

Report on the Assessment Lakewood, Ohio

March 2, 2005

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Thanks also goes to those attending the public meeting held during the assessment.

Introduction

Downtown Ohio, Inc. Downtown Assessment Resource Team spent one and a half days (March 1 & 2, 2005) in the City of Lakewood to assess the downtown district's revitalization needs and opportunities. The assessment process had several functions:

- To identify some of the commercial district's major challenges, opportunities, and needs;
- To provide community members with information about the Main Street approach to commercial district revitalization;
- To learn whether the Main Street Approach is an appropriate strategy for the City of Lakewood; and
- To determine Lakewood's readiness and potential to embrace the Main Street program.

The assessment team included:

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Heritage Ohio/Downtown Ohio, Inc. Columbus, Ohio

Sandra Hull, Executive Director,
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The team formed its comments, observations and recommendations based on documents, personal interviews, meetings with community leaders, walking and driving tours through the downtown district of Lakewood, and the team's own experience in working with local programs and community development corporations throughout the state of Ohio.

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National Main Street Center

The National Main Street Center (NMSC) is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Trust). Created by a Congressional Charter in 1949, the National Trust is a nonprofit organization with over 275,000 members. As a leading advocate of historic preservation in the United States, the National Trust is committed to saving America's diverse historic environments and to preserving and revitalizing the livability of communities nationwide. Economic growth, urban revitalization, and the creation of new jobs are all issues the National Trust addresses through the rehabilitation of historic resources.

Established in 1980 by the National Trust, the NMSC helps communities of all sizes to revitalize their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. More than 1,700 towns and cities in 43 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have participated in Main Street's comprehensive commercial revitalization program. During this time, approximately \$12.8 billion has been reinvested in Main Street commercial districts, creating 193,000 net new jobs, 51,000 net new businesses, and spurring more than 62,000 building rehabilitation projects. Participating communities have leveraged more than \$38.34 in new investment for every dollar used to support the local revitalization effort – a reinvestment ratio that makes the Main Street program one of the most successful economic development strategies in the nation. The NMSC also sponsors the National Main Street Network™, a professional membership program for organizations interested in commercial revitalization. It produces publications, newsletters and special reports on revitalization and preservation issues and serves as a clearinghouse for information on community development issues. The NMSC accomplishes its mission through the Main Street Four-Point Approach™.

A Comprehensive Approach to Revitalization

The Main Street Program assists local partners to plan and implement a comprehensive revitalization strategy for their commercial districts. The foundation of the “Four Point” or “Main Street Approach” to downtown revitalization is preservation: using those elements of quality that have survived as assets upon which we can build a lasting, positive physical and emotional image for everyone who uses downtown. Historic Preservation is used as an economic development tool. It capitalizes on over-looked and underutilized assets, encourages imagination, sharpening of entrepreneurial skills and strong participation by the private sector.

The Four-Point Approach

The four point methodology works to create a total image for the community: Providing the retail/professional area with its necessary market niche, creating a cohesive visual identity unique to the community, and nurturing a cultural ambiance associated with the community's location, appearance, and way of life. The Main Street Approach gradually builds on existing resources and fosters improved community leadership and support on behalf of the Central Business District for the long term.

- **Organization** is the building of consensus and cooperation between the groups that play a role in the downtown. Many individuals and organizations in the community have a stake in the economic viability of the downtown.
- **Design** involves improving the downtown's image by improving its physical appearance – not just the appearance of buildings, but also of street lights, window displays, parking areas, signs, sidewalks, streetscapes, landscaping, promotional materials and all other elements that convey a visual message about what the downtown is and what it has to offer.
- **Promotion** involves marketing the downtown's unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, new businesses, tourists, and others. Effective promotion creates a positive image of the downtown through retail promotional activity and special events utilizing the downtown as a stage area of community activities.
- **Economic Restructuring** involves strengthening the existing economic base of the downtown while diversifying it. Economic Restructuring activities include helping existing downtown businesses expand, recruiting new businesses, providing a balanced mix, converting unused space into productive property, and sharpening the competitiveness of downtown merchants.

The Eight Principles of Main Street

While the Main Street approach provides the format for successful revitalization, implementation of the four-point approach is based on eight principles that pertain to all areas of the revitalization effort:

1. **Comprehensive.** Commercial district revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful and lasting results, a comprehensive approach must be used. Simply stated, *comprehensive* means working on all four points simultaneously.
2. **Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help develop skills so that more complex problems can be addressed and more ambitious projects undertaken. Starting with small projects creates progress and momentum at the same time.
3. **Self-help.** Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the project successful. The NMSC provides direction, ideas and training; but continued and long-term success depends upon the involvement and commitment of the community.
4. **Public/Private Partnerships.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical stability of the district. Each sector has a role to play, and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations so that an effective partnership can be forged.
5. **Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities – like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging or businesses that have become local institutions. Main Street cannot create new landmarks or institutions; existing local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.
6. **Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies equally to each element of the program, from storefront design to promotional campaigns to educational programs.
7. **Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.
8. **Implementation-Oriented.** Activity creates confidence in the program and greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization process is under way. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger activities as the revitalization effort matures.

Downtown Ohio, Inc.

Downtown Ohio, Inc. (DOI) is a non-profit corporation organized to encourage development, redevelopment, and improvement of downtown areas throughout Ohio.

DOI is the state-coordinating program for the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Main Street" program in the State of Ohio. Since incorporation as a non-profit statewide organization in 1989, membership in DOI has increased to include over three hundred (300) cities, organizations, consultants, and downtown development professionals throughout the State of Ohio. The Board is dedicated to a statewide downtown revitalization program, and continues to work toward assisting self-motivated communities of all sizes. Downtown Ohio, Inc. provides technical assistance, training, and networking in all facets of downtown development.

The Board of Trustees for DOI is composed of thirteen members, including an ex-officio member from the Ohio Department of Development and the Ohio Historic Preservation Office. They represent a broad-based group of downtown professionals from small, medium and large cities throughout the State.

DOI is a member of the International Downtown Association (IDA) and the National Main Street Network. DOI also links its technical assistance services with the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) in two ways. First, DOI is working with the Office of Housing and Community Partnerships (OHCP) to develop fundable downtown-related projects in those communities interested in applying for the Downtown Revitalization Competitive Grant Program, Economic Development Loan Program, local Economic Development Revolving Loan Funds, and the Home Program. Second, DOI will act as a conduit for other ODOD programs and resources and as an advocate for downtown revitalization issues related to ODOD.

Through a Membership Network Directory developed by DOI, members have the opportunity to share knowledge, common experiences, and problems concerning management, planning and development in downtown areas. DOI holds up to three conferences per year with the annual meeting held in Columbus. Conferences focus on up-to-date downtown revitalization techniques and feature presentations from regional and/or nationally known speakers. A wide variety of downtown issues have been explored, including such topics as: competing with Wal-Mart; Special Improvement Districts; architectural design standards; parking; dealing with "white elephants"; and retail recruitment. DOI members also receive reduced rates for conference registration and Windows, an informational newsletter.

Ohio Main Street Program

Main Street is a comprehensive revitalization program that promotes historic and economic redevelopment of traditional business districts.

Established in 1997, the Ohio Main Street Program, administered by Downtown Ohio, Inc., is dedicated to empowering each community within the state to maintain, strengthen and revitalize the unique physical, economic, historical and cultural characteristics of its own Downtown or City center.

Each year the Ohio Main Street Program will select demonstration communities on a competitive basis to become official state Main Street projects. These communities will receive technical support and training needed to restore their Main Street to centers of community activity and commerce. Communities selected to participate in the Ohio Main Street Program will receive three years of technical assistance, including:

- Volunteer and program manager training
- Advanced training on specific Downtown issues, such as marketing and promotion, business recruitment, volunteer development, market analysis, design, historic preservation and fundraising.
- On-site visits to help each community develop its strengths and plan for success
- Materials such as manuals and slide programs
- Linkages to other national and state Main Street communities
- When a community participates in the revitalization effort, its Downtown will experience renewed vitality and enhanced economic performance. Benefits of the Main Street Program include:
 - Protecting and strengthening the existing tax base
 - Increasing sales and returning revenues to the community
 - Creating a positive community image
 - Creating visually appealing and functional buildings
 - Attracting new businesses
 - Developing new housing opportunities in historic buildings
 - Creating new jobs
 - Increasing investment in the Downtown
 - Preserving historic resources

Organization

ORGANIZATION

A strong organization is the cornerstone of a successful revitalization program. Without the strong foundation a good organization provides, all other projects, however well intentioned, will falter.

Observations

The following describes the Resource Team's observations of the organizational situation in Lakewood.

1. Incredible turnout for the day and strong representation of the community. Lakewood has a strong sense of community as evidenced by number of organizations supporting community issues. Assessment of presenters is that perhaps the community could combine like organizations and create a Main Street organization and process without creating yet another organization. LCPI could serve as this organization.
2. It is obvious the community has taken a good look at what needs to be accomplished with Detroit Avenue and, secondarily, Madison Avenue. Assessment of strengths and weaknesses shows objective and subjective viewpoints regarding the downtown area, which supports the sense of place, which Lakewood residents wish for their downtown area.
3. Incredible synergy with participants and agreement on what goals for DART should be.
4. Mayor and council participation strong and an incredibly, strong beginning for a Main Street process that can and will be successful.
6. Huge plus that YMCA, library, and hospital etc. are still in the downtown corridor. This creates a solid, economic base from which to initiate a Main Street program.
7. Proximity to Cleveland is an asset as well as an issue; the critical mass is important in what is ultimately agreed upon for recruitment of new businesses.
8. Great architecture; façade changes will create an amazing perceptual change for the community and the Main Street process.

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9. Actually low vacancy rate, but 1st floors filled with more service oriented, rather than retail. You might see what shifts can be made to upper floors.

Recommendations

1. The Main Street approach is volunteer driven, it comes from the members of the community, both within and outside the boundaries of your Main Street target area.
2. Establishing the organization that is going to run your revitalization effort is a primary goal. Most Main Street boards file for status as a 501(c) 3, so that they can accept charitable donations. In Lakewood, because you have such a strong Chamber, you will need to determine what the appropriate long-term relationship should be.
3. Downtown Ohio, Inc. can provide examples of articles of incorporation and by-laws from other Main Street communities.
4. Board Development-you may decide to have a working board and an advisory board. How often will they meet, what are the skills and interests needed to populate this board to maximize the effectiveness? Standardizing the board meeting and the committee structure. A simple program needs to be developed to recruit, retain, and recognize board members. It's important that they understand specifically why they are being recruited to fill a particular need. There must be a working board, and assignments must be spelled out.
5. If Lakewood believes they would like to join the Ohio Main Street program for their revitalization program, they should understand both the benefits and responsibilities of applying to the program. Applications to the Ohio Main Street Program are due October, letters of intent to apply are due September 1, and someone must attend one of the three 'Call for Application Workshops' that are being offered the third week of June.
6. The Main Street approach recommends goals for the Organization committee to cover broad areas: Fundraising; membership; Communications; Human and Financial Resources; volunteer management.
7. Sometimes the organization committee is structured as an executive committee

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8. The DART report should be presented, via meeting, to property owners and retailers/service sector to create ownership with those “on the street”.

Fundraising

9. Developing sustainable financial support is crucial to an ongoing revitalization effort. This is not a short-term project; you must plan for it to be operating for the next 50 years and beyond.
10. Review your financial support plan to reflect a balance of 1/3 public funds, 1/3 private funds, 1/3 other resources-- grants/foundations, special fundraisers.
11. **Government** participation is critical, as this is a partnership and many of your goals will involve public infrastructure, not private building/business owners alone. The county and city government should be approached. The presentation should demonstrate the commitment of community volunteers that will be brought in to support them, as well as the goals that will effectively work to increase property tax base and income tax in your community. You will remain accountable by providing regular reports of economic statistics, which the Ohio Main Street Program requires in monthly reports. The relationship is a two-way street; you want an appropriation in exchange for community volunteers working on revitalization
12. **Corporate Sponsors** Lakewood has great opportunity with several large companies to provide financial support. A Case Statement needs to be provided to them so that they see specific attainable goals, results and a reporting system...and possible advisory board representation. They want a strong viable community for their employees. Another significant partner in Main Street communities is the banking community, who routinely provide program support as well as sponsorship of promotion activities. Many communities have a bank as a sponsor for the Ohio Main Street Program, and they pay their \$3,000 dues directly, which in turn gives them year-round publicity for their instrumental supporting role.
13. There are other mid-sized businesses who will want to offer a special sponsoring level of giving, teams should make requests in person for these gifts.
14. In-kind gift opportunities are valuable too, be creative.

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15. The executive committee/fundraising committee should have sole power over requests to the community for funding from the revitalization efforts. The Promotion committee will have many financial needs, but those requests should be in partnership with the existing fundraising efforts so the funders do not get mixed messages from your organization, or essentially conflicting requests and expectations.

Membership

16. The steering committee will have to determine a membership structure, perhaps at the \$50 and up categories. You cannot discount the membership to the level that managing the membership itself is more costly than the fee. Also the benefits for each level of giving will be determined, and a brochure as a membership vehicle will need to be designed, printed, and distributed. Some communities have a business level set fairly high that it also then covers a specified number of cooperative advertising promotions. As you start-up, you will need to have a group of volunteers available for public speaking engagements to your service organizations, etc. to get lots of information out to the public. All board members should be required to be members, and all should feel comfortable recruiting gifts and memberships. Members are anyone who cares about Lakewood's survival, not just those people in the target area.
17. **Other Sources** of support should be investigated such as Foundations; many Main Street communities get substantial annual support from local foundations (i.e.\$20,000). Pursue smaller family foundations as well. Many Main Street communities hold perhaps one major fundraiser a year, these take a wide variety of forms, find one that works for your community:[beer tents at October fest, sponsored brick walks, formal dinner/dance, auctions, merchandise, etc.] Again remember to use your assets.

Communications

18. This portion of the responsibility to the Organization committee is the communicating of the revitalization efforts, the promotion committee works on the promotion of the downtown itself. Many projects will have some overlap with other committees and will take coordination. The promotion committee will have the expertise to develop an image campaign, which will be a huge benefit, but it falls to the organization committee to see that the revitalization program itself has the presence in the community to succeed. Coordinating the message

delivery with the other three committees will be a continuous task, though they may establish a set program within their own committee.

19. Photo opportunities, press recognition of major donors
20. Newsletter and web site development. This will be coordinated with all committees as you will develop a site which may link to merchants; offer property information to potential merchants; and of course support promotional activities
21. There is also the opportunity to coordinate or share communication tools with chamber members.
22. The setting and hosting an annual meeting and producing annual report would be typical functions under the organization committee's responsibility.

Human and Financial Resources.

23. Typically it would fall to the revitalization board to hire a manager to run the program. The direct chain of command should be well defined. The hiring, supervision, and personnel policies should also be spelled out, and not assumed. Examples of these policies are available in the DOI Board member handbook. Electronic copies are available on DOI's website: www.downtownohio.org.
24. Financial policies need to be established, as well as the role of the treasurer and any other signatures for disbursements. The types of financial reporting required by the board, the system of budget establishment and authority delegated to committees within their budget expenditures. Will there be audits, are reviews established and in what frequency?
25. As each committee will be populated by many volunteers, who will be responsible to recruit more volunteers to work on projects? There needs to be a volunteer system of recruiting, retaining and recognition. Statistics need to be maintained through each committee on volunteer hours logged, and recognition may take a variety of forms, including through the annual meeting/report.

Promotion

Promotion

As one of the four points of the Main Street Approach, promotion is essential to the success of the revitalization effort. It describes the progress and vitality of the central business district to the general public; including investors, shoppers, visitors, and residents. It also describes the success of the revitalization program by providing a communication link between the revitalization program and the public. Raising the level of awareness of your downtown district is key to the success of the businesses and the district as a whole as well as projecting a positive image for the entire City of Lakewood. Creating an overall marketing and promotions program directed at your target markets will help increase awareness and bring new customers to the region.

A thorough, annual comprehensive promotion program needs to be developed and dues need to be established that will enable a proper budget. A promotion committee should be created and should meet on a monthly basis.

Observations

The following describes the Resource Team's observations of the promotion activities in downtown Lakewood.

Observation: Lack of Image and Identity

Lakewood has many fine business districts but they suffer from a lack of identity. An image campaign program will help to create an identity for Downtown Lakewood so that there isn't any question that you have 'arrived' in the business district. This can be achieved through physical improvements, consistent use of logo design and graphics, as well as other image building techniques.



Physical Improvements help to identify a district.



Identification signs and wayfinding systems using a consistent image helps to build a positive overall image.



Recommendations: The downtown area needs to have its own identity, image, branding and promotional program that differentiates it in the market and helps it to become a ‘Destination’. Lakewood is unique in the fact that it is the only adjacent area near Cleveland that has historic downtown business districts. An Identity/Image Building campaign needs to be created to emphasize the business district’s unique strengths that will ultimately raise the level of awareness and increase business for the district. A coordinated marketing and promotion program will help maintain consistency in all marketing efforts and help to carve out a particular and important position in the marketplace. The most successful marketing/promotions strategy requires market segmentation, positioning, and a clear consistent message of the image that is created. A marketing program complete with a logo and a branding campaign need to be created.

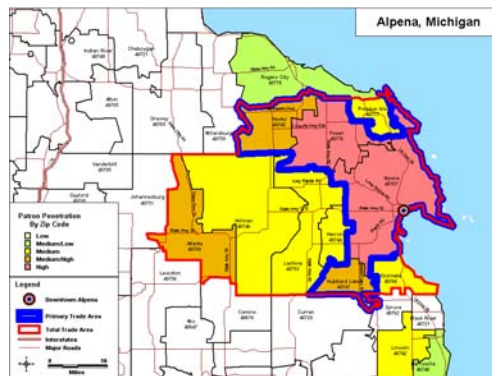
- A professional graphic artist/public relation specialist should be hired to assist the Promotions committee in creating an image/identity and logo for downtown.
- The logo/identity should then be publicized heavily and used in all marketing materials, signs, banners, and event materials. Business owners should be encouraged to use the ‘downtown logo’ in all of their advertising to promote a unique and cohesive district.
- The logo could also be used as a window decal in every business in the district further promoting a unified group.
- Consider selling hats, t-shirts, and other advertising specialties with the downtown logo, or as give-a-ways at events.
- Make sure that the logo is utilized in all websites that have links to the new downtown website, including Lakewood Alive, Lakewood Chamber, and the City of Lakewood.



Downtown Logos should reflect the identity and image of the Downtown.

Observation: Lack of utilization of market information.

A comprehensive market analysis should be updated for the district within one year. The latest data was compiled in 2001. Since most market data has a lifespan of five years, it is not too early to begin updating the information now. It will help to develop a comprehensive promotional strategy that will be effective in the long term and can address the many target market opportunities. The analysis can be completed by community volunteers with information that is readily available from local resources that will answer the questions of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW? On-the-Street surveys that collect zip-code information will help to give you an idea of what your trade-area is.



Example of a Trade-Area Map based on Zip Codes

Recommendation:

Complete a market analysis for the entire downtown Lakewood district. This step could be accomplished through local volunteers and local government support. The National Main Street Center has a very helpful easy to follow step-by-step guide for local volunteers to complete a market analysis. There are also some great online data collection tools. InfoUSA.com, experian, MicrosoftCentral, Switchboard.com, Claritas, and GoLeads, are a few you could research and use. Microsoft has an excellent program called Mappoint that can help with census and GIS information. The data can be used by the Promotions Committee to develop target-market promotions, and also by the Economic Restructuring Committee for retention and recruitment purposes. A summary of this information should be provided to every business and property owner in the district so that they can utilize the information to identify individual target markets for direct mail promotions.

Once you have demographic and market analysis information, the Promotions Committee can begin to identify target markets, which may include, but not limited to the following:

- Downtown Employees-There seems to be a great opportunity to market to district-wide employees. In order to create a promotion and marketing plan aimed at district employees, an Employee Survey should be completed as soon as possible within the district to assess the needs and desires of this ‘captured’ market.

- Residents-A survey could also be created for area residents to assess the needs and desires of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods and communities.
- School-Age Children-Don't leave out this important market! The beauty of Lakewood is the walkability of the city and proximity of every school in the district.

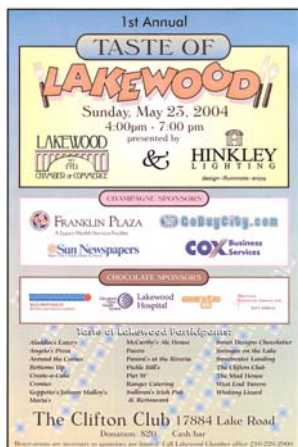
Observation: Lack of Downtown Website

There is no website or part of a website that I could find that spoke about the Downtown, showed pictures, highlighted businesses or business owners, showed available space (including photos), events, restaurants, etc.

Recommendation: A separate page/s on the city's or chamber's current websites could be added or a stand-alone site needs to be created for this purpose. Many people who take day trips use the Internet to plan their visits before leaving home. This is very important for the future if you are interested in building the visitor market. Make sure the information on the site sets Lakewood's downtown apart from anywhere else!

Additional Marketing & Promotion Strategies

- **Special Events**-Continue strengthening existing festivals and events. Complete an 18-month Calendar of Events so that it can be readily available for business prospects, recruitment packages, customers, and visitors. This will also be helpful in planning future events/promotions and help to not overlap with other community events shown below.



Lakewood has three main events: Taste of Lakewood; Light Up Lakewood; and the Lakewood Arts Festival. Downtown should support these main events. Make sure when holding events, an image is used consistently as shown above right.

- **Public Relations and Advertising**-The area media can help Downtown in many ways by providing cost effective promotion and advertising. Get to know your media personally. Find out how you can help them to help you.

Here are some suggestions you can try:

- Work with the local newspaper to submit a weekly downtown news column. Include news about what's new in downtown businesses, promotions, events, and Main Street updates. Take the time to go into individual businesses to get this information.
- Submit downtown events and happenings to local and regional radio stations. Most have free community spotlights. Some have programs that give you an opportunity to be a guest weekly, monthly or quarterly.
- Advertise on local cable programs. They may offer short ads on selected channels for very little cost. Some cable programs will allow you to even have your own show highlighting progress and happenings in your district and interviewing individual businesses downtown.
- Consider cooperative district-wide advertising with local businesses on all types of media to advertise as a district and to keep costs down for everyone. Get creative with your joint advertising.....show what you have to offer and don't forget your unified downtown logo!
- There are some great marketing materials for the City, however, if you wish to market your downtown/s as a destination, you must first establish it as one. A separate brochure or a separate section of an existing one will set this area apart as a "special" place. Promote the existing businesses and services the downtown has as a whole entity; a destination.
- When clustering business types for a joint promotion, consider showing product in a creative way. Using a professional to design the advertisement may be worth the investment

The Antique Dealer's Association has the right idea about advertising jointly...it shows that there is quite a destination for antiques.



- Create a Main Street Newsletter to update the district on Main Street projects and accomplishments. You may consider highlighting businesses in each issue to educate the district

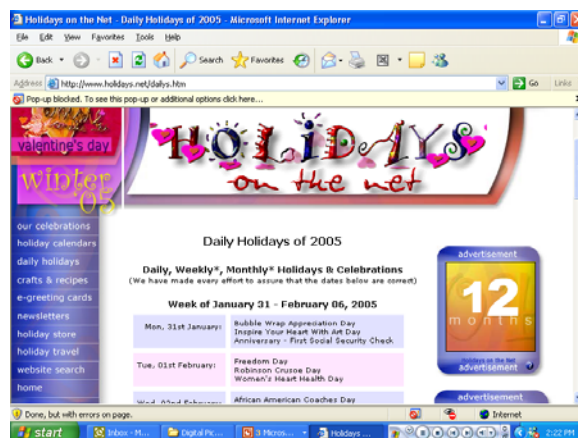
about existing businesses. Coupons for lunches/dinners from area restaurants may also give business owners and employees the incentive to patronize the district businesses. If cost is an issue at first, talk with the Chamber and/or City to insert Downtown news in their newsletters either as a separate page or additional column.

- Create press releases to highlight the district news regarding new businesses, new developments, future projects, status of existing projects, new board or committee members, and volunteer accomplishments. Develop relationships with local print, radio and cable businesses. Identify national association or magazines related to businesses in your district so that press releases can be developed to highlight special service of these businesses.
- Using your market data and working with your downtown business owners, create an e-mail list of visitors and customers for future promotions, newsletter mailing list, or e-mail newsletter list. Attached are e-mail marketing hints and tips if you are considering this type of marketing.

Conclusion

There are many resources and examples to help you develop the best Promotion Program for Downtown Lakewood including: Downtown Ohio, Inc; the National Main Street Center; various websites; and other community's examples. Take advantage of these resources!

www.holidays.net is one resource to help create promotional ideas!



Design

DESIGN

Good design is more than just the appearance of Lakewood's storefronts. Design refers to all of the visual aspects of the business district, from buildings and pedestrian areas, to merchandising and advertising graphics used in promotion. A consistently high level of quality in all aspects of design will improve local attitudes towards revitalization.

Observations

The following describes the Resource Team's observations of the design elements within the downtown district of Lakewood.

1. Lakewood has great building stock. There are some 'missing teeth' that provide opportunities for infill construction
2. Lakewood has a design review board that appears qualified, interested, and engaged in the revitalization opportunities. However, there are no design guidelines that are communicated well to building/business owners. There is also no direct "police power" enforcement. This keeps good, consistent design from taking place. New development is happening, such as the Rockport project, but the design is not consistent with the ambiance and character of the rest of Lakewood.
3. Lack of streetscape. The streets do not feel pedestrian-friendly or inviting.
4. Great library, still downtown, expansion on the horizon. Great traffic generator.
5. Buildings underutilized and many need rehabilitation...opportunity!
6. Lack of parking lot spaces. One of the few downtowns that actually does have a parking problem! The parking that does exist is unattractive and uninviting.
7. Little to no signage directing traffic to downtown.
8. Small amount of downtown housing, great opportunities, and the market would suggest upper-floor housing would be a popular attraction.
9. Great residential neighborhoods and architecture, all within walking distance to downtown. Great asset!

Recommendations

The Main street approach recommends goals for the design committee to cover education and technical assistance; public improvement programs; and private improvement programs. Subcommittees can be established within the design committee to assure that projects are being conducted in all areas

1. Lakewood's Design Review Board and city government should be encouraged to investigate becoming a CLG (Certified Local Government). This program is operated through the Ohio Historical Preservation Office. The basic qualifications are the existence of a design review ordinance and review board. This program provides on-going training and support to design review in your community, as well as provides an opportunity to apply for small grants that could be used in many ways.
2. Strengthen Design Review Board's stature in the community as a resource. Work with Design Review Board to create guidelines that feature simple 'good' 'bad' examples. Work together to establish a process for building owners to get good advice. As the Main Street program matures, the design committee can work with the design review board to build better educational programs about historic preservation and good design for the entire community.
3. Consider making application for National Register Historic Districts, this would make building owners eligible for 20% historic rehabilitation tax credits. It is also a great marketing tool for the community. You have the opportunity to have the largest national register historic district in the country, a distinction now held by Key West, Florida. What a great image enhancer!
4. Image development should be coordinated with the Promotion committee
5. The mayor mentioned several times that there has been quite a bit of interest in national chains of locating in the downtown area, but there are no buildings large enough to accommodate them. I would consider tying together multiple storefronts or work on locating them in the vacant lots, as long as they work within your design standards (you must develop them first!). The Giant Eagle site is one such opportunity...but make sure whatever is built is an enhancement to the area and not a distraction, like the chains now occupying your downtown.

Public Improvements

6. Public Improvements will be programs that are worked in partnership with the city or county government. Streetscape improvements: landscaping, lighting and signage are immediate concerns. The streetscape needs to be carefully considered so that it is not “vanilla” or cookie cutter. Research historic streetscape of Lakewood, and see if you can find any “lost” elements to re-establish in the district. (i.e. clocks, benches, lighting designs, signage, etc.) These will give the area a personality. Also, go for the “wow factor”! With Lakewood’s walkability, all aspects of the streetscape need to invite walkers and entice drivers to get out of the car and become a part of the atmosphere. Some of this can also be achieved with flowers and public art, such as sculpture. Use your pool of local artistic talent, and consider getting the youth involved as well. If they are part of the design, it will help the next generation become more engaged, and they will bring their current families and next generations to view “their” designs.



Gateway features, such as this wrought iron and brick entrance feature in Kissimmee, Florida add pizzazz and let visitors know they've arrived someplace special.

7. CDBG money is a way the city can help leverage private improvements.
8. You should develop a sign program for Lakewood to downtown from highways. Coordinate wayfinding. Signs to direct vehicular traffic into and through the downtown area were not easily identified. The downtown revitalization organization must envision the needs of first-time visitors, and satisfy those needs. Entrance features that announce arrival points are highly recommended. In the future, as you designate more districts, design each one to have its own character and defining

entrance features. This could be done through graphics, colors and shapes.

9. Develop a sign program for parking. Beautification, landscaping, signage and interesting/creative links to the buildings are needed.



Attractive parking signage can enhance an area, as well as guide visitors to parking areas.

10. The parking study currently underway by the City is very important. Utilizing many creative parking opportunities is essential. One idea may be to narrow the traffic on Detroit to 2 lanes and widening sidewalks to include angled parking. It may be worth it to bring the pedestrian scale back and add sidewalk enhancements to the area. It would also calm traffic. Our visit showed amazingly low traffic during rush hour!



Outdoor dining can enhance a downtown area and make it pedestrian-friendly and inviting.

Private Improvements

11. Private Improvements – There are many building/façade renovations to do. You need to begin working one on one with the business and property owners to show them what they can accomplish and providing them with the proper tools to achieve it. There are many wonderful property owners in the district, such as the Beck Center. However, the buildings are not pleasing and inviting. Good facelifts would go a long

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- way in making the interior use shine through on the design of the façades.
12. Publicize and highlight the good work that has been done. Develop a local awards program. Make sure you are awarding appropriate design.
 13. The Detroit Theater is a treasure. Bring the theater owner into the loop and provide support. I should note that the hotel clerk stopped us and wanted to be sure we let you know the public thinks there needs to be a multi-plex downtown. While I don't know whether this is a good or bad idea, I do think building an entertainment district around the existing theater is good.

Education and Technical Assistance

14. Educational and Technical assistance opportunities. Educate the community about the 10% and 20% tax credits available for historic rehabilitations
15. You may want to contact The Ohio Historic Preservation Office about bringing their Building Doctor program to work with several building owners at one time, so they could get technical assistance on improvements they could be making.
16. Partner with your knowledgeable historical/heritage group volunteers to celebrate your assets. They appeared to be more than willing to assist and are wonderful assets.
17. On our DART tour, someone mentioned a plaque program, recognizing the history of buildings in the community, this could be on walls, or recessed in the sidewalks.
18. Develop a brochure depicting styles and history, which focus on downtown, perhaps a self-guided walking tour.
19. Work with historical/heritage organizations as partners, possibly a monthly feature in the newspaper about a downtown building, with before/after picture and a description of the building
20. Develop walking tours for Saturday or Sunday mornings or coordinated with other festival activities. You could develop a special Sunday morning program with churches for after services in the summer.

21. Work with schools to coordinate architectural history (art class) using your own community assets. There are some great examples of community coloring books that incorporate local history. Also, photo and art contests are a good way to get the youth involved.

Economic Restructuring

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Economic restructuring is a long-term process to strengthen the community's downtown core of existing assets while diversifying its economic base. This is normally accomplished by retaining and expanding existing business, recruiting new business to provide a balanced commercial mix, converting underutilized and vacant space into productive new uses and sharpening the entrepreneurial skill of merchants. Economic restructuring will be an ongoing task for Lakewood.

Over the past several years, a number of variables have changed Lakewood's market. The recent construction of nearby Crocker Park and the Avon Commons are just two such examples. Also affecting Lakewood is the continued sprawl and outlying development along Route 90 countered by the renewed interest in urban housing in Cleveland (Warehouse District, growth along W. 25th, etc.); and changing consumer habits and shopping attitudes.

Observations

The following describes the Resource Team's observations of the economic conditions of Lakewood:

1. One factor of Lakewood that serves as both one of its largest assets and biggest challenges is its location. Located within minutes of Downtown Cleveland and a short car ride from the newly constructed Crocker Park, Lakewood can draw people to its downtown by creating and maintaining a niche image and more authentic atmosphere, but this can also lead to retail leakage and a shift in consumer habits being so closely located to a larger city and malls—where the perception at times is “larger is better”.
2. Downtown Lakewood is still home to most traditional civic buildings—library, post office, banks, etc. Such uses draw hundreds of visitors daily to the downtown district. This market should be capitalized on for attracting customers to retail shops/restaurants.
3. Lakewood has many “stories” to tell—i.e.) History of the streetcar in Lakewood, beautiful historic homes, the impact of the close proximity to Lake Erie, the creation of the Rocky River Reservation, etc. These can be expounded upon for potential image building and heritage/cultural tourism goals, etc.
4. It is a positive that so many representatives from financial institutions, the Chamber of Commerce, Historical Society, City staff, Real Estate Agents, Building Owners, and business owners attended the meeting on March 2nd. This broad involvement will greatly enhance your ability to succeed in bettering downtown Lakewood.

5. The lack of a clearly defined downtown district is a concern in revitalization efforts. Fortunately, participants in the March 2nd meeting overwhelmingly agreed on the need for an improved streetscape. Such an improvement will help to define exactly what is considered “downtown”. Also, this aids in a more cohesive environment for existing businesses and those considering locating within the district. The streetscape will also contribute to the charm of this district.
6. Lakewood is a very residential city. The close proximity of the residential district to the downtown district means that a large and diverse population of residents is within easy walking distance of the downtown. This should help to support an equally diverse retail market, and should contribute to an active nightlife in downtown Lakewood. Downtown Cleveland is largely vacant at night due to the low number of downtown residential units, thus few businesses stay open past 6:00. Lakewood has much potential here.
7. There are already many successful businesses in downtown Lakewood. Attention should be paid to the types of business that are doing well, and perhaps try to attract complimentary businesses.
8. Strong Chamber of Commerce. Attendance and dedication of Chamber staff and Board members was very positive.
9. Signage to Lakewood/downtown Lakewood has room for improvement. Short North in Columbus was used as an example of ways to attract attention to the downtown district. Contact should be made with a representative in Short North to help gather ideas.
10. Strong existing events taking place within/near the downtown district
11. Some existing retail shops seem strong, while others appear semi-marginal. There is a need to compliment them with similar type businesses and services.
12. There are several buildings in the downtown district in need of repair and proper maintenance.
13. There is a huge potential for upper-level housing within the district. Some housing does exist, which is a positive. However, this could be increased, as well as other uses; such as office or IT companies should be considered in these vacant spaces.
14. City should make building owners aware of all reinvestment incentives (CDBG, façade loans, etc.)—many building owners may not be taking advantage of existing opportunities. City should explore additional incentives for restoring historic structures.
15. A business recruitment package is needed with incentives to market the property and buildings that are available in downtown Lakewood.
16. There are a number of vacancies that provide an opportunity to solidify a business-clustering plan through a visioning process. An inventory of existing business mix and a plan for filling the vacancies should be implemented.

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17. Strong central location. Much traffic already passes through Lakewood- efforts must be made to get passersby to stop. Little public space exists. Pocket parks for entertainment/eating lunch outdoors on nice days would greatly enhance the downtown.

Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered, and when adopted, communicated to board of directors, other committee chairs and committee members:

1. First and foremost, form an economic restructuring committee. This committee should develop a marketing strategy for the community that will result in an improved retail mix, stronger tax base, increased investor confidence and a strong, stable role for the downtown as a major component of the community's economic health. Members may include downtown merchants, Chamber of Commerce representatives, City Council members, realtors, property and business owners, developers, consumers, marketing professionals, etc.
2. The economic restructuring committee should develop business recruitment, retention and expansion programs to insure the vitality of downtown.
3. Develop educational opportunities to enhance the entrepreneurial skills. Join with existing programs or organizations such as the local Chamber of Commerce, SBA, Educational Institute/Branch or County Extension Office to offer business planning or other related business improvement workshops such as visual merchandising, advertising, customer service, business plan writing, etc.
4. Develop a business retention and expansion program to insure the vitality of the downtown. The best recruitment is expansion of existing businesses.
5. It is important to work with existing businesses to strengthen their bottom line. This may include a better diversity of products, improved customer service, creative merchandising and physical improvements to the exterior and interior details of the establishments. Please keep in mind the heritage of these details set the downtown apart from other retail establishments in outlying strip centers and regional shopping environments.
6. Emphasize the need to further develop a comprehensive image and effectively market the downtown and community strengths.
7. Once an image campaign is developed it should be promoted aggressively; the Internet, signage, promotional brochures, radio, television, event planning, etc. are examples of possible ways to communicate the image and message.
8. Embrace the opportunity to piggyback off the existing cultural, heritage and recreational tourism of Lakewood to enhance the

- downtown. Embrace the opportunity to preserve, protect and promote your community. Visitors love to visit and spend time and money in communities that are authentic or have authentic stories to tell, are charming, welcoming and entertaining.
9. The formation of an investment consortium, such as a Limited Liability Corporation (LCC) may ease the financial difficulties in maintaining and revitalizing the downtown structures.
 10. The downtown program, in conjunction with local government, should start, or continue, to offer such incentives as revolving loan funds, grants and tax abatements. These will encourage rehabilitation and re-use of historic structures.
 11. Once a downtown organization is formed, it should become a clearinghouse for all space available in the district by maintaining both a building and business inventory and providing the information to potential investors.
 12. A business-clustering plan should be developed as the committee matures.
 13. Efforts should be made to promote and capitalize on existing traffic generators to the downtown. These include civic buildings, the library, hospital, restaurants, etc.
 14. Work with downtown property owners, City officials and bankers to offer/take advantage of incentives for reinvestment, such as historic rehabilitation tax credits, low interest loans, property tax moratoriums, etc.
 15. Focus on positive aspects. Although a number of negative influences are working against downtowns nationwide it is important to focus on the positive elements that downtowns have to offer. The success of the downtown revitalization efforts will depend, to a great degree, upon the community's ability to capitalize on the strength of the commercial area and improve upon or neutralize the weaknesses.
 16. A market analysis study should be explored to determine the potential for new and appropriate businesses while assisting existing businesses to expand. This should include greater understanding on visitor's spending habits.

Data Collection

CENSUS: The first project related to Economic Restructuring is a simple census of the location and type of businesses already located within the defined boundaries of the "business district" or downtown. Do this for a number of reasons:

- Having hard numbers helps people understand the distribution of retail businesses, service businesses and offices and identify areas of concern and vacant space.

- Cross-reference their location on a map and look for “clusters” of related businesses that share similar merchandise in adjacent or nearby locations. This saves shoppers time and helps businesses benefit from customers who value convenience.
- Use this to create a vacancy report and map available locations.
- Identify the district’s top generators of foot traffic (may or may not be a retail business) and begin to visualize how this can help others in the downtown. Use this in assisting with a marketing plan.
- The census should form the beginning of a detailed property/building survey that should include addresses, owner information, square footage and utility information, design-related information (architecture, unique resources like tin ceilings, etc.) and available multi-story unit information.

SURVEYS: Another key project related to economic restructuring is surveying. Both merchant and consumer survey information should be key resources when planning and carrying-out revitalization efforts. These give a realistic understanding of the market place served by the commercial center and should consist of updated information (within the last 6-12 months). Once collected, *disseminate* relevant information to businesses and community.

- Downtown businesses are the engine that drives revitalization. Beginning with the core group of merchants, develop a survey of downtown establishments. Try to get a reading of the pulse of the downtown business community. This could range from simple face-to-face interviews to more extensive questionnaires. Areas covered should include business related issues such as number of full-time employees, part-time employees, rent, utility costs, gross revenue, etc. Community-issues should also be surveyed. Ask business owners their perception of the downtown district, city government, police and fire departments, etc.
- Customer-related surveys should also be done to determine the larger community’s relationship to the downtown. If at all possible, try to include the questions in a citywide mailing to maximize responses. Who shops downtown and why? What types of businesses do local folks want or need that aren’t currently in the district? These answers can help determine the types of businesses the community does/can support.
- A Target Market Analysis is also important. Retail leakage, sprawl, consumer habits, etc. can all be determined through an effective market analysis.

Conclusion

The above activities are a good foundation that will help determine the direction your efforts will take in downtown Lakewood. Documenting current resources and understanding the needs of both business owners and consumers will help tackle larger issues such as business assistance programs (training, services, financial incentives, etc.), retention and expansion, recruitment of new businesses and large-scale projects (streetscapes, way-finding, upper floor developments, etc.).

Attachments

City of Lakewood Assessment Report

Lakewood Strengths and Weaknesses Assessment

At the Downtown Ohio DART (Downtown Assessment Resource Team) visit on March 2, 2005 community participants broke into groups. Each group was asked to list every item they felt was either a strength or a challenge for Lakewood. Later in the afternoon after viewing presentations, those present were asked to individually vote for five strengths and five weaknesses. This exercise enables the group to prioritize the issues that should be addressed first, and give clues as to which strengths they should capitalize upon.

Strengths

Walkability	34
Safe	31
Attractive historic architecture	24
Façade renovations	
Strong residential	19
Long Established businesses	16
Access to Lake	16
Destination points	16
(library, churches, YMCA, hospital, etc)	
Accessibility to Neighborhoods	13
Engaged Citizenry	13
Public transportation	12
Easily Accessible from the outside	9
Diversification	7
Chamber	6
Local business ownership	5
Strong nightlife	5
Little office vacancy	4
Large Employers	4
(creates critical mass of people)	
Parking	3
Vibrant lots of activity	2
Zoning already in place	2
New building programs & investment	2
Grid maintains original integrity	2
Senior Center	1
Green space pocket parks	1
Successful infill	1
Easily defined	1
Cultural Arts center	
Opportunity to recruit businesses from Westgate	1
Property and income tax generation	
Strong economic base	

Challenges

Need Streetscape	32
Lack of definition for Downtown/visitor	21
Managing Suburban perceptions (of an urban environment)	19
Parking	18
Absentee Landowners	15
Recruitment of quality businesses (lack of quality space to attract)	15
Lack of quality retail	13
Lack of business mix	13
Stronger preservation guidelines needed	11
Lack of marketing/promotions (nightlife/events)	10
Lack of public focal gathering spaces	10
Commissions/bldg Dept Need to communicate & facilitate	9
Façade renovation needed (lack of 20% tax credit use)	9
Competition of nearby retail	7
Lack of business clustering	5
Defining boundaries	5
Vacancies on street level	4
Residents shopping habits	3
Change existing attitudes	2
Landlocked	2
Limited Hours	2
Traffic/circulation/flow (no bus shelters/walkability/limited public space)	2
Lack of signage & business addresses	2
Over 50% retail	2
Lack of Destination	2
Need groups to work together/consensus	1
Maintenance of streets/district as a whole	1
Sewer project (business accessibility challenge)	1
Need technology	

Boundaries

Madison Avenue//Madison Mile

North	Rear boundaries of buildings
South	
East	W. 117th St.
West	Hilliard

Detroit Avenue

North	Railroad
South	Franklin
East	Bunts
West	Arthur