preferred shopping locations (on a scale of 1, “most preferred,” to 5 “least preferred”).

Respondents rated downtown Bowling Green as their first preference (2.49), followed by Bowling Green, not downtown (2.51), Toledo (2.84), Perrysburg/Rossford (3.47), and Findlay (4.18). Other shopping areas survey respondents noted the most were Columbus, Ohio, and Ann Arbor, Michigan.

When asked “how often do you dine in downtown Bowling Green,” respondents reported similarly: 27% noted dining several times weekly, 29% once weekly, 29% monthly, and 14% indicated eating in the downtown “several times yearly.” Likewise, only two-percent of respondents indicated never dining in the downtown.

Survey respondents were able to rank preferred dining locations (on a scale of 1, “most preferred,” to 5 “least preferred”). Respondents rated downtown Bowling Green as their first preference (2.02), followed by Toledo (2.61), Bowling Green, not downtown (2.74), Perrysburg/Rossford (3.67), and Findlay (4.19). Other dining areas survey respondents noted the most were Ann Arbor, Michigan and Maumee.

Roughly fifty-six percent indicated visiting the City offices or the Bowling Green post office at least once weekly. 26% noted visiting these offices monthly, and 14% reported visiting them several times yearly. Almost 4% said they never visit City offices or the post office.

D. Sources of Information

Downtown survey respondents were asked if they receive enough information concerning both downtown shopping and sales, and downtown special events. In both instances, approximately 60% of



survey takers noted getting enough information on these downtown events.

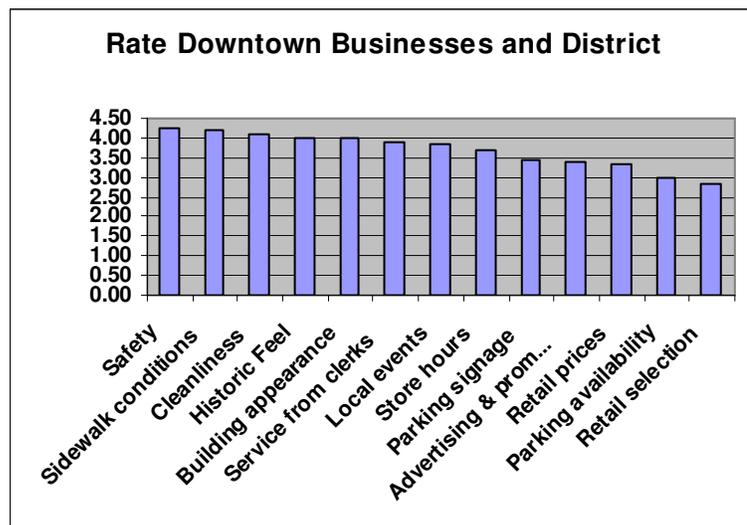
In both questions, 74% and 76% of respondents, respectively, received their information from the Sentinel-Tribune, followed by 58% and 60% of respondents, respectively; receiving their information from word of mouth. In addition to receiving most of their information from the Sentinel-Tribune and by word of mouth, respondents indicated coupons (28%) and direct mail (27%) provided them with the necessary downtown shopping and sales events.

Survey respondents indicated, at much lower percentages, that they receive information on downtown shopping and special events from the BG News, television, radio, or the Internet.

These responses indicate that a majority of downtown survey respondents feel they receive enough information concerning downtown shopping and special events.

E. Rating Bowling Green's Downtown

Survey respondents not only rated the downtown's overall appearance above average (4.07 out of 5), but they viewed the recent downtown streetscape improvements above average as well (4.17 out of 5).



When asked to rate selected qualities of Bowling Green's downtown and its businesses (with a rating of 1 being "poor" and 5 being "excellent") survey respondents rated safety (4.22), sidewalk conditions (4.20), cleanliness (4.09), historic feel (4.0), and building appearance (3.98) as downtown Bowling Green's top five qualities.

Lower scoring variables included retail selection (2.81), parking availability (3.00), retail prices (3.34), advertising and local promotions (3.36), and parking signage (3.4). However, with the exception of "retail selection" being rated slightly below average and parking availability rated average, survey respondents rated the remaining 11 other downtown qualities above average.

F. Open Ended Questions

The survey also included three open-ended questions specifically asking about the downtown's strengths, weaknesses, and the most important improvement needed. The most prevalent responses are provided under each of the following topics:

1. Identify the most important strengths downtown.

Although varied due to the open-ended nature of the question, survey respondents noted downtown attractiveness and "feel," (noted by 79 people), restaurants, people, variety, the Ben Franklin store, and cleanliness.

2. Identify the greatest weaknesses downtown.

A general theme by survey respondents (111 people) noted lack of parking for downtown employees and during special events. The lack of retail diversity, lack of men's and women's clothing and shoe stores, too many bars, lack of restaurant diversity, no grocery store, traffic noise and congestion, lack of



advertising and marketing, retail prices, and vacancies were also noted.

3. Identify the most important improvement needed in the downtown.

Again, the general theme was addressing parking availability issues and parking costs. Also noted were: more retail selection, more restaurant diversity, additional rehabilitation needed to building facades, clothing store, reducing traffic and banning truck traffic, fewer bars, more special events (arts and music), department store, filling vacant buildings, and retaining the downtown's historic features.



I. Study Area

The study area consists of the boundaries of the Special Improvement District and the B-3 Zoning District. Also included in the study area are the institutional parcels to the west where the junior high school and church are located. To get a more detailed analysis of the study area, see *Map: Block Numbers*. The block numbers are as follows:

Block 1

This area is bounded to the north by Clay Street, south by W. Oak Street, east by N. Main Street, and to the west by N. Church Street.

Block 2

The area is bounded to the north by W. Oak Street, south by Court Street, east by N. Main Street, and to the west by N. Church Street.

Block 3

This area is bounded to the north by Court Street, south by W. Wooster, east by N. Main Street, and to the west by selective parcels that front on N. Church Street.

Block 4

This area is bounded to the north by W. Wooster, south by the Clough Street “alley” north of Sky Bank, east by S. Main Street, and to the west by selective parcels that front on S. Church Street and S. Church Street itself.

Block 5

This area is bounded to the north by the Clough Street “alley”, south by Washington Street, east by S. Main Street, and to the west by S. Church Street.



Existing Conditions and Trends

Block 6

This area is bounded to the north by Washington Street, south by Pearl Street, east by S. Main Street, and to the west by S. Church Street.

Block 7

This area is bounded to the north by Pearl Street, south by Ordway Avenue, east by S. Main Street, and to the west by S. Church Street.

Block 8

This area is bounded to the north by Washington Street, south by Lehman Avenue, east by S. Prospect Street, and to the west by S. Main Street.

Block 9

This area is bounded to the north by Clough Street, south by Washington Street, east by S. Prospect Street, and to the west by S. Main Street.

Block 10

This area is bounded to the north by E. Wooster Street, south by Clough Street, east by S. Prospect Street, and to the west by S. Main Street.

Block 11

This area is bounded to the north by E. Court Street, south by E. Wooster Street, east by N. Prospect Street, and to the west by N. Main Street.



Existing Conditions and Trends

Block 12

This area is bounded to the north by Oak Street, south by E. Court Street, east by N. Prospect Street, and to the west by N. Main Street.

Block 13

This area is bounded to the north by Ridge Street, south by Oak Street, east by N. Prospect Street, and to the west by N. Main Street.

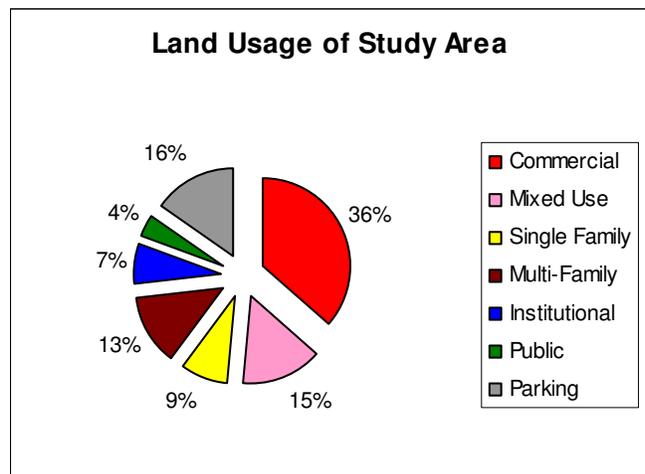


II. Land Usage

The land usage in the downtown study area consists of various commercial and mixed use parcels, with sporadic residential uses, either owner-occupied or rentals, on the outlying streets.

A general review of land usage in the study area was conducted using a combination of data and aerials from the Wood County Auditor's office, and field checked for accuracy (*See Map: Existing Land Use*).

The overall square footage of the parcels in the study area is approximately 2.3 million square feet (2,279,954 sq. ft)¹. It was classified into six major land uses, including parking, to accurately assess the study area's overall functionality.



The uses are as follows:

A. Single-Family Residential

Approximately 276,467 square-feet of single-family residential uses exist in the study area and are contained on 27 parcels. Of these 27 single-family parcels, 56%, or 15 parcels, are owner-occupied, with the remaining 44% rentals. Most of the single-family parcels are located in the northeast and southwest sections of the study area.

¹ The square footage is calculated for parcels not buildings.

Existing Conditions and Trends

Parking related to single-family uses amounts to roughly 1.5% of the total square footage, or 4,206 square feet.

B. Multi-Family Residential

Thirteen percent, or 337,599 square-feet, of the downtown study area is multi-family residential. Of this amount, approximately 14% (48,081 square feet) is utilized for parking.

Included in this specific land use are rental units and apartments either located in former owner-occupied single-family homes or in apartment complexes. Apartments and other multi-family units located on the second floors of buildings in the study area are classified as “mixed-use” and therefore not included in the overall multi-family square footage.

C. Commercial

As the largest downtown use, aside from parking, commercial parcels consume roughly 901,518 square-feet, or 27%, of the study area. Of this total, approximately one-third (288,090 square feet) is utilized for parking.

D. Mixed Uses

Approximately 14% of the downtown study area, or 233,828 square-feet, is comprised of mixed-use parcels. Of this amount, 13% (29,916 square feet) is utilized for parking.

For a parcel to be identified as mixed-use, it had to be jointly utilized as commercial or office use and upper floor residential use. As of September 2005, approximately 84 housing units exist on these downtown mixed-use parcels. This equates to a housing density of approximately 17 units per acre.



E. Public and Institutional

Roughly 530,542 square-feet of public and institutional land uses exist in the study area. Of this amount, approximately 44% (235,709 square feet) is utilized for parking.

Public uses include: all municipal buildings and City owned property (administration building, police station, etc.), the senior center, and the post office. The Bowling Green Junior High School, King's Way Church and the Wood County District Public Library are also included as institutional uses.

F. Parking

To better estimate the overall amount of parking in the study area, all surface parking lots were digitized using the recently-flown, half-foot resolution aerials.

Over 607,084 square feet of off-street parking exists in the study area, representing approximately 27% of the total study area.² Of this amount, roughly 34% is allocated as public parking³ and 66% is privately owned. In addition, approximately 208 on-street parking spaces exist in the study area. When this additional 29,120 square feet of on-street parking is included, public parking accounts for 37% of all parking. Public parking, as a percentage of overall downtown land use, accounts for 9.2%. For more information as to the specific locations of these public and private lots, please see *Map: Buildings and Parking*.

² It is estimated that this number could actually be 2-4% higher, due to some surface parking lots being hard to identify on the aerial imagery.

³ The City's newest parking lot (Lot #7) on the former Speedway site is included in this square footage. The lot is utilized for parking for City and other downtown employees and not customer parking. City Lot #5 near the Courthouse was not included, due to its location outside of the Study Area.



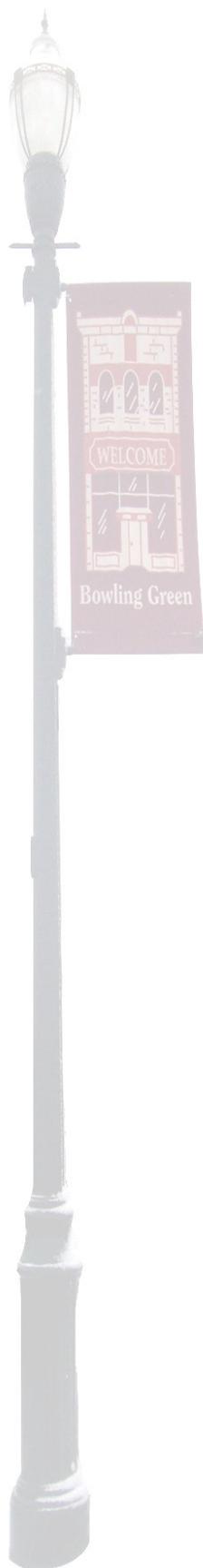
III. Downtown Accessibility

A. Traffic Circulation

Bowling Green's downtown is at the crossroads of two main routes, State Route 25 (Main Street) and State Route 64 (Wooster Street), that carry both through and local traffic. The mix of the travel purposes and the expected increase of through volumes will increase the probability of vehicle conflicts. In addition, increased volumes will introduce longer delays at key intersections.

The current design of this intersection—although changed for a short time during and shortly after the Heritage 2000 streetscape improvements—requires motorists to weave through the intersection. The intersection's configuration, plus on-street parking, results in the approach lanes being offset from the departure lanes. These factors generally contribute to traffic flow and safety concerns, which may reduce the attractiveness of downtown shopping.

Also, mid-block alleys and entrances along East and West Wooster Street often inhibit traffic flow at times. These mid-block entrances to off-street parking introduce additional points for vehicle turn conflicts. Delivery vehicles parked in or pedestrians using the alleys as a walkway also add to the probability of conflict. Motorists turning into the alleys may not notice the truck or pedestrians until they have made the maneuver. Backing up then becomes difficult due to pedestrian and traffic flows.



B. Traffic and Parking Signage

Signage for off-street parking is poorly located and hard to read while driving. Motorists unfamiliar with parking entrance locations along Wooster Street may make sudden turns at the parking entrances, distracting them from observing other



vehicles or pedestrians. In addition, some directional signage is obstructed by trees in certain locations, such as the west side of North Main Street (southbound) and in the Clough Street alley (west).

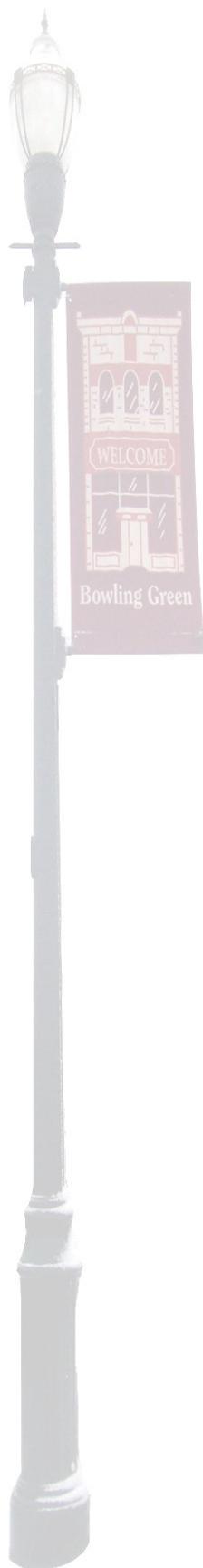
C. Gateways, Peripheral and Directional Signage

Few gateway signs exist, even at the edge of the City, to let drivers know that they are entering the City of Bowling Green. Small, standard blue and white or green and white signs at the City limits and the change in streetscape are the only indications that one has entered the City. Bowling Green's downtown is a destination, but there is no peripheral signage to let visitors know where it is, or that it even exists. There is no signage advertising the location of the downtown business district beyond the boundaries of the study area where the H2K streetscape improvements changed the look and feel of the area.

D. Parking

1. On-Street Parking

There appears to be moderate to heavy utilization of on-street parking throughout the most days of the week and weekends, especially with the approximate 124 spaces on North and South Main Street and the additional 18 spaces on East and West Wooster Street. Although



Existing Conditions and Trends

often contingent upon time of day and time of year, this usage is primarily due to the downtown having a diverse selection of retail, restaurants, and upper-floor residential opportunities—as well as being in close proximity to county and city government offices and the BGSU campus. In addition, meters were removed as part of the Heritage 2000 streetscape improvements and on-street parking is free for two hours. Although enforced it is an easy target for downtown employees and other non-shoppers to utilize, such as the approximate 200 or more residents that live in upper-floor apartments.



Shoppers wanting to take advantage of a free on-street space may make multiple trips through the downtown area looking for a parking spot. If none are available, they either park in off-street lots or shop elsewhere. These multiple trips add to total volumes on the downtown streets, add to the likelihood of vehicle and/or pedestrian conflicts, add to congestion



levels, and contribute to motorist impatience. Metering of spaces does not appear to affect utilization.

Because of the speed and flow of traffic on Main Street and Wooster Street, parking maneuvers impede traffic flow. Leaving the parking areas can become difficult during peak travel periods. These issues increase the likelihood of traffic collisions. The magnitude of through traffic and safety concerns can reduce the attractiveness of downtown parking and shopping.

2. Off-street Parking

Off-street parking as a land use consumes approximately 27% of the downtown study area, of which 66% (of the 27%) is for private use. When other issues are added to this disparity, such as ineffective public parking signage yet effective private parking signage, serious consumer frustration can occur. It was noted several times during the study process by various downtown individuals that it is very easy to know “where not to park.” This message is easily conveyed in pictures contained in this document.

Because demand for the most convenient parking is high City Officials utilize parking meters and a permitting process that allocates parking spaces to downtown merchants, employees, and others. Over the last two decades parking meter rates have varied from 5 cents for twelve minutes up to 25 cents per two hour time block. These rates were recently modified in September 2005 making the current rate 25 cents for one hour. Permits are currently issued for either 13, 26, 39, or 52 weeks with costs ranging from as low as \$45 for 13 weeks to \$180 for the entire year. These costs apply for all public lots, with the exception of Public Lot #2, in which officials offer a reduced rate (a 52



Existing Conditions and Trends

week permit costs \$140 instead of \$180). These rates and policies are currently under review by City Officials.

A large portion of off-street parking east and west of Main Street is signed as private parking (e.g., the Huntington

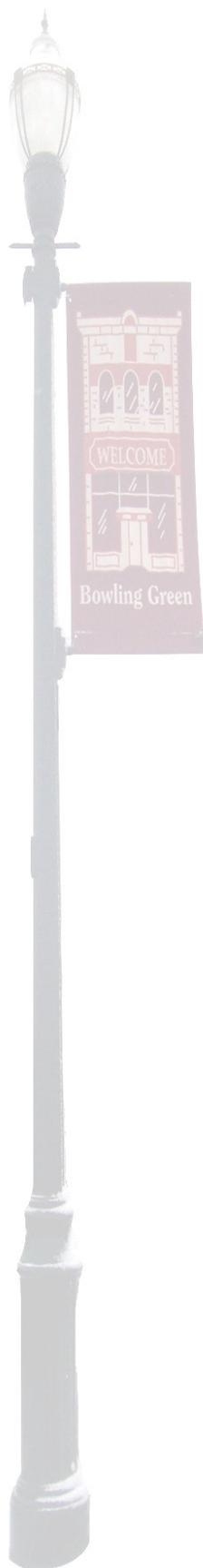


Bank and Sky Bank parking areas). Observations of the public parking shows high demand, especially during lunch and dinner times, with relatively low occupancy of the private lots during evening hours.

Circulations within the public off-street parking areas appear satisfactory. A cursory review of current parking, which was recently revised per the 2000 Parking System Review, indicates that the parking areas are relatively optimized and have a good vacancy and turnover rate. Although further refinement might be considered, it is likely that the gain of only a few off-street parking spaces might be achieved, and might only be achieved at the expense of the circulation patterns.

Although the City has recently constructed an additional off-street parking lot (Lot #7) on the northwest corner of Wooster Street and Church Street, these 28 spaces are likely to be insufficient for the total parking demand. This parking area is reserved for City Employees and permit holders, and not for the general public. Also, these two areas are a block away from Main Street, and their utilization may be relatively low compared to the other, closer off-street parking areas.

Nevertheless, a detailed analysis and/or modifications to those parking areas may not effectively address current parking needs. The



private parking areas south of Clough Street do not appear to operate as efficiently in terms of circulation or maximized parking spaces. Future discussions with the property owners regarding the sharing of those parking areas should therefore be considered.

3. Bicycle Issues (Including Parking)

Many residents utilize bicycles to travel around the city, including visiting downtown businesses.

Some bicyclists utilize the sidewalks to reach their end destination, often causing safety

issues with pedestrians. In an attempt to ensure safety issues, City Officials are enforcing Section 75.10 of the codified ordinance which prohibits bicycle usage on sidewalks in a business district.



Part of the H2K streetscape improvements included the installation of bicycle racks on Main Street, Wooster Street and near public parking areas. Most of these racks hold 2-4 bicycles. If a bicycle rack is not in a convenient location, bicycle riders often leave bicycles chained to any stationary object near the business they are visiting, which is not aesthetically pleasing.

E. Truck Loading and Unloading Issues

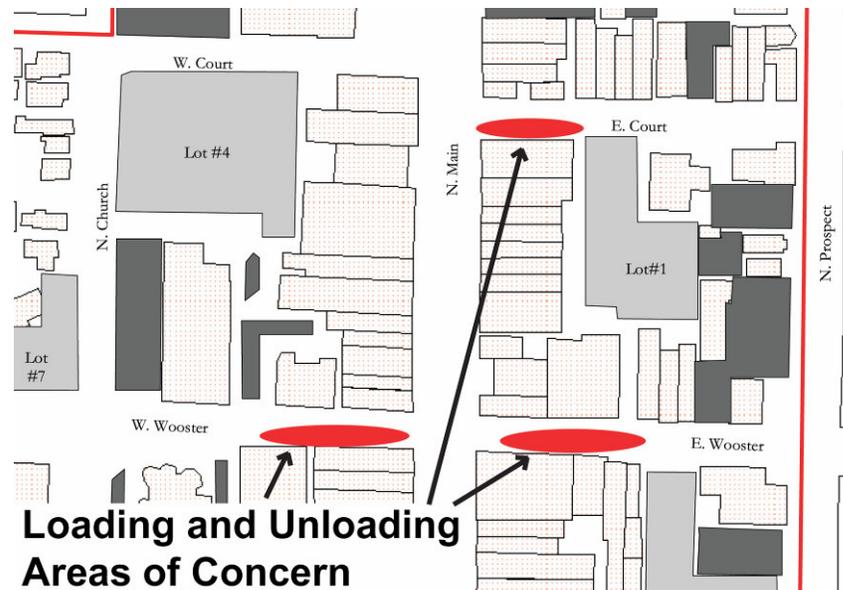
At various times of the day, downtown businesses receive business freight and other supplies and this often impedes vehicular flow and restricts sight distances. In



Existing Conditions and Trends



addition, the loading and unloading at various times of the day results in uncertainty and customer frustration



Loading and Unloading Areas of Concern

due to blocked alleys or trucks parked along the street in the driving lanes. This has been noted to create delays for downtown patrons, which may affect their decision on whether or not to shop in the downtown. At the current time, three areas in the downtown pose the most problems for truck loading and unloading. They are the first block of West Wooster, the first block of East Wooster, and the first block of East Court Street.

F. Public Transportation and Shuttle Services

Public transportation is not readily available in Bowling Green. No public bus routes exist. A transit service is available but requires an individual to call and schedule a pick up. Currently, the BGSU shuttle provides students access to numerous locations in Bowling Green, but not downtown. The downtown survey, taken by students, merchants, shoppers, and employees, illustrated a sound desire to have the downtown added as a shuttle destination. At the current time, however, the BGSU Administration contends that student demand is low and therefore substantiates the reasoning for not adding the downtown as another shuttle venue.

IV. Downtown Experience

A. Business Environment

Businesses in downtown Bowling Green are unique in both their location and their products. The current strong base of commercial businesses is a good draw for visitors, to the City. These businesses help promote the vibrant atmosphere that many people associate with the downtown.

1. Store Hours

Store hours in the downtown business district vary dramatically. The lack of uniform business hours has been noted by former downtown consumers as a reason why they chose to shop at other destinations.



2. Selection

The selection of goods and services in the downtown business district is broad and diverse. These goods and services range from various professional services and goods unique to college students and retirees, to one of the region's finest base of restaurants, pubs and eateries. The locally owned retail shops have a variety of products such as clothing, gifts, arts & crafts and jewelry. According to the survey results, the current mix of downtown businesses and restaurants is a strength as well as a weakness. Many survey respondents indicated that they believe there is a lack of diversity in the existing restaurants and that they would like to see more retail businesses in downtown.



3. Signage

Signage throughout Bowling Green is regulated in a manner that protects property values, creates a more visually and physically-attractive economic and business climate, and preserves the scenic and natural beauty of the city.

Business signage in the study area comes in various shapes and sizes and is classified into two main categories: Outdoor advertising (such as signage on awnings and facades) and temporary signs.

Total aggregate square footage for all categories of outdoor advertising in the B-3 district is limited to 90 square feet (or the width of the building front) times 1.4 plus 40 square feet, whichever is less (up to a maximum 270 total allowable square footage). No more than three outdoor advertising structures can be used at any one business as well.

There are two types of temporary signage found in the downtown: Freestanding temporary signs and flush-mounted temporary signage (such as grand opening banners). Freestanding temporary signs are currently allowed one time per year, while flush-mounted signage is permitted no more than four times per calendar year at any one location.

One particular type of freestanding sign, known as the “A” frame sign, is currently being used on a continual basis by downtown businesses in violation of Bowling Green’s Codified Ordinance, Section 150.65 (B), and causes pedestrian safety issues.

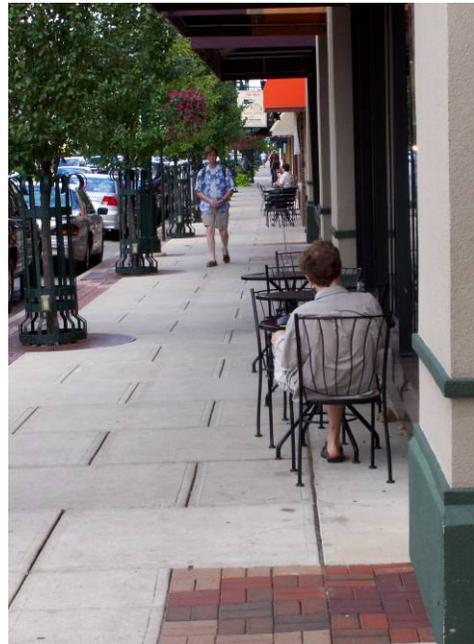


4. Vacancies

There are few commercial vacancies in downtown. As of September 2005, there are six vacant storefronts. With approximately 200 businesses operating in downtown this leaves a vacancy rate of 3%. This may be due to the lower cost of renting a space in downtown (\$7-\$15 per square foot) as compared to a space in the local mall or another location (up to \$25 per square foot as in the new Levis Commons in Perrysburg).

5. Outdoor Dining Areas

Some restaurants in downtown utilize the public right-of-way as an area for outdoor dining. In most cases the restaurants place tables, with two to four chairs, directly adjacent to their building while others utilize space closer to the street, between street lights and trees. Currently there are no regulations or standards in place to create uniformity and enforce safety. In some areas, pedestrians are forced to maneuver between tables and immovable objects in the sidewalks or even to walk next to the street and parked cars.



6. Main Street Bowling Green

Main Street Bowling Green (formerly the Bowling Green Downtown Business Association) is a Special Improvement District (SID) within the downtown Bowling Green study area. It serves the downtown as a liaison with government offices, other merchants and the media. Main Street Bowling Green also works to encourage downtown shopping,

Existing Conditions and Trends

and improve the downtown's image, appearance, and quality of business.

The SID is funded primarily through an assessment based upon a linear foot of building frontage. The current assessment to property owners in the SID is \$10 per linear foot, although SID members recently approved a dollar increase effective in January 2006. The approximate \$95,000 raised from these assessments is roughly 80% or more of the overall operating budget. The organization's remaining operational revenues come from the City of Bowling Green. Office space and other necessary personnel and organizational resources are provided by the Bowling Green Community Development Foundation.

By organizing merchants, citizens, and City Officials, Main Street BG has built a framework that serves to keep downtown Bowling Green from the neglect and despair many other downtowns have fallen to. Main Street BG strives to enhance and stabilize the economic vitality of the central business district through long-term improvement projects and ongoing promotional activities.

In addition to promoting and marketing the downtown business district, Main Street BG, in conjunction with the Bowling Green Community Development Foundation, provides existing and new businesses with various forms of technical assistance, such as:

- Market and feasibility analysis and business plan development;
- District wide image and marketing programs and advertising and promotion assistance for individual firms;



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- Financing of building improvements, facades, displays, fixtures, inventory and start-up costs through the existing revolving loan fund; and,
- An effective business to business networking system.

B. Pedestrian Experience

The downtown experience for each shopper and pedestrian could vary dramatically depending upon their familiarity with the downtown. To the daily visitor, the downtown is easy to navigate and is predictable. However, for the first-time visitor, the experience could be confusing (*see Map: Existing Conditions*).

1. Circulation and Pedestrian Signage

There is little, if any, signage to direct pedestrians toward Main Street or Wooster Street. Few pathways exist due in part to the relatively few gaps between buildings, most of which are used for entrances to off-street parking. This detracts from the use of off-street parking, as pedestrians have to walk between vehicles on private lots to get to the storefronts. Pathways that do exist are poorly marked and lighted.



2. Aesthetics, Landscaping, and Maintenance

The task of keeping downtown aesthetically pleasing is the job of many organizations and individuals. City departments maintain the downtown as they would any other neighborhood in the city. Trash and snow are removed, lights are kept functional and the street is cleaned by the City.



Existing Conditions and Trends

As part of the H2K streetscape improvements, many planters and other forms of landscaping were introduced into the downtown. The landscaping and its maintenance are funded through the Special Improvement District for a total of twenty years, expiring in 2020. The staff of Main Street BG oversees the general maintenance of the landscaping, planters, and sidewalks (litter removal), and also utilizes third party contractors to assist in snow removal and the power washing of sidewalks. However, the final participants in the upkeep of downtown are the property and business owners themselves. They are responsible for keeping the sidewalk in front of their buildings in presentable condition. Any graffiti found on buildings is the responsibility of the owner.



3. Nuances

There are many aspects of Bowling Green's downtown that cause it to stray from the character of a vibrant historic retail center. As buildings change owners or are repaired, some original details are lost. Some buildings facades have been completely stripped of historic character.



Some nuances may affect pedestrians on sidewalks while others nuances are largely visual due to the physical alteration of the buildings. One distinction is that air conditioning units are located in



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upper stories of the buildings. These units, some in windows and some placed directly into the facades of the buildings, are not only visual eyesores, but they also drip water onto pedestrians. There are approximately twenty-seven A/C units located in the fronts or sides of buildings where water is able to drip onto the sidewalks.

When repairs are made to buildings many owners disregard the original character. This may be due to cost saving measures, but the outcome causes buildings to look as if they are still in disrepair or completely out of character with the downtown. Many

windows in the buildings downtown have been replaced with standard sized windows and the rest of the space has been filled with brick or boards. Some doors and windows have been completely enclosed with brick. This stray from the original look of the building makes the downtown area less attractive than if the buildings were to remain in their original state.



Some façades in the downtown are in need of immediate attention. Observations included issues with chipping paint, broken bricks, false façade replacements, graffiti and poor awning maintenance. Downtown properties observed in need of repair were noted at various locations in blocks 8 and 12, the south end of blocks 5 and 9, and in the middle of Block 3.

C. Way-finding and Kiosks

There is relatively no way-finding signage for pedestrians either in parking lots or on the sidewalk. Unless the visitor is familiar with the layout and know the address of certain businesses downtown, it could



be hard to know which direction to go from the parking lot. Once on the street, the only way to find a certain address is to look at the numbers above every door. No kiosks exist to point the pedestrian in the direction of the address they are looking for or the particular store that they are seeking.

D. Public Spaces

There are few, if any, usable and truly inviting public spaces in the downtown. There are some spaces that appear to be public such as the front entrance to the Huntington Bank building or the area behind the Mini-Mall, but these spaces are privately owned. There is currently no public space available for visitors to use and enjoy.



E. Safety

Safety issues are always a concern when pedestrians and vehicles can potentially collide. Vehicular traffic is usually heavy and constant during business hours and at special events due to the downtown's location at the crossroads of two state routes (SR 25 and SR 64).

Motorists trying to park downtown are focusing on multiple tasks that range from looking for a parking spot, yielding to oncoming traffic and observing signal displays. These multiple tasks may result in the diminished awareness of pedestrians and pedestrian crosswalks. Also contributing to this issue, as noted before, is that some motorists may be making multiple trips through the area looking for the most convenient, free parking spot.



Existing Conditions and Trends

Pedestrian crossing of the streets other than at designated crosswalks happens frequently, and is related in part to gaps in traffic flows caused by the traffic signals at nearby intersections and pedestrian impatience waiting for a walk signal. On-



street parking can also contribute to the likelihood of jaywalking to and from a parked vehicle. The parked vehicles may also restrict sight distance for motorists who may not notice pedestrians walking between them. Along both Main Street and Wooster Street it is likely that traffic will increase due to area development activity, which will increase the likelihood of pedestrian / vehicular conflicts. This could in turn affect desirability of downtown shopping.

Other pedestrian safety issues have developed when bicyclists and skateboarders share space with walking pedestrians. To prevent these safety hazards, the City Administration in September 2005 increased enforcement of its 1979 ordinance that banned the use of bicycles and skateboards on all sidewalks in the downtown business district.



I. Land Usage

The functioning of the downtown and study area depends much upon the compatibility of contiguous buildings and land uses. While it is hoped that the personal decisions of those investing in the downtown would have the City's best interest in mind, it is important that additional mechanisms be in place to help encourage land uses and building design that promotes the economic stability and unique character of the downtown. In addition it is vital to recognize the importance and integrity of the residential neighborhoods in the core area of the city. They contribute importantly to the well-being of the downtown business district and must be protected and nurtured.

Strategy 1: Encourage Compatible Land Uses

In heightening the economic livelihood downtown, it is important that policies and procedure focus on the synergy of downtown and work toward an optimal mix of uses. Strategic business placement enhances the synergy and competitiveness of downtown, and there are a number of general considerations that aid in initial planning for placement. These general considerations examine the compatibility of different uses and downtown business arrangement. Both of these aspects will be useful for public and private officials in ensuring a safe and user-friendly downtown business district.

While shopping center developers are trying to integrate mixed uses into their new developments, Bowling Green's downtown already has a distinct advantage by having an existing number of mixed uses that attract people. Nevertheless, this special composition of mixed uses may not exist forever, and over time a market analysis process may be needed to identify opportunities for new or expanded uses.



II. Downtown Accessibility

This section includes strategies to improve traffic circulation, signage, parking (on and off-street), and truck loading and unloading procedures.

Strategy 1: Promote Safe Traffic Flow

At certain times of the day and season, the traffic in the downtown area is heavy. Also heavy during these times is pedestrian traffic. Over time, these two forces, if not monitored properly, will “collide” possibly causing serious injury and delays. Problematic areas are crosswalks when pedestrians have the right of way, yet traffic may not yield either due to a lack of patience or a general lack of awareness. This is something the consulting team witnessed on various occasions during the study.

Monitoring of traffic crashes and other pedestrian safety issues is recommended in order to determine the need for changes to intersection configurations, crosswalk signalization, on-street parking, and/or turn restrictions at mid-block alleyways.

A long-term concern for the downtown will be to determine the feasibility of a truck bypass route outside the downtown area in order to minimize issues directly pertaining to truck traffic.

Strategy 2: Advertise the Downtown Using Effective Signage

Downtown Bowling Green is special with unique character, ambiance, and history. Prominent signs located at the entrances should be erected to announce to visitors that they have arrived, or will arrive, at a unique destination (see *Map: Gateways and Periphery Signage*). They should be appropriate marketing signs that encourage interest in the downtown. Gateway signs are used to elevate the status of the area, share the community’s pride and promote business vitality.



Strategies and Recommendations

Bowling Green has the opportunity to provide three types of signs from five directions.

1. Downtown Markers:

These are the “welcome to” signs. The actual boundary of the downtown district dictates their location. Therefore, they are often forced into an area where there is little room for them. Ideally they would be mounted on their own pole however if there is not sufficient space they could be mounted on an existing light or traffic pole. For a complete illustration of what these gateways could look like, please see the attached “Design Sketchbook.”

These signs should be located where the H2K plan streetlights begin.

- Main Street north bound:
Locate at Lehman Avenue, on a light pole.



- Main Street south bound:
Locate at Clay Street, on a light pole.



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- Wooster Street east bound: Locate at Church Street, on a light pole.



- Wooster Street west bound: Locate at Prospect Street on a new pole.



2. Downtown Gateways

These are the “this way to” signs. Their exact location, although outside the downtown area, is flexible allowing for larger scale, size and overall creativity. These signs signify that you are close to, and about to enter, the downtown area. They are an excellent way to repeat the historic flavor of the Downtown and brighten up an otherwise dull area or corner.

Locations:

- West Wooster Street:
Take advantage of the large area just west of Wintergarden Road, on the south side of the street. Opportunity for a large monument style sign with landscaping.
- Haskins Road (SR 64) and West Wooster Street: The character of the road



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changes at the intersection of Haskins and Wooster Street. A small monument sign on the south side of Wooster Street would be beneficial oriented toward south bound Haskins Road traffic. There is not a lot of room at this location but it could make an effective statement.

- Haskins and West Newton Road: At the southeast corner of this juncture is the location of the new community recreation center. This site also provides for a good location for a downtown gateway, as the site is already nicely landscaped and is under public ownership.



- Haskins and Poe Road: At the southeast corner of this intersection is a large parcel currently owned and operated by the Wood County Agricultural Society and primarily used for the county fair and other events affiliated with fairgrounds. Another location could be at the northwest corner of the intersection.



- Haskins Road and Conneaut Avenue: There



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is ample opportunity at the southwest corner of this intersection for the creative signage with landscaping.

- South Main Street and S.R. 6: The large undeveloped parcel at the northeast corner could present an excellent opportunity for the City to



install a large gateway sign and landscaping for visitors entering the downtown off S.R. 6. This may also be visible from S.R. 6 as well. The City should act while the site is undeveloped to ensure gateway signs are coordinated with the future development. The City could also negotiate with the developer to acquire easements and financing to help pay for the improvement.

- North Main Street and Poe Road: This site is useful because this is an area where the street transitions from a modern commercial district to a tree-lined residential street.



- East Wooster Street and I-75: Although this location most warrants a large gateway sign there is



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simply no feasible location. The grade created by the overpass combined with the right-of-way locations would cause the proposed sign to be well below the street level and not visible. It is unlikely ODOT would allow a Bowling Green downtown gateway sign in the right-of-way although this could be pursued. (Other communities around the State of Ohio have had some success). Therefore, an ODOT brown historic sign, as noted in #3 Periphery “Directional” Signage below, could be located on a decorative pole for this location to direct those exiting I-75 toward the downtown. Perhaps several signs could be installed: at each off-ramp and approximately 1000 feet west of the interchange.

3. Periphery “Directional” Signage

Upon concurrence with ODOT, white-on-brown markers could be used along S.R. 6 and I-75 to accentuate the fact that a beautiful downtown full of history with several quaint eateries and services is a few miles away. If this is possible, some locations such as those on S.R. 6 (the same type signage also exists on I-75) could be:

- S.R. 6 and Bowling Green Road West: This location could be another potential gateway location to attract possible tourist traffic.
- S.R. 6 westbound, near S.R. 25 south entrance to Bowling Green.



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- S.R. 6 eastbound, near S.R. 25 entrance to Bowling Green.



Strategy 3: Improve Visibility of Parking Signage

Under Chapter 150, no off-street parking is required in the B-3 District. The City is committed to provide public parking lots for the downtown. Due to structural issues and placement of the current signage, public parking in the downtown area is difficult to find, especially for new visitors. One solution to this problem is to improve directional signage.



Off-street parking signs, especially advance signage, would facilitate motorist decision-making. Two issues are raised with these signs. First, the sign messages should be simple and easily understood. This minimizes motorist hesitancy in reading the signs. Secondly, using signs similar in style in advance of and at the parking entrances help motorists recognize the preferred routes for finding a parking space.



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Strategy 4: Optimize Parking Opportunities

On any given day or time of season, parking availability in the downtown can fluctuate considerably. Although most local residents can generally navigate the downtown for a parking spot with moderate ease during busy times, outsiders and “first-timers” might not be as successful. It is important to note that parking experiences can determine whether the visitor decides to return to Bowling Green.

City Officials utilize a permitting process to allocate parking spaces to downtown merchants, employees, and others. The allocation process should be revisited over time to ensure the closest parking areas are reserved for consumers.

Another method to optimize parking, especially during peak times, is to begin charging market rates for metered parking, or the lowest price that will achieve approximately a 15% turnover rate. At the current time, the City of Bowling Green (which is the enforcer of parking) recaptures less than 50% of the related enforcement costs through meter revenue. This is largely due to the fact that meter rates have remained at 10 cents per hour since the mid-70’s, while costs pertaining to enforcement have skyrocketed due to labor, health, and maintenance costs. The City and downtown property and business owners recently agreed to increase meter rates to 25 cents per hour.

A common trend in most communities is that a policy of under pricing (or no pricing because on-street curb parking is free for 2 hours) often results in inefficient use of parking facilities and promotes excessive parking demand and safety risks. In particular, the most convenient curb parking spaces in the downtown are often filled, while less convenient spaces are often unoccupied. This reduces motorist



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convenience and increases traffic problems and congestion due to vehicles cruising for on-street parking.

With the revenues generated from market rate meter fees, the city could begin to rebuild its off-street parking fund or utilize the revenues to off-set increased costs incurred with maintaining the downtown's infrastructure and beautiful historic character.

Strategy 5: Ensure Plentiful Downtown Parking

The high demand for parking closest to Main and Wooster is indicative of several trends:

- a. Most consumers and other parking users (like downtown employers and employees) avoid walking more than they absolutely have to, and thus park in the most central location;
- b. The low or no cost parking rates dissuade the usage of other parking areas, thus putting more pressure on the closest parking areas; and,
- c. The increase of new upper floor residential opportunities.

It is recommended that City and Main Street Bowling Green officials monitor parking trends after additional upper floor residential uses and the potential future reuse of the junior high school property.

Some options exist that could help Bowling Green to stay current with parking strategies:



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Shared Parking

Shared parking should be encouraged in the downtown due to most of the surface parking being private. Some of these privately-owned parking lots were often found to be underutilized during the study. This is especially true for the Sky Bank parking lot in Block 9 and several others in Block 8. It is quite feasible for these private lots to be utilized by the general public after 5PM. To effectively do so, the currently “Private Parking Only” signs should be modified to indicate the parking is private only during the respective business’s business hours. However, while the sharing of private parking during non-business hours may be considered as a means of increasing parking availability in the evening hours, it may result in additional enforcement problems.

Encourage a BGSU Shuttle

BGSU students currently have the opportunity to be shuttled to numerous locations throughout the City, with the exception of the downtown. Hundreds of on-campus students visit the downtown on a daily basis. Adding the downtown as a shuttle location could promote parking turnover by up to 15% or more.

Develop a Designated Employer-Employee Lot

There is no question that downtown employees and employers utilize parking spaces reserved for paying consumers. It may be possible that either a new employer-employee lot be developed or that existing private lots be utilized after 5PM by downtown employers-employees only.



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Off-street Parking Structure

A parking structure could be necessary if continued growth of retail activity in the downtown area continues, and if the downtown area were to be expanded onto adjacent blocks. A key factor in the selection of a parking structure location is to place it near permanently-sited land uses such as a library, police station, or City Administration Building. Other factors will include whether the downtown area will expand and the likely and/or desired future uses of the downtown properties.

When installed, a new parking structure would possibly be placed on some or all of an existing parking lot. Hence, the structure would need to be sized for parking replacement and long term parking needs. Numerous factors will need to be considered before final selection of a parking structure location. These factors would at a minimum include building and maintenance costs, aesthetics, and the proportionate size of the facility with the rest of the downtown.

If and when a parking structure is needed, it is also imperative that it is designed in a fashion to not be a net drain of fiscal resources, as is the case with most standard parking garages managed and maintained by public entities. This is especially likely if the facility is located and designed to meet the needs of only a few businesses.

If properly designed in a mixed-used fashion, with first floor reserved for retail/commercial enterprises, middle floors for parking, and upper floors for residential, such a facility could be self-sustaining.



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Other Innovative Solutions

Pursue the feasibility of charging market or location-adjusted rates for metered parking. In September 2005, a committee recommended an increase in meter rates, from 25 cents for 2 hours to 25 cents per hour. Optimal parking rates have been found to promote parking turnover and convenience.

Strategy 6: Improve Truck Loading / Unloading Procedures

The current procedures being utilized to transfer freight and goods to downtown businesses is in dire need of additional review. Currently under section 76.06 of Bowling Green's Codified Ordinances, commercial vehicles may park alongside any stopped vehicle for up to 30 minutes when making a delivery, unless a parking area, alley or another facility is located within a reasonable distance away.

At the current time, three areas in the downtown pose the most problems for truck loading and unloading. They are the first block of West Wooster, the first block of East Wooster, and the first block of East Court Street. In the future, or if any other concerns arise, it is recommended that the City study the safety issue in further detail.

Strategy 7: Encourage the Use of Bicycles

Bowling Green should closely consider encouraging the use of bicycles by:

- a. Designating and advertising bicycle routes and / or lanes to downtown from all directions. Clough Street, for example, could be used since it is safer than Main and Wooster Streets.
- b. Adding more bicycle racks at appropriate locations.



III. Downtown Experience

A. Business Environment

To some, the environment by which businesses operate and thrive in downtown Bowling Green is just right; reasonable zoning requirements, free off-street parking and other requirements, and no design guidelines. The environment is deemed profitable enough by outside and local economic interests to make an investment in the downtown. During the development of this Plan, approximately 7 new business establishments opened their doors, providing Bowling Green shoppers with an array of new shops and eateries.

Strategy 1: Retain Existing Businesses

Downtown Bowling Green's greatest resource is the existing pool of businesses that are located there. This is important because existing businesses contribute more to the local economy than new businesses of equal size. Existing businesses are already established in the community, and typically most employees live in the local area, and locally owned businesses tend to spend their profits locally. New businesses which are attracted from other areas typically are not locally owned and profits escape from the local economy. In the future, it is recommended that Main Street BG continue to utilize the expertise and resources of the Bowling Green Community Development Foundation and other organizations in helping to retain the various businesses located in the downtown business district.

Strategy 2: Attracting New Businesses to Downtown

Attracting new businesses into a downtown can require patience and perseverance. Some types of businesses are naturally attracted to a downtown location. Some types of businesses are needed to



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complement existing downtown businesses and contribute to the local business mix.

This critical mix can best happen with the management control found in a shopping center. Generally, a shopping center developer will provide substantial inducements to large chain anchor stores, including minimal rents, free square footage, or construction costs reimbursements.

Some communities attract new businesses through incentives. In Benton Harbor and Owosso, Michigan, finders' fees are given to individuals who find tenants for empty spaces, sometimes in upwards of \$1,500. This reward gives a reason for local residents to encourage new businesses, and in turn pays for itself in enhanced local revenues.

Strategy 3: Encourage Uniform Hours

Store hours in the downtown business district are not uniform. While a problem not new to downtown business districts, there is something to be said about the old quote that "if your business hours are from 9AM to 5PM you're staying open for the unemployed."

Today's workforce is quite different than it was several decades ago, when conservative family values often translated into a different set of commercial mores. People work on Sundays and often stay at work later than 5PM, and therefore shop at non-traditional times.

Case studies from other downtown business districts adjacent to college towns illustrate the benefits of using mall hours and staying



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open longer. For instance, retailers in Madison, Wisconsin reported a doubling in sales as a result of the extended operating hours.

Strategy 4: Maintain a Database of Downtown Buildings and Businesses

This database, which already exists in a limited format, should play an important role in helping Main Street BG and City Officials manage and market the downtown. With the database, they can better serve as an advocate for renting and selling downtown property. They can better assist the community, realtors, developers and new businesses in efficient site selection. Ultimately, the downtown database will be crucial for evaluating the current supply of products and services. The eventual combination of this information with consumer demand will help determine business expansion and recruitment opportunities. Such as a building inventory that has been created.

Strategy 5: Encourage Downtown Housing Opportunities

Downtown housing developments typically involve utilization of existing buildings, as well as infill projects to create a higher density residential neighborhood. Best practices in downtown housing include rental and owner-occupied units reflecting rents and prices that serve all segments of the market, and that are situated adjacent to suitable parking opportunities.

The following are some of the general categories of downtown housing that could exist in the downtown Bowling Green area:

Upper-Floor Units – These units are often located on the upper-floors of downtown stores, offices, restaurants, and other businesses. Most are rented out, but sometimes the unit is



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occupied by the building owner or operator of the first-floor business. These units can offer low-rent options for those who require affordable housing.

Townhouses – Townhouses provide the amenities of a house in a downtown setting. Most townhouses share common walls, so a significant number of units can fit onto a small city lot. They attract people who do not want to live in an apartment-style unit but do want to live in or near downtown.

Apartment or Condominium Building – These freestanding buildings can bring significant population density downtown and can serve those looking for rental units or owner-occupied units. By offering convenience and center-city amenities that are not available at other apartment/condominium buildings in other areas, downtown housing can gain a competitive market advantage.

Live/Work Units – These units, which could include Bed and Breakfast establishments, allow the occupant to comfortably live and work in the same unit. They are appropriate for a number of service businesses that are run from the home and help the tenant save on renting additional office space. For those residents intending to work from home or telecommute, live-work units provide office space or even a small business under one mortgage. Having these units downtown will help attract entrepreneurial-minded residents.

Loft Units – Loft units are created by converting upper floors of buildings into apartments or condominiums. These units offer unique spaces that are sought by downtown residents and



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provide a good way to rehabilitate older or unused buildings downtown.

The process of incorporating housing into the downtown mix will involve an assessment of the amount of demand for these types of units, as well as analyzing the current supply.

Understanding the dynamics of the local market will be the basis of such an analysis. Finally, the placement of such units will require an assessment of housing's compatibility with other downtown uses, as all the above residential uses will contribute to an increased demand for off-street parking.

Strategy 6: Promote Outdoor Dining in Suitable Locations

Many restaurants in the downtown business district utilize the public right-of-way for outdoor dining purposes. While outdoor dining can help foster tourism and a sense of quaintness, it can also create an unsafe environment for pedestrians that may have to walk close to the street and navigate around tables. To support pedestrian and retail friendly activities through outdoor dining, standards should be created to encourage uniformity and pedestrian safety. Outdoor dining can enhance the economic and social vitality downtown if proper standards are created and enforced.

The following are ideas for outdoor dining standards derived from ordinances of other communities around the country. These are ideas and issues the City of Bowling Green should consider when creating specialized standards.



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Minimum Requirements

Outdoor dining should only be permitted in certain areas of the B-3 downtown business district, as adequate space should be allowed within the right of way to facilitate safe pedestrian circulation and be in conformance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires a total of 5 feet of unobstructed walkway. Because the sidewalk widths vary downtown, some downtown sidewalks are not wide enough to provide outdoor dining. For a map of recommended outdoor dining locations, please see Map: *Possible Outdoor Dining Locations*.

Outdoor dining areas should be limited to lawfully operating and properly licensed food establishments. City ordinances regarding alcohol and smoking should be observed at all times. The outdoor areas should also abide by State of Ohio and Wood County health requirements, and applicants should provide proof of liability insurance.

Permits and Site Diagram

The issuance of permits is recommended to regulate outdoor dining areas. Annual permit fees or deposits can be requested to cover the cost of any sidewalk maintenance that is required as a result of the outdoor dining. Plans with detailed dimensions showing the location of furniture, accessories and any stationary objects in the right-of-way should be presented to the Safety Director for review as part of the permit application.

Other information that could be requested for approval may consist of furniture design, including photographs or sketches, hours of operation, dimensions and designs of umbrellas,



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lighting details and barrier locations, if applicable. Permits should be effective for one year with the provision that the permit can be revoked by the City at any time or with the change of the owner or business. During public and special events, street fairs or parades, the City should consider allowing temporary permits to allow different configurations of furniture locations.

Outdoor Furniture

Any furniture or accessories should be approved by the Safety Director. All furniture and materials should be compatible with the character of the building and fragile materials such as aluminum and plastic should not be used. Umbrellas with advertisements should be considered as part of the establishment's overall signage allowance and should also be approved by the Planning Director or designee. The use of tents and awnings should require a separate permit.

The furniture should be directly adjacent to the building. It is recommended that the furniture does not extend beyond 36 inches of the face of the building, that at least a five foot unobstructed pedestrian walkway be maintained, and vehicular visibility should be maintained at intersections. Umbrellas should also be considered when determining the width of the unobstructed walkway. Umbrellas should not protrude into the pedestrian walkway and should have a minimum clearance of seven feet. This standard could be reviewed on a case-by-case basis depending on the location of the establishment, street furniture and other stationary objects such as light poles, fire hydrants, and other landscaped amenities.



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All furniture should be brought indoors when the establishment closes daily. It is suggested that the outdoor dining area close thirty minutes prior to allow time for cleaning. It should be the responsibility of the establishment to maintain and properly secure any furniture by keeping the area under the direction and control of the owner or manager. The City should not be held responsible for damage to furniture during the repair or replacement of the right-of-way. Liability insurance should be obtained prior to the issuance of a permit.

Maintenance

The surface of the right-of-way should be maintained at all times. No painting, resurfacing or raising should be allowed. Any furniture used by the establishment should not damage the sidewalk nor should it be bolted or fastened to the sidewalk or any stationary objects within the right-of-way. Trash containers should be provided and the area surrounding the dining area should be cleaned by the establishment. Sidewalks should be steam cleaned or pressure washed regularly by the establishment at their sole expense. If necessary rodent control measures may be needed.

Noise

The noise in the outdoor dining area should not exceed the decibel level stated in the Code of Ordinances. Also, no music, bells, sirens, horns, loudspeakers or other forms of broadcasting should be allowed. Recreational activities should not be permitted in an outdoor dining area. Receipt of three noise complaints should constitute grounds for the City to revoke the permit.



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Use of Barriers

If barriers are considered feasible by the City, considering the sidewalk width, they should be compatible with the overall look of the H2K improvements. Two to four-foot barriers are generally utilized when the dining area is visible from the street, but should not be required if the five foot pedestrian walkway cannot be maintained. These barriers should completely surround the dining area, but not penetrate the sidewalk. The use of barriers may not be feasible in most areas of the downtown business district due to the widths of the sidewalks and the placement of stationary objects such as signs, light poles, and other landscaped amenities.

Other Standards

Additional standards should be considered if the outdoor dining area is to have servers. No food preparation should be permitted outdoors. Service should be limited to those who have been properly seated at a table. Barriers should be in place and the area should only be accessible through the inside of the building. Doors from the outdoor dining area to the interior of the building should not be propped open.

Strategy 7: Pursue the Feasibility of Using Incentives as a Downtown Business Recruitment and Retention Tool

It is also important that businesses located or looking to locate in the downtown have access to a variety of financial and tax incentives. There are a variety of incentives available to existing and new downtown businesses, with the most important incentive deriving from the downtown being designated as a community reinvestment area (CRA). As such, the CRA incentive affords property owners to abate property taxes gained from new property investment.



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However, the use of other incentives might include:

- Tax Increment Financing;
- Façade, signage, and building restoration programs fueled by CDBG-RLF dollars;
- Negotiation and leasing of space if the prospect is not working with a broker or not familiar with the area;
- Centralized retail management in which the downtown business district organization gains the right to lease property from owners and place businesses in locations prescribed by a downtown plan or other appropriate study;
- Business incubator(s) to help establish new businesses at a reasonable cost and provide them with space and common services.

Strategy 8: Pursue the Feasibility of Developing Incentives to Promote Downtown Housing Opportunities

Rehabilitating older buildings for mixed uses can complicate a project and increase its costs, in part because of code requirements for separating residential and commercial uses. In some communities, the square-foot costs of a downtown, mixed-use rehabilitation are almost double those of a new, multi-story suburban apartment building.

The comparative costs of developing housing in downtown Bowling Green as compared to other outside locations may differ drastically. While hard construction costs might be roughly equivalent for a similar building, the costs could be higher downtown for land, demolition and general construction conditions (mobilization, staging and site safety). Rehabilitating a downtown building for housing purposes will typically cost more per square foot than building a new multi-family residential development. The need to remove or neutralize hazardous materials, such as asbestos, lead paint and underground storage tanks, can add

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15-20% to construction costs in a rehabilitation project. Health and safety code requirements in older buildings can also add to project costs.

Nevertheless, there are a few specific locations that downtown housing opportunities could transpire in the study area. These possible areas are located within Block 9.

Strategy 9: Promote Innovative and Uniform Advertising Standards

Business signage in the study area comes in various shapes and sizes and is classified into two main categories: Outdoor advertising (like signage on awnings and facades) and temporary signs.

Total aggregate square footage for all categories of outdoor advertising in the B-3 district is limited to 90 square feet (or the width of the building front) times 1.4 plus 40 square feet, whichever is less (up to a maximum of 270 total allowable square footage). No more than three outdoor advertising structures can be used at any one business as well.

There are two types of temporary signage found in the downtown: Freestanding temporary signs and flush-mounted temporary signage (such as grand opening banners). Freestanding temporary signs are currently allowable one time per year, while flush-mounted signage is permitted no more than four times per calendar year at any one location.

“A” Frames

The trend in the downtown business district today is the use of “A” frame structures to announce an advertisement or special



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sale. During the study period, several of these devices were witnessed being used although not compliant with Section 98.08 (of Bowling Green’s codified ordinance), as they were situated more than 30 inches away from the building’s face. Also, under Section 98.08, the use of these “A” frames requires permission from the Mayor. To date, only two businesses have permission: Finders (Sundays only) and Newlove Realty.

While the use of “A” frames can provide unique character to the business district, it is important that their usage does not cause a visual eyesore or a pedestrian or vehicular safety hazard. Consideration should be given as to whether the use of “A” frames should count towards the 3 sign maximum rule as defined by the City’s current zoning code.

Similar to outdoor dining recommendations, the portable “A” frame signs should be deployed within 36” of the storefront as to allow at least five feet for pedestrian passage along a public sidewalk or pedestrian walkway (5’ of unobstructed walkway starting from the edge of pavers, not edge of curb).

B. Pedestrian Experience

The improvement of the pedestrian experience is a theme that began with the last examination of Bowling Green’s downtown as a component of the City’s last comprehensive plan in 1986. Some 20 years later, the pedestrian experience in downtown Bowling Green is still a pleasant and enjoyable experience. However, various improvements could be made in the areas of pedestrian signage, safety, and circulation, way finding and directory kiosks, and public spaces (*See Map: Potential Improvement Areas*). In addition, for a

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complete review of signage examples, please refer to the Design Sketchbook.

Strategy 1: Improve Pedestrian Circulation

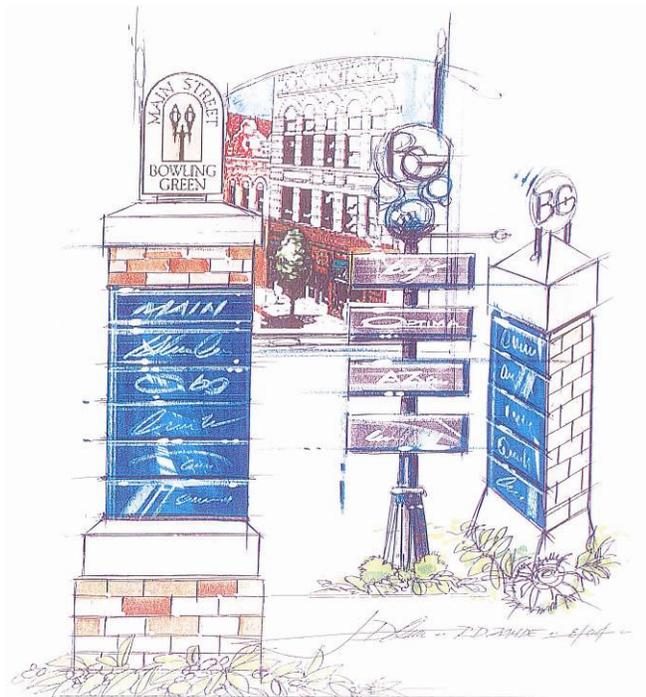
Every year, thousands visit Downtown Bowling Green for the first time enjoying food, entertainment and social opportunities and may or may not be sure where to go. A network of signs, commonly called “Way finding Signs,” strategically located and thoughtfully designed throughout the downtown area, could ease the frustration often associated with visiting a new area.

These signs are designed and located specifically with the first-time visitor in mind. They function like signs located throughout a large building. They should add detail to a street while informing and directing visitors to their destination. There are several types of way finding signs. These work together to present useful information to the visitor where they are likely to need it most.

Kiosks

These are the largest way finding signs and contain the most information.

They should be constructed of durable materials, as vandal proof as possible, easily



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updated, and of a style that complements the architecture of the downtown. The kiosk style will set the tone for all the other way finding signs.

The kiosk should be internally lit and located in a prominent location such as a street corner, plaza, the beginning/end of a pedestrian cut-through, or near large public parking areas.

The content of the kiosk is flexible with room for creativity. People may spend a few seconds up to several minutes reviewing its content. In addition to maps showing landmarks and parking areas, they should contain posters of upcoming events, quotes, and historical tidbits.

Destination Signs

Most pedestrian traffic begins in the rear of buildings that front main street due to the public parking lots being located there. From the rear of the buildings, it is unclear what businesses are located on the block where you are parked. Additional directional signage in these areas would enhance the public's ability to locate their desired destination once they have parked. By locating a business sign on each block a visitor can easily locate their destination, as well as be alerted to a business that they were not aware of. These informational signs could be funded by the various downtown destinations that chose to participate.

A ladder style kiosk allows for many businesses to be listed on a sign without protruding paddles that can be easily broken. The business name and address will be placed on a plate that can be easily removed and updated. The City could charge a



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one-time fee to each business that desires a plate. To help offset installation costs, alternate sources of revenue could be utilized.

Directional Signs

These signs indicate the location of parking, interstates, the University, etc. They should be located throughout the downtown area. Since these are important to motorists, as well as pedestrians, they should be simple and bold.



Choosing a shape and color that is associated with the content is helpful for quick recognition. For example, blue square signs are often



associated with hospitals per the Ohio Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

In this case, an unusual shape and color will work best so as to not confuse it with other signs.

For instance, a color scheme could be as follows:

Direction to:

1. Downtown Area: White letters on a dark brown, thin, oval sign



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2. Public Parking: White letters on a dark blue, fat, oval sign
3. Alleys and Pedestrian Cut-Throughs: Black letters on a tan rectangle

Address Markers

Address markers are the equivalent to floor numbers in a building. They could be clearly located at each building throughout the downtown area. Suggestions include a metal plaque mounted on the side of the building. They should be displayed in a consistent location with a consistent look. These will be helpful to both pedestrians and motorists in locating their destination.

Block Numbers

Markers that identify the addresses, or range of addresses, should be installed along Main Street at Lehman, Washington, Clough, Wooster, Court and Clay, and along Wooster at Grove, Church, and Prospect. These signs should be located at the intersections, possibly combined with the street name signs, yet should have a distinctive look that separates them from other signs.

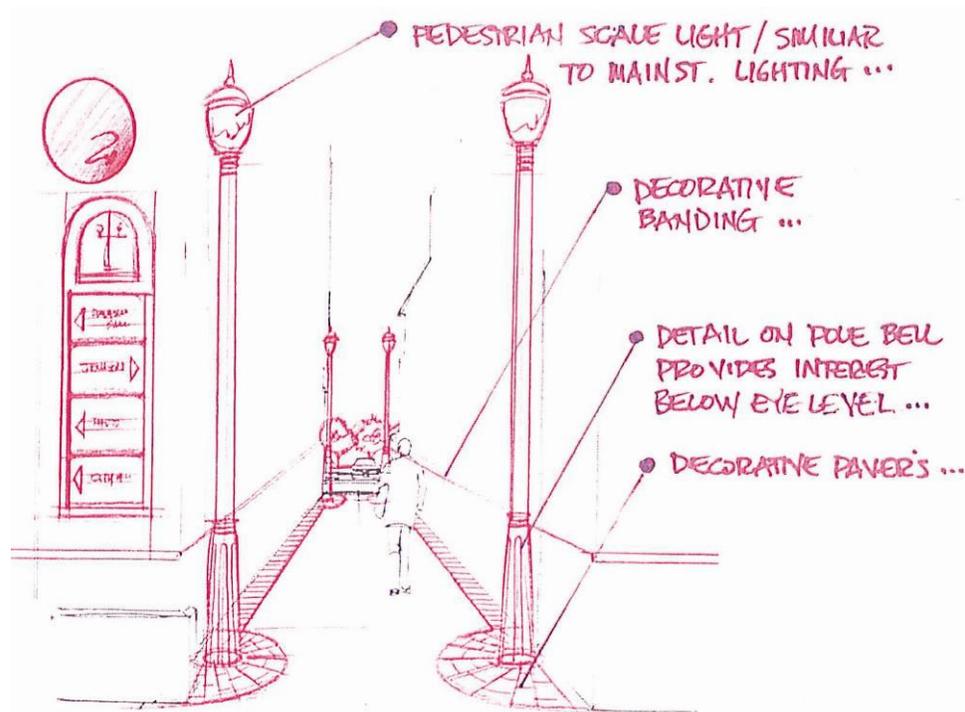
Strategy 2: Promote Pedestrian Safety

The monitoring of pedestrian safety issues in the downtown study should be a continuous process, and one that works to minimize the number of potential and existing pedestrian barriers. These barriers are potentially anything that may get in the way of pedestrians moving about the downtown in a uniform and safe fashion.



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For instance, there are several existing pedestrian alleyways in the downtown that are utilized, yet may be poorly signed, lighted, or maintained. Examples of these areas are highlighted on the *Map: Existing Conditions*. In some locations pedestrians are using the vehicular access alleys behind the downtown buildings to access a better path to Main Street (such as the access alley adjacent to the Bowling Green Police Department). Not only is this an unsafe practice, it impedes and slows vehicular traffic.



Other safety concerns arise at pedestrian crosswalks. To promote a safer crosswalk environment, it might be feasible for City Officials to utilize a signalization system that's more informative and located at all crossing areas.

Another safety concern may arise when improvements are being made to downtown buildings. All contractors should follow County and City regulations for all construction improvements and repairs.

Violations were noted during the improvements of properties located in Block 10.

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Additional pedestrian safety issues could arise with the increasing usage of outdoor dining facilities. While eating outside is something that should be encouraged downtown, it is an activity that brings with it additional issues pertaining to pedestrian circulation and safety. Over time, with increased outdoor dining, the installation of barriers along the sidewalk pavers may be necessary in specific areas to safely buffer pedestrians from maneuvering traffic. The installation of these barriers would likely necessitate removal of some or all on-street parking.

Strategy 3: Increase Public Areas in the Downtown

True public spaces are vital to a downtown because of their ability to bring people together. Currently, Bowling Green lacks a large and significant public space. These spaces are typically called the “town square or “courthouse lawn” and are part of a community master plan when the area is originally platted. Unfortunately, this did not happen in Bowling Green and therefore, this space needs to be created after-the-fact.

The consultant team performed an inventory of the downtown for spaces that could be used for plazas, especially small ones. Appropriate spaces include: space where buildings may be demolished and new ones constructed, vacant land, or streets that may be closed to traffic or may connect to parking. Although general areas were selected as potential public courtyards (see Map: Potential Improvement Areas), they were highlighted using criteria that could change if downtown land uses change.

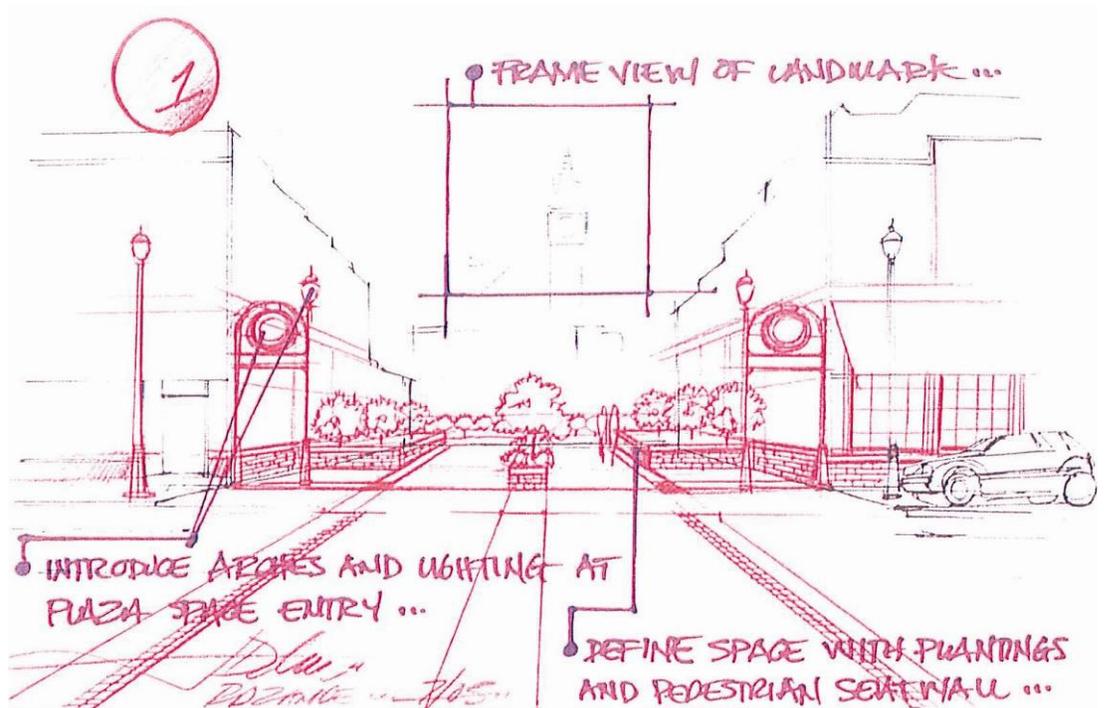
Great public spaces often have important buildings defining their edges and the potential for such a space exists in Bowling Green.



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Two of the more important buildings in or adjacent to the downtown are the courthouse and library. The front door of the library, located on Main Street, is directly on axis with the courthouse tower, located on Prospect, one block away. The area between these two buildings would make an excellent public plaza and provide a vital link, physically and visually, between the Courthouse and Main Street, as well as a major pedestrian route between Bowling Green State University and downtown.

This space has the potential to impact the downtown and community in dramatic ways. Spaces such as these can boost the community's pride, encourage people to socialize and serve as locations for public expression. If the City



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is successful in acquiring this space, it should be carefully thought-out and designed.

The space should be interesting, physically comfortable and safe. The space should be designed for activity, including relaxation, and should leave a strong, lasting, positive, impression. It should catch the eye and the imagination.

In addition to this potential public area, the location of other public areas in the downtown may be as important. It is critical that these pedestrian courtyards and plazas are designed properly. Some good guidelines include the following:

- Limit plaza sizes to create small, human-scaled spaces.
- Enclose the space on one or two sides.
- Plan for at least 20 percent or more of the plaza to be landscaped (to continue the Heritage 2000 improvement scheme).
- Provide seating in the sun and make it readily accessible to the public.
- Develop shops and stores along the plazas, excluding large banks, travel agents, and offices that attract few pedestrians.
- Do not use large expanses of blank wall.
- Plan for prevailing sun angles and climatic conditions, using as a rule of thumb a minimum of 20 percent of daily sunshine hours on March 21.
- Encourage the use of bandstands, public display areas, outdoor dining space, skating rinks, and other features which attract crowds. In cold or rainy areas, a covered galleria would benefit pedestrians more than an open plaza.



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- Integrate indoor and outdoor space to make it more useful. Plan spaces to be small and informal in character and quality so as to be inviting, comfortable, and non-oppressive.
- Avoid sunken plazas, since access is difficult and people feel uncomfortable in them. Keep them level or just slightly below sidewalk grade.



There is also a general shortage of smaller public gathering areas in the downtown, other than those located in private areas such as in front of the Huntington Bank or behind the mini-mall at the south end of Block 4 (see *Map: Block Numbers*). Although some individuals may feel the downtown is one big public gathering area, there are clear social and economic benefits of having more public spaces downtown, especially when these locations are utilized for farmers markets, arts and craft vendors, festivals, outdoor dining, recreation, music venues, or downloading email (if wireless Internet connectivity existed throughout the entire downtown, and not just in selected businesses).

One good method of creating more gathering areas is to provide more public seating opportunities in selected areas of downtown. The addition of street furniture helps create these smaller public gathering areas and can help to make downtown Bowling Green more attractive to pedestrians. It is recommended that more benches be added to the existing streetscape design, when and where feasible. Benches should be located near the pavers along the curb, facing the buildings,



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without disrupting the flow of pedestrian traffic or on-street parking spaces.

Purchasing and installing benches would be done at the expense of business and/or property owners. A permit would be required before installation with the application process including site plan and bench design review. All benches should mirror those already present in the downtown and the same color scheme should be followed. Review of the application would be done by the City's Safety Director and/or Planning Director or their designee.

Strategy 4: Increase the Use of Festivals and Special Events

Thousands of visitors come to Bowling Green each year to participate in a variety of fun activities, from the Classic and Main Car Show, Art Walk and September's Black Swamp Arts Festival, to several holiday



events throughout the year. These events help dramatically to expose Bowling Green and its downtown to new visitors and economic activity. Additional and properly planned activities should be supported and encouraged.

Strategy 5: Encourage Building Murals in Selected Locations

At one time, downtown buildings were accentuated with murals and advertisements. Some of this building art, historic or not, is still present today in various forms. A good example of a recent mural promoted by Main Street Bowling Green can be found at the southern end of Block 10 on the Moose Lodge building.



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Murals and other forms of public art are helping to recharge downtown areas and revitalize distressed buildings across Ohio, from Marion, Portsmouth, Marietta, and in Columbus’s “Short North” area. Several locations in Bowling Green, with building owner consent of course, could be good candidates for such an activity.



Matching grants are currently available from the Ohio Arts Council to promote public art and murals. The two most current programs, the Arts Access and the Arts Innovation programs, each provide matching grants in amounts up to \$3,000 and \$20,000, respectively, to eligible individuals and organizations.

Strategy 6: Encourage the Revitalization of Historic Properties

The downtown’s best quality is its attractive historic character, and this character is embodied in the several historic buildings that reside in it. These buildings, with obscure hidden names like “Buckeye,” “Milliken,” G.W. Trichler,” still remain primarily intact, albeit several buildings have been altered over the years that removed any and all significant historic features, such as facades, windows, and awnings. A general lack of maintenance still remains as the biggest cause of property disrepair, and this currently applies to a variety of buildings in the downtown area. Most of these buildings are located in blocks 5, 8, 9, and 12.



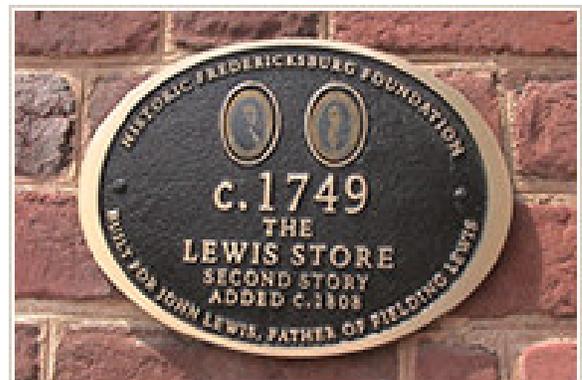
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The federal government encourages the preservation of historic buildings through various means. One of these is the program of federal tax incentives to support the rehabilitation of historic and older buildings. The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program is one of the federal government's most successful and cost-effective community revitalization programs. The Preservation Tax Incentives reward private investment in rehabilitating historic properties such as offices, rental housing, and retail stores.

Federal tax law offers a 20% tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic buildings, and a 10% tax credit for the rehabilitation of non-historic buildings built before 1936. The credits are dollar-for-dollar reductions of taxes owed. The 20% rehabilitation investment tax credit equals 20% of qualified expenditures in a certified rehabilitation of a certified historic structure. The 10% rehabilitation investment tax credit equals 10% of qualified expenditures for rehabilitation of a non-historic building built before 1936. For both credits, the building must be depreciable and the rehabilitation must be substantial. Applications for the 20% rehabilitation investment tax credit are submitted through the Ohio Historic Preservation Office to the National Park Service.

Strategy 7: Promote Downtown Historic Buildings With Markers

The downtown area is full of well-documented historic properties. These properties are not only visited on a daily basis, but also promoted through additional programs like the Walking Tour of Historic



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Places promoted by the Boomtown Preservation Society, Main Street Bowling Green, Bowling Green Community Foundation Bowling Green Convention and Visitors Bureau, Bowling Green Leadership Class of 2003 and the Wood County Health District.

To enhance this program, and others similar in nature, public and private officials might want to pursue the feasibility of developing a voluntary historic marker program that recognizes sites, persons, objects, events, or buildings that are significant to the history of the City. Several communities in Ohio have historic marker programs, and a similar type of this program could work in unison with other programs to help distinguish Bowling Green's Downtown from others.



I. Summary

This Plan should be implemented through a systematic series of successfully completed projects. But most importantly, for ideas set forth in this Plan to be achievable, it must be implemented in ways which work effectively with the private sector.

This Plan identifies a range of initiatives and public capital investments and provides the rationale for joint public and private efforts in areas of downtown maintenance, parking, the deployment of effective way-finding and signage, housing, and major infrastructure. Please see *Table 2: Implementation* on the following page.

Numerous Bowling Green residents, social groups, and downtown employers and employees participated generously in the creation of this Plan through public meetings and workshop discussions.

The success of this Plan in guiding positive change will ultimately depend on effective community ownership of the principles and directions it sets out. There must be stakeholders, individuals and groups responsible for interpreting this Plan and ensuring its implementation.

The continuing value of broad-based involvement needs to be emphasized during the implementation phases. Ongoing effort should be devoted to expanding this involvement and encouraging broad community outreach as this vision evolves.

