

# **CITY OF MASON**

## *Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan*

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## Acknowledgment

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This Plan is dedicated to the approximate one hundred volunteer members of the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee who, over the past two and a half years, have contributed their time and energy to the development of a comprehensive strategy to revitalize and maintain Downtown Mason as a vital and attractive historic retail center.

## Executive Summary

Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc. (PDG), working with the Danter Company, Ms. Linda Fitzgerald of LSR Consultants, and the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee (DMRC) completed this *Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan* for the City of Mason after twelve months of research, brainstorming, public input, and coordination with other related projects. Numerous opportunities were provided for public input and review, including public sessions with DMRC and displays at the DMRC booth at the Heritage Festivals in both 2001 and 2002.

It was very evident during the past year, that most of the residents of the City of Mason view Downtown Mason as the heart of the community, and want it to be preserved. Downtown Mason represents the Mason of the past, before all the new housing developments, shopping centers, industrial and commerce parks, and the community campus were constructed. Downtown Mason evokes fond memories of life in a small town; memories of a shopping area where people knew everyone, felt safe and comfortable with their children, could purchase the basic necessities, and get a bite to eat. This is the nostalgic feeling that they want preserved and enhanced in Downtown Mason.

The *Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan* contains 50 pages of recommendations to improve the current situation in Downtown Mason. Key areas that are addressed include: traffic, image and theme, streetscaping, focal points, gateways, signage, parking, street treatment, land uses, buildings and historic resources, management and organization, marketing and promotion, and technical and financial assistance. Each of these elements is important to the overall revitalization effort.

If the City of Mason and the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee (DMRC) are to be successful with this downtown revitalization effort, ***a strong partnership between the two is imperative***. Neither group alone can successfully undertake a project of this magnitude. Better communication between the City, DMRC, business and property owners, and other interest groups is extremely important. A joint subcommittee of city and DMRC representatives should be created to facilitate coordination and communication.

The ***City of Mason and DMRC must adopt the basic concepts of this Plan*** wholeheartedly in order to begin implementation. The key to the success of this Plan is that the City and the County, with input from the DMRC and businesses in the downtown, ***must agree to a viable solution to route non-local traffic and truck traffic around the downtown***, so that the principles of New Urbanism, and especially the concept of a pedestrian-friendly environment, can be initiated. This is critical to almost all design elements recommended in the Plan: reinstating on-street parking, maintaining two-way traffic, pedestrian oriented streetscaping, pocket parks, focal points, reduction of the required right-of-way width, alternative street treatments, pedestrian crosswalks, business recruitment, etc.

The ***City of Mason and DMRC should play a proactive role with Warren County in the Major Investment Study (MIS)*** soon to be undertaken to identify an east-west connector between I-75 and I-71. This project will impact the City of Mason and the downtown more than any other issue in the past decade. The City and DMRC should have a representative on the MIS Committee.

**Truck and non-essential traffic must be removed from Main Street**, and classification of Main Street must be reduced to a collector or less (in lieu of an arterial) so that two-way traffic and two lanes of parking in most areas can be provided without reducing sidewalk area. This is the major goal of the Downtown Plan; however, it will take the cooperation and coordination of many entities (including ODOT, Warren County, and neighboring communities and townships) to resolve this issue.

**A Downtown Manager must be hired** to carry this Plan forward through implementation. Volunteer groups are just that – volunteers! They have businesses to run or jobs to do and can only dedicate so much time to the downtown planning effort. The Downtown Manager should be the person with the primary responsibility for coordinating all efforts on the implementation of this Plan and should act as the liaison between the City and DMRC.

**A theme, such as “Mason Village,” should be adopted** and utilized extensively to create an identity for the downtown. A coordinated signage system, including building identifications and gateways, should be implemented, incorporating this theme or logo.

The City should hire a consultant to **conduct a feasibility study of the buildings formerly occupied by the City Administration, Engineering and Building Departments, and Fire Department**, to determine the structural integrity of the buildings, as well as alternative uses and potential tenants for the facilities. The potential for adaptive re-use of these buildings is critical to maintaining a flow of pedestrian traffic in the downtown.

**A design firm should be retained to undertake detailed design** on a streetscaping plan that would include placing all overhead wiring underground, decorative light fixtures matching those on Mason-Montgomery Road, street furniture, street trees, signage, and decorative pavers. **The first phase of this design should include Main Street between Reading Road and Mason-Montgomery Road.** Funding assistance should be sought for the first phase immediately after completion of preliminary design. The City should **apply for a CDBG - Downtown Revitalization Tier 2 application** in September of 2003.

**A series of focal points and pocket parks should be designed** to incorporate various historic sites and buildings, green spaces, pedestrian walkways, Muddy Creek, the new community center, the proposed amphitheater and train depot, city parks, and other key points of interest in the downtown and surrounding community.

**Committees should be appointed and assigned to pursue specific elements of this plan**, such as the proposed amphitheater, the gateways, the proposed train depot, restoration of a theater/arts center in the Fifth Third Bank building, or new/improved parking areas. Whichever project is able to proceed the fastest, or is able to acquire financing, should receive the highest priority for implementation. The Downtown Manager should coordinate the activities of these committees.

Obviously 50 pages of recommendations can not be implemented immediately. The City and DMRC must take the Plan and implement one step at a time, albeit in a coordinated manner consistent with the goals of the Plan. The Downtown Manager’s main goal should be to see that the Plan is implemented within the next five years.

This *Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan* is a **conceptual plan**. As actual design plans are prepared and additional research undertaken to do so, changes to the Plan will be required and should be expected. The general principles and concepts of this Plan, however, are critical to its successful implementation.

# DOWNTOWN MASON REVITALIZATION PLAN

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# Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan

The following pages summarize the results of the planning efforts of Poggemeyer Design Group (PDG) and the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee (DMRC) that transpired over the past year. This Plan has been recommended to the Council of the City of Mason for approval and implementation. The DMRC looks forward to working with the City on the implementation of this Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan.

## A. Background on Downtown Mason Revitalization Program

Historically, past efforts to design and implement a comprehensive revitalization program for Downtown Mason have been sporadic and not non-comprehensive in scope. The last public sponsored streetscape treatment occurred in downtown in the late 1970's when the City of Mason eliminated on-street parking downtown, installed turn lanes and constructed a streetscape treatment that included trees, sidewalks, and trash receptacles. Over the years, various ideas have been "floated" by downtown merchants to develop a marketing identity for Downtown Mason including a "Western" theme and a center for the arts. In January 1999, a group called "Citizens for Downtown Mason" was formed to develop a redevelopment plan for Downtown Mason, but the group disbanded one month later citing "lack of City support and controversy".

In August 1999, the City of Mason hired Linda Fitzgerald of LSR Consultants to facilitate discussion about downtown revitalization and to establish broad-based grassroots community support for a comprehensive downtown revitalization plan. A twelve member Downtown Mason Steering Committee, comprised of downtown stakeholders, was formed as a temporary committee responsible for facilitating citizen input on how to renew Downtown Mason as a social and commercial center.

In November 1999, the Steering Committee sponsored two public meetings to begin developing community consensus on a vision for Downtown Mason. The meetings were moderated by staff from Downtown Ohio, Inc. (DOI), a non-profit organization which the State of Ohio Department of Development employs to assist local communities in developing and implementing effective downtown revitalization programs. The sixty downtown stakeholders who attended the meetings included downtown residents, businesses and property owners, residents and businesses from outside downtown, City staff and policymakers, and representatives of Mason City Schools and other civic organizations. The participants identified a list of strengths and weaknesses of the downtown and prioritized goals and objectives for ensuring the future vitality of Downtown Mason.

During the DOI public meetings, there was strong consensus and interest from the community for initiating a comprehensive Downtown Mason revitalization program. Based on the results of these public meetings, the Downtown Mason Steering Committee transitioned into the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee (DMRC). The DMRC initiative is modeled after the National Main Street Center (NMSC) Program which is administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Main Street program uses a four-point approach to downtown revitalization which addresses the following areas: 1) organization, 2) promotion, 3) design, and 4) economic restructuring.

The DMRC mission statement, presented below, is very clear in its assertion that Downtown Mason is and should remain the “historic soul” of the City of Mason:

“To revitalize and maintain ‘Downtown’ as the focal point for the City of Mason by creating a gathering center providing retail, office, cultural, entertainment and residential opportunities while preserving Mason’s heritage, character, and quality of life.”

A premise of DMRC is that the same strong commitment which the City of Mason has made to invest in infrastructure and recruitment of industrial, office, research, and development facilities, should be carried forth in historic Downtown Mason.

Today DMRC is comprised of approximately one hundred volunteers who serve on four working subcommittees. Below is a summary of the purpose and goals of each of the four DMRC subcommittees:

**Organization - Purpose:** To build collaborative partnerships between a broad range of organizations, agencies, businesses and individuals, and to mobilize volunteer support for the revitalization effort. A key tenet of the Organization Subcommittee is the recognition that many individuals and organizations in the community have a stake in the economic viability of the downtown.

*Goals:*

- Designation of a downtown lead organization, (e.g., a downtown merchants’ association, an arm of the Chamber and/or City of Mason, or a separate 501(c)3 corporation).
- Fund raising for the downtown initiative, (e.g., “Adopt a Streetlight/Bench/Planter” program, corporate donations, grants and foundations, etc.).
- Identification of long-term (five year) goals for the downtown initiative.
- Oversee the development of the Downtown Mason Comprehensive Plan and Market Analysis.

**Promotion – Purpose:** To market the downtown’s unique characteristics and assets to shoppers, investors, new businesses, tourists, and others.

*Goals:*

Recruit more downtown property owners, businesses and residents to DMRC.

- Development of a Downtown Mason Web Page.
- Issue more frequent and consistent news articles and guest editorials on plans and activities of DMRC.
- Publish a regular feature article in the city newsletter *Mason Matters*.
- Work with the Organization Subcommittee to help provide input in the Downtown Mason Comprehensive Plan and Market Analysis.
- Develop a theme to incorporate in downtown streetscaping, (e.g., signage, banners, benches, planters, street lamps, pavers, trees).
- Sponsor joint DMRC subcommittee meetings.
- Develop one or two new special events in downtown.



**Design – Purpose:** To improve the downtown’s physical environment and rehabilitate historic and traditional commercial buildings. Design also entails improvements to the downtown streetscape including lighting, parking areas, signs, sidewalks, landscaping, infrastructure (streets, curb and gutter and utilities), and window displays.

*Goals:*

- Provide input in the Downtown Mason Comprehensive Plan and Market Analysis to help develop creative and practical design plans for both building facades and streetscape in Downtown Mason.
- Develop an Overlay District and Design Guidelines in downtown to protect historic and architectural integrity of downtown buildings and streetscape.
- Conduct a complete inventory of historically significant buildings in Downtown Mason and prepare a plan to encourage property owners to nominate buildings for listing on State and/or national historic register.

**Economic Restructuring– Purpose:** To strengthen and diversify the existing economic base of the downtown area. Economic Restructuring activities include developing programs to help existing downtown businesses expand, recruitment of new businesses to downtown, development of a plan to convert unused space into productive property while providing a balanced mix of businesses, converting unused space and sharpening the competitiveness of downtown businesses.

*Goals:*

- Oversee the market analysis component of the Downtown Mason Comprehensive Plan and Market Analysis.
- Analyze benefits/costs of designating Downtown Mason as a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA).
- Analyze using a portion of CDBG funds to establish a facade improvement loan program for downtown property owners.
- Investigate other tax and financial incentive programs to help stimulate new investment and re-investment in Downtown Mason.
- Work with the City or a downtown organization to recruit targeted businesses to Downtown Mason, based in part on results of marketing analysis.

Today DMRC is comprised of approximately ninety members who regularly meet with their respective subcommittees as well as attend quarterly joint subcommittee meetings. Since its creation in November 1999, DMRC has proven itself to be a sustaining vehicle for developing a viable plan for revitalizing Downtown Mason. Attached in **Exhibit A** is a summary of accomplishments and future goals of each of the four DMRC subcommittees.

DMRC recognizes that Downtown Mason is a major community asset worth preserving and enhancing. Creation of the DMRC has resulted in a renewed interest and pride in local heritage and recognition of the key role of the downtown in a community’s overall quality of life. The continued success of the Downtown Mason revitalization program will depend on the continued ongoing involvement of the entire community in the planning and implementation process and strong support by Mason City Council and Administration.

## **B. Purpose and Scope of Downtown Mason Revitalization Comprehensive Plan**

To assist the City and DMRC in accomplishing its mission of downtown revitalization, the Mason City Council hired Poggemeyer Design Group (PDG) in June 2001 to work with the Administration and DMRC to conduct a market study of Downtown Mason, and based on the findings in the market study and input from the City and DMRC, to develop a comprehensive plan for the revitalization of Downtown Mason.

During the November 1999 public visioning session, DMRC determined that the primary study area which the Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan should address is the "Downtown Mason Central Business District" (CBD). (See **Exhibit B** for a map delineating the Downtown Mason CBD). The Downtown Mason Central Business District is generally defined as the properties fronting along the north and south sides of Main Street (six blocks) from Kings Mill Road to Mason Road; and the properties fronting along the east and west sides of Reading Road/U.S. 42 (four blocks) from Main Street to Fourth Street.

Although the Downtown Mason CBD is the primary focus of this plan, DMRC recognizes that any development or improvements or changes to infrastructure outside the CBD, (e.g., relocation of the municipal complex to Mason-Montgomery Road and planned roadway improvements at entrances into downtown), will directly impact downtown revitalization plans. For this reason, DMRC also identified a larger "Downtown Mason Redevelopment Focus Area" as delineated in **Exhibit C** of this plan.

PDG divided the Downtown Mason Revitalization Comprehensive Plan into five phases. Below is a summary of each phase:

### **Phase 1: Kick-Off Meeting, Key People Interviews and Review of Existing Plans**

The Kick-off Meeting for the Downtown Mason revitalization planning process was held on June 26, 2001. Twenty-two people attended that meeting, and they were asked to complete a survey form, identifying "issues" with the downtown. A summary of their responses is contained in **Exhibit D** of this report.

Key People Interviews were held by PDG with 25 individuals who were identified as Downtown Mason stakeholders by the DMRC. Those results are summarized in **Exhibit E** of this report.

PDG reviewed many plans and studies completed on various issues related to Downtown Mason or the City in general. These included:

- *Around Mason, Ohio: A Story* (Springman, 1982),
- *Comprehensive Plan Update* (PKG, 1992),
- *Comprehensive Plan* (Woolpert, 2001),
- *Bicycle and Pedestrian Way Master Plan-2001* (McKenna and LJB July 2001),
- *Draft Landscape Ordinance Update* (McKenna, August 2001), and
- *Downtown Ohio, Inc.'s Assessment Report* (December 1999).

In addition, PDG reviewed the *U.S. 42 Downtown Mason Traffic Study* (TEC, 2002), and attended a presentation by TEC to the Council in February 2002.

It is worth noting that the *1992 Mason Comprehensive Plan Update* presented a very cursory analysis of the downtown area. Also, the decision was made by the City of Mason and Woolpert to not address Downtown Mason in the 2001 update since the City had already retained PDG to develop the *Downtown Mason Comprehensive Revitalization Plan*. As a result, this proposed plan constitutes the major guide for implementing an effective downtown revitalization program for the City of Mason.

### Phase 2: Market Study

The Danter Company of Columbus, a national leader in real estate research, completed the Market Study for Mason in September 2001.

The market study surveyed current perceptions of Downtown Mason and identified gaps in the marketplace. The market study analyzed existing and ideal business mix, suggested plans for adaptive re-use of vacant buildings, outlined a targeted business recruitment strategy, and recommended methods for sharpening the competitiveness of downtown merchants. Results of the market study indicate a strong market demand for additional retail, specialty and niche shops and restaurants in Downtown Mason. This demand is validated by the fact that one new restaurant has already located in downtown, and there are several other serious prospects for new restaurants and restaurant expansions. According to the market study, market conditions are equally encouraging on the supply side. When the staff from three municipal buildings relocate from downtown to the new civic center in Fall 2002, this will result in approximately 20,000 square feet of available office/retail space in the downtown.

The Danter Company used three techniques in their research:

- The Effective Market Area (EMA) Principle. This is a concept developed by Danter to delineate the support that can be expected for a proposed development. An EMA is the smallest area that will generate the most support for the project.
- A 100% Survey Data Base. Danter's field analysts surveyed all developments within the EMA.
- Proprietary Research. In addition to site-specific analyses, Danter conducted a number of on-going studies, the results of which were used as support data for their conclusions.

As part of the market study, Danter conducted 20 merchant surveys and 300 consumer surveys. About half of the consumer surveys were done over the phone and the other half were done as intercept surveys (on the street during the 2001 Heritage Festival.)

A four-page summary of the results of the Danter study is provided in **Exhibit F**. Several copies of the entire report are available in the City of Mason offices.

### Phase 3: Existing Conditions Analysis

A good deal of time was spent gathering and reviewing data, observing and analyzing existing conditions, and reviewing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT), as part of Phase 3.

- Base Map. A base map was developed, indicating locations of buildings. Buildings were numbered and cross-referenced to a building list, which included business name and address. [Reference the Downtown Mason Building Map, **Plate 11.1.**] There is no question that the downtown area represents some of the most historic buildings and sites within the City. General consensus is that these assets should be protected and enhanced as part of this process, as this is what sets Downtown Mason apart from the rest of the City, and especially from other nearby commercial shopping areas.
- Land Use Map. PDG completed a land uses analysis of the Downtown and surrounding area. These land uses were color-coded onto the Downtown Mason Land Use Map which is included as **Plate 10-1.** The map illustrates what DMRC and the City know, that most of the land uses are services, as opposed to retail. Many single-family homes are also located within the designated downtown area. Few restaurants exist in the downtown, other than Kidd Coffee, New China Restaurant, Angelo's Pizza, Domino's Pizza, the Whippy Dip, and the Pleasure Inn. Since this plan was begun, a new restaurant (Chokolade Morel) has opened in the historic Drake Hotel building in Downtown Mason.
- Zoning. The zoning within the Downtown is primarily B-1, B-3, and R-4, which would allow for typical downtown businesses and residential uses.
- Pedestrian Conditions. The small size of the downtown provides an opportunity for a very pedestrian-friendly environment. However, high traffic volumes, narrow and uneven sidewalks, and existing streetscaping and parking conditions in the downtown do not necessarily encourage walking.
- Parking. In order to understand whether the "parking problems" in Downtown Mason are real or perceived, PDG conducted a parking analysis, which included counting all parking spaces by category and comparing that information to the calculated number of parking spaces that would be required according to existing land uses using generally accepted parking standards. (See Downtown Mason Parking and Pedestrian Conditions Map in **Plate 8-1** of this report.)

Research conducted during the Fall of 2001 documented the following:

- There are approximately 937 parking spaces in the downtown;
- 103 of the 937 spaces are on-street parking spaces;
- 559 of the 937 spaces are clearly private, as they are beside or behind places of business;
- 88 of the 937 spaces are clearly public, as they are marked as such; and
- 165 of the 937 spaces are unclear and unmarked, but could be assumed to be private. (Refer to **Plate 8-1.**)
- Of the total spaces available, 22 were designated for handicapped parking.

There are approximately 196,184 square feet of space used by businesses in the downtown, categorized as follows:

Retail	28,622 sf
Office	50,750 sf
Service	76,240 sf

Government	7,302 sf
Other public (library, etc.)	19,500 sf
Civic	13,770 sf

The generally accepted parking standards that PDG utilized assume the following:

- 1 parking space per 250 sf of general retail
- 1 parking space per 200 sf of government buildings
- 1 parking space per 200-750 sf of office space (we used 350)
- 1 parking space per 200-300 sf of service businesses (we used 250)
- 1 parking space per 300 sf of library space
- 1 parking space per 300 sf of civic organization space

Applying these generally accepted parking standards to Downtown Mason indicates that there should be 712 parking spaces available to accommodate the existing businesses in the downtown. Thus, according to this analysis, there is currently an average of 225 spaces.

Although the analysis indicates that there are adequate parking spaces in the downtown, all interviews and surveys indicate the opposite. Thus, the “perceived” problem has become a “real” problem in Downtown Mason. This issue is addressed in the recommendations section of this plan, in the parking and signage sections.

- Infrastructure. The City of Mason completed an infrastructure condition survey for the Downtown in September 2000. Infrastructure elements were ranked as ): 0= condition okay; 1 = minor improvement or repair needed; or 2 = major repair or new infrastructure needed. The following information was provided as a result of that survey:
  - Streets throughout the target area were ranked as minor improvements or repair needed.
  - Sidewalks along 5 face blocks were rated as minor/repair; the balance were rated as major/new.
  - Curbs and gutters were rated as minor/repair on 8 face blocks. The balance were rated major/new with 3 face blocks not having curbs and gutters.
  - Waterlines and sanitary sewers were rated as major/new through the entire target area.
  - Street furniture was ranked as minor/repair on 4 face blocks. The balance were ranked as major/new.
  - Street lighting was rated as minor/repair in 4 face blocks; the balance were ranked as major/new.
  - Two face blocks were rated as having minor/repair needs for parking lots. The balance were considered to have major needs or require new parking improvements. Based on this analysis, a considerable amount of work remains to be undertaken to the public infrastructure in the Downtown.

- Flood Plain. The flood plain has been delineated on Figure VI which presents an aerial photo of the Downtown. Muddy Creek, which runs parallel and south of East Main Street and then parallel and east of South West Street, has a flood plain along its banks that needs to be recognized. It presents some opportunities for linear parks and connectors between the downtown and other areas, such as the new government/community center, neighborhoods, etc.
- Landscaping and Streetscape Elements. These design elements are obviously lacking in the downtown. Old gas street lighting fixtures present an opportunity for enhancing the historic element of the Downtown. However, questions still exist as to whether or not these light fixtures are in good working condition. Some pavers and street trees exist along Main Street but they are older and the theme is inconsistent. Sidewalks are in dire need of repair, as mentioned above, and there is no uniform design theme.
- Management. PDG has worked very successfully with the DMRC organization and the City's consultant, Linda Fitzgerald of LSR Consultants. The Main Street approach has been instituted and is working well. Committees have been assigned and are doing the tasks that the Main Street approach recommends. One concern is the need for a Downtown Manager to continue to run the program from a grass roots perspective.
- Financing and Technical Assistance. It appears that the City of Mason has an extensive list of financing assistance programs for industries locating or expanding in the community, and that the City and its staff implements these programs very efficiently. There are however, no programs in place for smaller businesses, especially retail or service, with minimal job creation. This issue will be addressed in this report. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - Downtown Revitalization grant program is one avenue to pursue. Designating Downtown Mason as a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) is another option.

Also during Phase 3, an Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) was undertaken. A SWOT Analysis compiles information on the downtown from a variety of sources, (as mentioned throughout this section), and delineates the variables as to whether they are strengths or weaknesses of the community, as well as whether they present opportunities for change or threats to progress. The results of the SWOT Analysis are included as **Exhibit G**.

#### Phase 4. Visioning Workshops

On September 18, 2001, PDG and DMRC sponsored a Downtown Mason Visioning Workshop. Approximately 50 people participated in this visioning workshop, which was facilitated by PDG planners and Linda Fitzgerald. The workshop participants were divided into five groups to discuss and make recommendations regarding the following topics:

- Traffic
- Parking
- Image
- Economic Vitality and Viability
- Focal Point/Green Space

An overall summary of the visioning workshop is enclosed as **Exhibit H**. Outlines of the topic discussions and summaries of the results of each of the visioning sessions are also included as **Exhibit I** of this plan. The visioning sessions confirmed a lot of the issues that had been expressed during DMRC Subcommittee meetings prior to the workshop. They also addressed potential solutions to problems such as the perceived lack of parking (better signage, upgrading parking lots, developing combined parking lots, etc.); the lack of identity (several themes or logos were discussed, as well as gateway entrances, uniform signage, etc.); focal points were identified as potential additions to the downtown; various solutions to the downtown traffic congestion were proposed and discussed; and the types of businesses that should be recruited to the downtown, and activities that should be established were also discussed.

### **Phase 5. Preliminary Action Plan**

Recognizing the impact that traffic has on all other components of a comprehensive downtown revitalization plan, PDG was directed by the City Administration in the Fall of 2001 to defer further work on plan recommendations until after the TEC traffic study, (a separate study undertaken by the City in 2001), was completed and City Council had decided what approach they intended to take with traffic issues in the downtown. This was important since a change in traffic patterns would directly affect other downtown revitalization issues such as streetscape, building and infrastructure improvements, and open space.

The TEC study, which presented a variety of scenarios for improving traffic circulation in the downtown, was presented to Council and the public at a March 18, 2002 meeting. Since then City of Mason staff and Council have discussed at length, the traffic options for downtown with members of DMRC and the newly formed Mason Core Association (MCA). MCA is an ad hoc committee of downtown stakeholders formed in February 2001 to oversee improvements to U.S. 42 from the bridge just north of Tylersville Road to just north of Fifth Street at the entrance of the Downtown Mason CBD. After the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, Administration informed PDG to complete the downtown comprehensive plan based on the assumption that no major changes will be made with traffic patterns in downtown. PDG was also advised to review the TEC study to determine if any of the recommendations should be adopted as part of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

To help "jump start" the Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan, a joint DMRC meeting was held on June 12, 2002 and attended by thirty-five people. At the meeting PDG shared preliminary ideas and plans that reflected the findings and recommendations made during the September 19, 2001 community visioning session, as well as during all the previous phases in the planning process. Input was solicited on issues related to the four DMRC subcommittees: design, organization, economic restructuring and promotion. The next section of this report will present the recommendations for implementing a community-based downtown revitalization program.

### **C. Guiding Principles**

The DMRC mission statement formed the basis for the efforts undertaken over the past year by the DMRC and PDG, and is reflected in the recommendations contained herein. The following guiding principles support this mission statement and are critical to the successful implementation of the *Mason Downtown Revitalization Plan*. These principles include:

- Downtown revitalization is a complex process that cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful results, a **comprehensive approach must be used** whereby the community is working on all four Main Street points simultaneously.
- Both the public and private sectors have a vested interest in the economic health and physical stability of Downtown Mason. Each sector has an important role to play, and each must understand that the other's strengths and limitations so that **an effective partnership** can be forged.
- Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the downtown revitalization project successful. Although the four point Main Street approach provides the downtown initiative direction, long-term success depends upon **buy-in and involvement from the Mason City Council and Administration**, as well as from **downtown property owners and businesses**.
- **“New Urbanism” design concepts should be used** whenever possible for new development and redevelopment activities in the downtown. New Urbanism is a national phenomenon in which neighborhood centers are designed more like pre-World War II towns. Streets are tree-lined public spaces designed for social interaction as well as commercial activity. Design guidelines reflect the local vernacular, emphasizing preservation of architectural styles and proper building placements. New Urbanism design concepts typically include:
  - Zero lot lines
  - Pedestrian-friendly design
  - Pocket parks
  - Enhancing existing housing around the downtown
  - Mixed uses within buildings (e.g. live/work facilities)
  - Heightened sense of community identity
  - Use of lanes and alleys
  - Narrow streets
- **Pedestrian traffic and activities should be encouraged** over vehicular traffic and activities.
- **All overhead electric lines (including cable, phone, etc.) should be placed underground** whenever possible and as soon as possible. All future City projects in the downtown should include plans for burying any utility lines in the area.
- **Demolition** of existing structures in the downtown should be **strongly discouraged**. Historically-significant buildings should not be demolished.
- The **historic integrity and charm** of the downtown should be retained and enhanced.
- This downtown **planning process should be continuous**, and this plan should be updated regularly, with the identification of new five-year goals.
- A **joint task force of representatives** of DMRC, the Mason Core Association, City Council and administration, Warren County, and Deerfield Township should be established to plan and coordinate activities that affect the community. Of special concern at this time is rerouting of truck traffic around the downtown and/or a U.S. 42 bypass. This is critical to the successful implementation of this downtown plan.



- **Lines of communication** between DMRC and City Council and Administration, (including the City Manager's Office, the Economic Development Department, and the Engineering and Building Department), **must remain open** in order for plan recommendations to be implemented and for a viable downtown revitalization program to be sustained.
- The recommendations made in this plan **will require substantial financial and human resources** to implement. LSR Consultants was hired to stimulate dialogue on downtown revitalization and to work with the community to develop a comprehensive downtown revitalization plan. This has been accomplished. Future work must focus on plan implementation. DMRC is a volunteer organization, therefore it is critical that the City of Mason **hire a full-time Downtown Manager** to work with DMRC (and the joint task force) to oversee implementation of the plan.

Although the City of Mason Council and Administration are ultimately responsible for implementing the recommendations made in this plan, in order for the downtown revitalization program to be effective, Council and Administration must coordinate regularly with DMRC and other joint task force representatives during the implementation process. Even though DMRC has been designated and recognized by Mason City Council as the "overseer" of the downtown revitalization program, coordination with other downtown stakeholders is critical.

## Recommendations

Based on all aspects of community input during this planning process, DMRC brainstorming sessions, research, existing conditions analysis, and the market study, the following recommendations are made for Downtown Mason. These recommendations, which are generally illustrated on **Plate 1-1**, are divided into thirteen sections, as follows:

- Traffic Circulation
- Image and Theme
- Streetscaping
- Focal Points
- Gateways
- Signage
- Parking
- Street Treatment
- Land Uses
- Buildings and Historic Resources
- Management and Organization
- Marketing and Promotion
- Technical and Financing Assistance

Recommendations for each section are summarized below. It should be noted that many of the recommendations are made for properties for which the City does not have control. The assumption is made that, if consensus is reached for implementation of a specific element of the Plan, negotiations and discussions would begin with the owner of the property to determine their interest in participating in the proposed project and/or selling their property.

There are several alternative scenarios to acquire control of the property:

- The City could purchase it outright,
- The City could acquire an easement (if appropriate),
- A third party could acquire the property with the intent to develop it as recommended in the Plan,
- The property owner could opt to donate the land (for a possible tax deduction),
- The property owner could enter into an agreement with the City regarding future uses of the land, as well as maintenance and other issues, while retaining ownership, or,
- Other options could be discussed and negotiated to achieve the desired results.

Property owners need to understand that if they are not interested in selling their property, or using their property for the proposed use, then alternate sites will be pursued.

## 2. Traffic Circulation

Probably the most critical issue facing PDG and DMRC during the downtown planning process was how to handle traffic in and through Downtown Mason. The basic dilemma facing the planning team was whether Main Street was going to be widened to allow greater volumes of traffic to move more quickly through the downtown or whether Main Street could be retained in its current condition with minor modifications to reduce or slow traffic through the downtown.

The recent widening of Mason-Montgomery Road at the Main Street intersection will undoubtedly funnel more traffic through Downtown Mason. The decision by City Council to abandon plans to also widen U.S. 42 between Tylersville Road and Fifth Street at the entrance to Downtown Mason will prevent additional high traffic volume and subsequent "bottlenecks" in the downtown area. There is no question that if Main Street is widened, there will no longer be a downtown, as the buildings sit close to both sides of the street. Thus, every and any alternative, including one of no action, should be seriously evaluated before any action is taken to widen Main Street.

TEC Engineering was retained in 2001 by the City of Mason to complete a transportation study for the City, and especially the downtown area. Traffic counts had previously been completed in 1998, 1999, and 2000 and the TEC study was based on those counts, as well as traffic counts taken by TEC in 2001, prior to the closing of the Mason-Montgomery Road bridge. [2001 counts were taken on April 24, 2001. The bridge was closed between June 5 and December 7, 2001. The 2000 counts were collected in August 2000.]

The study completed by TEC for the downtown was presented to Council in late 2001. Numerous recommendations were made to address traffic congestion in the downtown, including the construction of an alternate east-west road south of Main Street.

The Warren County Engineer's Office prepared a study several years ago to determine if a full interchange at Western Row Road (with its connector to Tylersville Road) and I-71 could be constructed. The study determined that a full interchange was feasible. The County Engineer's Office wanted to proceed with this project but was advised by the Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI), the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for this area, that the County should not proceed with the interchange project until a **Major Investment Study (MIS)** of the area was completed. The MIS is required in order to qualify projects on ODOT's Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC) system. An Interchange Justification Study would also be required.

The County Engineer's Office intends to select a consultant, probably within the next two months, to prepare the MIS for the central area of Warren County. **Of special concern is an east-west corridor between I-71 and I-75.** The MIS will take approximately 18 months to complete.

PDG reviewed this and other available information, along with the TEC recommendations. Based on our understanding of the City and the downtown, the following actions regarding the overall traffic problems in the downtown are recommended:

- The City and the DMRC, as well as other interested parties (possibly the task force recommended above), should work closely with the Warren County Engineers Office to **complete the MIS process.** Mason and DMRC must be adequately represented during this

planning process (which will encompass neighboring communities as well) to assure that key issues of concern to Downtown Mason are identified and analyzed. Some of the issues that should be addressed as part of the MIS process include:

- The results of the **TEC transportation study**, and all the alternatives suggested in that report.
- The possibility of **rerouting U.S. 42** out of the downtown. It should be noted that this will cause the City to lose federal and State funding for this stretch of road, as it would no longer be a U.S. highway.
- The feasibility of **rerouting only U.S. 42 truck traffic** around the downtown, and keeping a U.S. 42 business route on Main Street. The study should include analysis of the best possible alternative routes. One alternative is to use Tylersville Road to Western Row Road to Kings Island Drive to I-71. The goal is to assure that the City is still eligible for State and federal funds for this stretch of highway (Main Street and Reading Road), while reducing the congestion.
- The potential for a **future bypass** around Downtown Mason or around the City. As the City continues to develop, this northeast-southwest traffic will continue to increase. With I-75 and I-71 so close, the eastern and western legs of a bypass could be the interstate highways, leaving only the northern and southern legs to be identified. The sooner this is done the better, as new subdivisions are started every day. Bethany Road on the north (as proposed by TEC) and Socialville-Fosters Road on the south should be studied. Once roads are identified, regulations should be adopted to control development along those routes, so as to reduce land acquisition costs later. Special consideration must be given to determining if a bypass would negatively impact downtown businesses.
- Construction of a **full interchange at Western Row Road (Tylersville Road) and I-71**. This project is critical to improving traffic flow through the community (unless the MIS study determines an alternative solution).
- Once this full interchange is completed, **signage** should be installed to direct through traffic onto Tylersville Road, as opposed to Reading Road, to reach I-71 or Kings Island. Signage directing traffic to the downtown should also be provided.
- The City of Mason and DMRC should **update the traffic counts** used in the TEC report to determine if or how Mason-Montgomery Road improvements impacted traffic flow and patterns. This is especially important in that some people believe traffic congestion in the downtown has been substantially reduced since Mason-Montgomery Road was improved and re-opened. New traffic counts would help determine if improvements to Main Street or additional east-west corridors are still needed. (The MIS study may address this issue, as well.)
- If 2002 or later traffic counts still indicate that road improvements are needed in the downtown, it is recommended that the **east leg of Church Street be constructed**, connecting Church Street to East Main Street just west of Kings Mill Road. According to the TEC study, this would

require the taking of two commercial structures. It is recommended **that two-way traffic be maintained on both Main Street and Church Street.**

Special efforts should be made to work with the two businesses to keep them in the downtown in different facilities. (This issue should be addressed in the MIS study, as well, to assure that the results of that study accommodate this improvement.)

- If the MIS study and traffic counts indicate that an east-west corridor is needed, the City should work closely with Warren County to identify viable solutions to the traffic problems in Downtown Mason which preclude construction of an east-west road in the Downtown Focus Area.

In addition to the larger traffic-related items in the community, several other recommendations are made regarding transportation in the downtown, including:

- **Whatever improvements are made in the downtown, either public or private, the key emphasis must be to maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment.** This means:
  - maintaining reasonable street widths and intersections,
  - adding pedestrian walking lanes and signals,
  - providing benches and other street furniture,
  - requiring signage geared toward pedestrians (as well as slow moving vehicles),
  - planting trees for shade and other shrubs to soften the landscape,
  - adding pedestrian level decorative lighting,
  - providing accessible parking, and
  - incorporating other design elements that will improve and enhance the pedestrian experience in the downtown.
- **The new bridge to be constructed on U.S. 42 near Tylersville Road should be designed to match the recently completed new bridge on Mason-Montgomery Road.** The design should include the stone face added to the bridge, as well as provisions for decorative lighting, sidewalks and bikepath, and flower boxes. **Plate 2-1** illustrates the design of the recently completed bridge.
- Serious consideration should be given to **reclassifying Reading Road and Main Street from an “arterial” to a lower classification.** This would be easiest to accomplish if/when a bypass is completed or when truck traffic is rerouted around the downtown. The reclassification would then allow the City to pursue a **right-of-way less than 100'** along Reading Road and Main Street. Such an action would provide a comfort to existing property owners, service providers, and merchants that current and past investments in their properties and businesses in Downtown Mason were worthwhile, and would encourage reinvestment in their properties, as well as providing a more positive enticement for new investors to locate in the downtown.
- **Traffic calming techniques (such as those illustrated on Plate 2-2) should be considered** to slow traffic in the downtown. Such techniques could include:
  - Medians or boulevards
  - Elimination of left turns

- Re-installing on-street parking
  - Speed tables (flat-topped speed humps)
  - Chicanes (curb extensions that alternate from one side of the street to the other to give more of a serpentine or undulating route)
  - Speed bumps or rumble strips
  - Pinch points (reducing the road width at certain points)
  - Mini traffic circles
  - Lower speed limits or stop signs
  - Diagonal diverters
  - Corner radii treatment (reducing the radii to make cars slow down)
  - Sidewalk extensions (bump-outs)
  - Raised crosswalks or raised intersections
  - Pedestrian phased traffic lights (stopping all traffic while pedestrians cross)
- **Reading Road and Main Street should be restricted to two lanes** with a turning lane, and parking should be maintained or reinstated along the street, wherever possible.
  - **Pedestrian alleys in key locations should be designed and constructed** to connect parking lots in the backs of buildings to Main Street. These alleys should include special pavement treatment, greenery, decorative lighting, and benches. Pedestrians should feel safe using these walkways.
  - Since the downtown has been replaced as the major focal point for the City with the new community and government center, it is imperative that **this new community campus be connected to the downtown**. The downtown will always be the older, historic part of the community. It makes sense to connect the new and the old, physically and mentally. The bikepath and sidewalks along Mason-Montgomery Road are a good start at connecting the two areas. Steps that could also help connect the two areas include:
    - Adding streetscaping, street lighting, flower boxes to the bridge on Mason-Montgomery Road and along the road to the downtown.
    - Installing new street lighting in the downtown to match that along Mason-Montgomery Road (although possibly smaller in scale).
    - Establishing public activities along Muddy Creek (as discussed elsewhere in this report).
    - Utilizing a common signage system throughout the area (as discussed elsewhere).
  - The DMRC should work with the City to **assure that links in the bikeway system are constructed**, and that the downtown benefits from the construction of these bikepaths. Bicycling is increasingly becoming a very popular sport and fitness activity. Catering to these bicyclists is an opportunity that merchants in the downtown could target. The following bikepath plans impact the downtown:
    - The bikepath that was just recently installed **along Mason-Montgomery Road** from Tylersville Road to Church Street will bring bike traffic into and through the downtown.

- A bikepath is planned **around the new community campus**, tying in the new city building, Corwin M. Nixon Park, the new high school, and the existing high school. This path will tie into the Mason-Montgomery Road and Tylersville Road bikepaths.
- A **connection to Heritage Oak Park bikepath** may occur in 2004. It would start at the Mason-Montgomery Road/Main Street intersection and proceed east to the existing bikepath that was stubbed out when the Heritage Oak Park expansion was completed. The exact location of this path has not been determined at this time.
- A **bikepath is also planned for U.S. 42** from Tylersville Road to connect to Heritage Oak Park and other bikepaths in the area. The exact location of the bikepath has not been identified, but it is planned as a lane in the street. Other streets may be used around the downtown if Main Street is not capable of handling the bikepath.
- Once the downtown adds new businesses and the Community Campus is operating, the DMRC should work with the City and other appropriate parties to **determine the feasibility of reactivating the Turtle Creek Excursion Train**, with a possible passenger stop on the east side of the tracks, just west of South Forest Street. An old train depot or railroad car could be acquired and located on the site to serve as a train station. (Refer to **Plate 2-3.**) The vacant triangular lot along the tracks, plus the vacant lot between buildings #80 and #81, would provide adequate room for parking, green space, and small activities.

Recommendations in the second set of bullets should be coordinated by DMRC through its Design Subcommittee.

### 3. Image and Theme

In any downtown planning effort, a very interesting topic for discussion is always the concept of adopting a theme or image for the area. There was general consensus among the people contributing their opinions to this process that the historic, “olde” town of Mason was the image that should be preserved and enhanced through a downtown revitalization process. Mason is growing in leaps and bounds, with new residential subdivisions, new industries, new commercial centers, new office parks, new streets, new government buildings, new parks, and new schools.

*Only the downtown area contains the history of the City of Mason*, with its variety of architectural designs, historic buildings, the old opera house, old tales of what happened in various buildings, and old traditions. The Yost Pharmacy and the Busken Bakery evoke memories of childhood and small-town Mason for long-time residents. At the same time, these traditional businesses in a downtown setting provide a “sense of place” and a sense of caring for new residents who moved to Mason to take advantage of the many assets the City offers.

Therefore, the **concept of “Mason Village”** or “Olde Mason” were most cited as preferable for developing an image and theme for the redevelopment of the downtown, and it is, quite frankly, the easiest and least expensive to pursue. Preserving historic buildings and sites, emphasizing simplicity in designs and streetscaping, and protecting and enhancing the “small town” character of the downtown are key to this revitalization effort.

Recommendations for implementing and improving this “Mason Village” image are the following:

- Encourage property owners, merchants, and businesses to **clean-up and renovate** their properties. The City and DMRC should adopt a building maintenance code.
- **Preserve** all existing **historically-significant buildings**. Those buildings that have already been inventoried for potential listing on the National Register of Historic Places are identified on **Plate 11-1**. The City should initiate a process to complete the Ohio Historic Preservation Office (OHPO) inventory forms for the balance of the buildings in the downtown and work with property owners to explain potential tax credit benefits if the buildings are listed on the National Register.
- **Create** a “sense of place” by identifying the entry portals into the downtown and providing landscaped, properly signed **gateways**.
- Construct **new buildings**, when appropriate, **that complement the existing** character of the downtown.
- **Create small green spaces** and gathering areas that tie the downtown together.
- Provide **pedestrian level decorative lighting** throughout the downtown, matching the new lighting being used elsewhere in the City, but keeping it pedestrian oriented.
- Develop and implement a **signage system** that reflects the “Mason Village” or “Olde Mason” theme throughout the downtown.



- **Add to and upgrade the existing streetscaping** to provide a continuous tree cover and a safe and decorative walkway. (This should be done after underground utilities are updated.)
- **Provide benches** and other street furniture oriented to a pedestrian downtown.
- Encourage merchants and businesses in the downtown to **utilize the Mason Village or Olde Mason logo** theme in their advertising, signage, letterhead, etc. to promote a common image for the downtown.

Recommendations in this section should be coordinated by DMRC through its Design Subcommittee.

#### 4. Streetscaping

Streetscaping is the key design element that ties the entire downtown area together. Street trees, decorative street lighting, safe and interesting walkways, shrubbery and flowers, and signage all play important roles in the streetscaping design, as well as in the functioning of the downtown. (Refer to **Plate 1-1** and **Plate 4-1**.)

The following recommendations are made regarding streetscaping in Downtown Mason:

- **Existing underground infrastructure** (water lines, sanitary sewers, and storm sewers) **should be evaluated and replaced if necessary, prior to the construction of any streetscaping improvements on the surface.**
  - The City is currently designing new storm sewers on Third Avenue and North East Street, as well as a new system that will begin at the First Avenue and South Forest Street area, head around the library, and then to Muddy Creek.
  - The sanitary sewer system in the downtown is in good condition. However, the City Engineering Department would like the opportunity to evaluate manholes to identify any sealing problems, prior to, or in conjunction with, construction of streetscaping improvements.
  - The water main on Main Street in the downtown should be replaced prior to any streetscaping work being started. When this water main is being replaced, the City will evaluate the connections off the main for possible replacement as well.
- **Overhead electric lines**, including cable and telephone, **should be placed underground** whenever possible, and especially when other infrastructure work is being undertaken. This will require working closely with property owners as private connections may need to be relocated. In areas where wiring absolutely cannot be placed underground, consideration should be given to moving the lines to the backs of the lots. It should be noted that this is an expensive undertaking, with the costs almost always borne by the community, not the utility provider.
- All streetscaping must be **designed to be pedestrian-oriented**, so as to provide a small-town, intimate feeling to the area.
- **Decorative street lighting fixtures in the downtown should be the same** as those used on Mason-Montgomery Road and other locations throughout the City. However, consideration should be given to **reducing the scale** of the fixtures. Shorter poles and less lights per pole could suffice in making the downtown street lighting more pedestrian friendly, while still being basically the same as elsewhere. Using the same fixtures will help the City control inventory and costs. (Refer to **Plate 4-1**.)

**Street lighting should be added to the new Mason-Montgomery Road Bridge** to match the existing lighting on Mason-Montgomery Road and the proposed lighting in the downtown. This consistency will help visually connect the new community campus with the downtown.

- **Sidewalks** in front of storefronts that are less than eight feet wide should be widened to **at least eight feet** wherever possible.
  - Decorative pavers should be used as accent, similar to what is currently in place. The pavers could be used over the utilities for handy access to the utilities for upgrades.
  - Sidewalks should **meet ADA requirements** and be designed to be accessible by persons using walkers or wheelchairs, wherever possible, but especially in the public right-of-way.
  - In the more residential areas of the downtown, as single-family homes convert to commercial uses, consideration should be given to expanding the sidewalks to at least 6 feet in width, wherever this can be accomplished without inappropriate sacrifices.
  - Several sections of sidewalks are hazardous and should be replaced as soon as possible. Those areas are indicated on **Plate 8-1**.
- Street trees are critical to every downtown. In addition to providing a change in texture, trees provide shade and help filter the air in the environment. However, the **street trees should be carefully selected**. The selected species should not be dense, have berries or other fruits, or have large leaves that will clog the storm drains. The thornless Honey Locust, Freemani Maple, and Patmore Ash are good selections for light, airy trees with small leaves. The Street Tree Committee should decide on the trees to be used in the downtown.
- **Existing trees should be evaluated and preserved** if at all possible. If the trees are in good condition and the proper species, then **pleaching the trees** (trimming the edges to appropriate size) and pruning them above the signage would save the existing trees, which have a great start on providing a continuous canopy in the downtown.
- **Awnings should be encouraged** for appropriate facades to add color and shade to Main Street. Signage on the awnings should be regulated, with the regulations being developed by the Design Subcommittee and enforced by the Design Review Committee (which is discussed in greater detail in Section 11).
- If the streetscaping improvements need to be phased due to monetary concerns, the **first phase** should be Main Street between Mason-Montgomery Road on the east and Reading Road on the west.
- **Pedestrian walkways** in alleys, parking lots, or other areas should be designed to delineate areas specific for pedestrians. Special pavement treatment, landscaping, lighting, benches, etc., and proper signage serve to direct pedestrians where they need to go and provide a safe and friendly area to do so. Special attention should be placed on keeping the walking area smooth for wheelchairs and baby strollers.

The Design Subcommittee would be responsible for coordinating issues related to streetscaping design.

## 5. Focal Points

A focal point is vital to every community and to every downtown. The focal point should serve as the gathering area for the community, and provide an area for social events, displays, concerts, and other activities that draw people into the area.

The City of Mason is in the process of creating a new focal point for the community with its new community campus on Mason-Montgomery Road. This complex extends from the old high school and includes the existing football and practice fields, as well as the new high school, the community center, the municipal building, a village square, several new football and practice fields, a bus loop, storm water detention ponds, and a proposed bikepath along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site. A bikepath has also been constructed along Mason-Montgomery Road in conjunction with the roadway improvements. The road to Corwin M. Nixon Park separates the old high school and most of the existing practice fields from the new.

The City will move its offices from the downtown to the new municipal complex in the fall of 2002, vacating three buildings in the downtown. With this move, this new community campus will become the focal point for the City of Mason. This large, new, beautiful complex is symbolic of the growth and development that is occurring in and around Mason, and **represents the Mason of the future**. It is centrally located within the City and is on a major arterial. It combines activities of the school with local government, community recreation, high school sports, and bicycling, and will be connected to a large part of the community through bikepaths.

**Downtown Mason, however, reflects a different type of focal point.** It is the center of the historic and cultural heritage of the City. It encompasses the original business and residential community of the City, with many historic buildings, businesses, and homes. It **represents the Mason of the past**, with its original plats of land dating to the mid-1800's, the railroad, churches, Muddy Creek, the Opera House, etc. This type of focal point cannot be built today. It can only be preserved and enhanced, and used to portray to the community how life was back in small-town Mason.

As part of the downtown revitalization process, it is important to preserve and enhance the historic elements that distinguish this downtown from all others through a *series of smaller focal points*. These historic features and pocket parks should be tied to the newer elements of the community to create a unifying theme, not only in the downtown, but throughout the entire City. To do so, a series of smaller focal points (as illustrated in **Plate 1-1**) is recommended for the downtown, as follows:

- The major physical and visual dividing factor between the downtown and the new community campus is Muddy Creek and its flood plain. Behind the buildings on the south side of Main Street is a severe drop in elevation extending down to Muddy Creek. On the south side of Muddy Creek is the new community campus area. To bridge this gap, the areas behind the buildings facing Main Street and the flood plain need to be utilized. It is recommended that **an amphitheater be developed** into the side of the hill, using the natural terrain to its advantage.

\*Although there are many locations that an amphitheater could be developed, first preference would be on the east side of Mason-Montgomery Road, where a connector to the community center could be easily accomplished. (Refer to **Plates 5-1 & 5-2.**) Other options include moving the amphitheater further east onto the Mink property or to the west side of Mason-Montgomery Road. (Please note that the property being discussed is not owned by the City and would have to be acquired.)

- Along with the amphitheater, which would provide an area for concerts, plays, movies, etc., **passive recreational activities such as picnicking, walking trails, bocci ball, horseshoes, etc. should be provided.** Parking should be included in the overall design, as should connections to bikepaths and walking trails in the area. (Please refer to **Plates 5-1 & 5-2** for a graphic illustration of this concept.)
- **A linear walkway should be developed along Muddy Creek.** This would involve acquiring easements along the Creek from adjoining property owners. The walkway could serve as another connector between various neighborhoods, the parks, the bikepaths, and the downtown. [Note that the easement acquired by the City for the sanitary sewer along Muddy Creek did not provide for public use of the easement above ground.]
- **Pocket parks should be developed** within the downtown in as many places as possible. These pocket parks should include:
  - Grassy areas, trees, shrubbery, and flowers
  - Plaques identifying historic sites or buildings, or some historic event that happened in Mason
  - Benches and trash receptacles
  - Decorative lighting to complement the street lighting on Main Street
  - Statuary, fountains, memorials, or works of art
  - Decorative pavers for walking areas
  - A gazebo or grand stand
  - Only passive activities (except for the gazebo or grand stand)

Locations for potential pocket parks, as indicated on **Plate 5-1**, include:

- **Behind building #23.** This could also serve as a connector to the proposed amphitheater area. Since this building has been converted to a restaurant, an eating area on a deck out the back of the building, with a staircase down to the parking lot could provide more pedestrian appeal to the area. It could then connect to the proposed amphitheater area. Plaques denoting the history of the building and its reference as the “haunted hotel” should be included as part of this small focal point.
- **Behind building #24.** Recently, there has been a lot of interest from prospective businesses to purchase this vacant building for adaptive reuse as a restaurant. An eating area outside the building could serve as a pocket park. It could be enlarged to include the area of the former apartment that was purchased by the City for the widening of Mason-Montgomery Road.

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\* Although an amphitheater already exists outside Downtown Mason along Kings Mill Road, it is important to establish a focal gathering point in the downtown proper.

- The **corner of the lot of the former Reber building** should be used as a small green space with trees, flowers, and one or two benches. This would help soften the negative influence of vehicular traffic and emphasize the pedestrian orientation of the downtown at one of the downtown's busiest intersections.
- The **lot between building 64 (Fifth Third Bank) and building #65 (DuPriest Antiques)** could be used as additional parking lot with extensive greenery added. The **lower area behind this lot and behind the Fifth Third Bank parking lot** could be used as a larger pocket park, with a gazebo, veterans memorial, clock tower, fountain, etc. and a connector to the proposed walkway along Muddy Creek. (Once again, control of the property would have to be acquired.)
- The **area between building #35 (Angelo's Pizza) and building #36 (Bauer Insurance)**. A small green space with benches as close to Main Street as possible should be considered and discussed with the owners.
- The **lot between building #80 (Heritage Awards) and building #81 (Nationwide Insurance)**. This lot is large enough that a shared parking lot could also be developed with the pocket park. This parking lot could also service the proposed train depot if located in the area due west of this lot. (Refer to **Plates 5-3 and 5-4.**) Negotiations with the property owner would be required to gain control of the property.
- The **grassy area west of Fifth Third Bank** should include some plaques about the opera house.
- The **lawn at the Library** could use additional seating area, as well as some statuary or plaques illustrating some of the history of Mason. This may also be a location for a gazebo or a clock tower.
- Opportunities exist to capitalize upon Muddy Creek and make it a feature of the community as opposed to a hidden liability. Areas could be identified along the **flood plain of Muddy Creek** for small pocket parks, areas where residents could stop and enjoy a picnic, observe wildlife, etc. Information on the wildlife in the area could be displayed in this area.
- Part of the parking area in **front of the shopping center at 115-117 Reading Road** (Mason Drive Thru and Habitat Consignment Furniture) could be converted to a small green space to de-emphasize the asphalt parking lot and to introduce trees and flowers into the space. Discussions with the property owner should be started to pursue this.
- The area **in front of St. Susanna's Church** (after its expansion) could provide a small pocket park to serve as a seating area in this stretch of the downtown. Placards illustrating the history of St. Susanna's Church could be included.
- The **southeast corner of the Busken Bakery lot (building #4)**, which has been affected by the intersection improvement project, could provide a small area for greenery as could the **corner lot on the south side of Main Street**, west of the intersection. This would allow for landscaping on three of the four corners of this new

intersection. Benches should be provided if room permits. Trees in these areas are especially important to bridge the visual gap between the vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

- The **northeast corner of the Marathon Station lot** should be redesigned with some greenery to serve as a gateway entrance into the downtown. Some of the asphalt could be removed and grass, trees, and shrubbery added to soften the appearance of this lot.
- The **corner of the Speedway Gas Station lot** should be enhanced with trees, grass, shrubs, and flowers, as space permits. If, in the future, this lot becomes available for purchase, someone (possibly a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) established for this purpose) should purchase it and convert it to a more pedestrian-friendly type of business with additional green space.
- DMRC should explore with Fifth Third Bank, whose building was a former opera house, the **potential re-use of all or part of that building as a theater/arts center**. If re-use is not possible, then plaques depicting the building when it was an opera house should be displayed in a pocket park around the bank building or in the lobby of the bank. In the event that Fifth Third Bank agrees to sell the building, every effort should be made to find them an alternate location in the downtown. Potential purchasers of the buildings are the City, a non-profit group, or a for-profit group, as discussed in Section 14. Grants and other assistance should also be pursued.
- The **current Municipal Building (building #31)**, which will be vacated in the fall of 2002, **should be developed as an upscale restaurant and possibly nice retail**. This Art Deco building is a key focal point in the downtown and should be developed as a major draw to bring people into the downtown. Interested parties are currently pursuing this option, and the City should assist with whatever financing and technical assistance programs that it has available or that it can acquire through the State. Jobs will be created with this conversion, which will provide more people in the downtown to use other services and facilities.

#### Prioritization of Pocket Parks

Obviously, not all of these pocket parks can or should be constructed at the same time. Various factors will play key roles in determining which parks should proceed first, including:

- **Control of the land.** The City, DMRC, or a third party will need to acquire control of the property. This could be through purchase of the land or through an easement, lease, or some other formal agreement.
- **Funding availability.** Funds may be available for certain pocket parks sooner than others, either through grants, donations from private individuals, contributions of labor or materials, etc. The City and DMRC should be flexible enough to change priorities based on funding availability. For example, the CDBG-Downtown Tier 2 grant could fund a pocket park as part of the overall program. Thus, parks in the first phase area could be funded sooner than others.
- **Timing.** Some pocket parks will be more critical to the Downtown Plan implementation process than others. Or, some may be held up due to other processes that are underway. Once again, flexibility is key, provided that the goal is to adhere to the general concepts of the Downtown Plan. For example the pocket park (and parking) behind Bldg. 23 should be tied to the timing and location of the amphitheater.

- Logic. It may become apparent through the planning process, that certain parks should be done before others. This priority may also change as the planning process evolves. Flexibility and logic should prevail. For example, if the amphitheater is moved to the west side of Mason-Montgomery Road, the pocket parks and parking should move as well.

Given the basic concepts of the Downtown Plan, as presented in September of 2002, the following priorities seem logical and consistent with the goal to complete Phase 1 of the project between Reading Road and Mason-Montgomery Road:

- The former Reber building lot, the Busken Bakery corner, and the corner lot on the south side of Main Street, since these areas are already under construction.
- The lot between Fifth Third Bank and DuPriest Antiques, as a parking lot and small pocket park.
- The low area behind the Fifth Third parking lot and the new lot mentioned above.
- The front part of the area between Angelo's Pizza and Bauer Insurance.
- The point of the Marathon Station lot.
- Adaptive re-use of the Municipal Building.
- Conversion of the upper floor of the Fifth Third Bank back to an Opera House.

The balance of the recommendations for pocket parks and focal points should occur in a logical sequence as the planning effort continues outward.

The Design Subcommittee should coordinate implementation of the recommendations in this section.



## 6. Gateways

In order to appropriately define and identify the “downtown” as a special place within the City of Mason, gateways or entry portals into the downtown should be designed and constructed at key locations. These gateways (as illustrated in **Plate 6-1**) should contain signage, landscaping, lighting, and other design elements that make a statement about entering the downtown and give visitors a sense of being in a special place. These downtown gateways should be coordinated with and complement any existing or proposed gateway entrances to the City itself.

Most participants in the downtown planning process believe that the gateways entrances should be as close to the compact area of the downtown as possible. Thus, the suggested locations for these gateway entrances are as follows:

- One key entry point is **Reading Road** around the split with Tylersville Road, preferably at the bridge. If the **reconstructed bridge** is designed in a manner similar to the new bridge on Mason-Montgomery Road, as recommended, this would be an ideal location for a gateway entrance into the downtown.
- A second major entry point is **East Main Street at Kings Mill Road**. The southern corners of East Main Street at Kings Mill Road could provide some space for gateways.
- **West Main Street at Mason Road** is a third entry point, although possibly less utilized. It too should contain a small gateway feature.
- The **new bridge on Mason-Montgomery Road** just south of the downtown should be a fourth gateway into the downtown. Street lighting, signage, flower boxes, etc. should be utilized to denote that traffic is now entering the downtown area.

DMRC, through its Design and Promotion Subcommittees, should work with the City to develop gateways as recommended in this section.

## 7. Signage

A major element in the success of any downtown, or any retail or commercial center for that matter, is the ability of consumers to identify and locate the businesses or sites that they wish to patronize. In addition to identifying names and locations of businesses and sites, signs also provide directional information, which is key to the flow of traffic through the community and the downtown. Thus, signage is a critical element in the design and revitalization of Downtown Mason.

Unregulated or poorly regulated signage, however, can be one of the greatest contributors to visual clutter in a community. We are all familiar with commercial strips where the varying sizes and heights, number, color, and lighting of signs are distracting and aesthetically unappealing. Unregulated or poorly regulated signage can be detrimental to the economic viability and the visual quality of the commercial area.

The following recommendations are made regarding signage:

- The City of Mason should entertain the idea of a **way-finding signage system for the entire City**, of which the downtown would be one small part. Many communities and universities today are exploring way-finding systems to address all facets of signage, including:
  - Directional
  - Identification
  - Street signs
  - Historic markers
  - Parking
  - Free-standing kiosks
  - Trail markers
  - Districts such as the community campus, high school, downtown, etc.

It is recommended that the City of Mason consider exploring this option, especially as it continues to grow at such a fast rate. New residents and employees will have an increasingly difficult time maneuvering through the community without a coordinated and effective signage system. (A sample signage system is attached as **Plate 7-1.**)

A key component of this city-wide signage system is **rerouting truck and other non-essential traffic around the downtown**. Identifying alternate routes to Kings Island and to I-71 and I-75 will be key to a directional signage system, when proposed alternate routes are established.

- The DMRC should **establish a downtown signage system**, that could be coordinated with a City-wide way-finding system, if/when the latter is established. However, the downtown signage system should begin immediately and address:
  - A coordinated signage system for **business identification**. This is not to say that all signs have to look alike. However, the placement, size, mounting, materials, lighting, and design of the signs should be coordinated so that each sign complements, rather than detracts from the others.
  - **Each business or building should have proper identification**. Street numbers should be visible from the street and sidewalk.

- **Historic buildings should display markers** identifying the building as being historic and including the date of construction. This would help with the series of focal points recommended for the downtown and provides more of the historical data that makes the downtown so special. (Samples are included in **Plate 7-1.**)
- In addition to the historical markers on individual buildings, **historical markers** should be established and displayed to identify sites or events of historical significance, as well as buildings of historic significance that no longer exist.
- The **gateways** discussed above should include signage that is coordinated with an overall downtown signage system. The gateways signs should welcome visitors to the downtown.
- **Directional signage** throughout the downtown is extremely important. Signs directing traffic to the community campus, the high school, the amphitheater, Kings Island, the library, the bike trail, and other key sites should be designed to provide the needed information in an unobtrusive manner. (Refer to **Plate 7-1.**)
- **Signage identifying parking** areas as public and private is critical to resolving the perceived parking problem in the downtown, as discussed in more detail in the parking section of this report. Signs directing the public to the public parking areas from major streets are also critical. (Refer to **Plate 7-1.**)
- Signs identifying **key points of interest** such as the community campus, the library, various parks, the proposed amphitheater, the various bike trails, etc. are needed to provide visitors and residents with the comfort of a welcoming people-friendly downtown.

The Design and Promotion Subcommittees of DMRC should coordinate the implementation of these recommendations with the City.

## 8. Parking

As in most downtowns, the general consensus when this planning process began was that there were inadequate parking opportunities in Downtown Mason. PDG conducted an analysis of the parking situation in the downtown, counting all parking spaces, and categorizing them by public, private, not identifiable, on-street, off-street, and/or handicapped. This information is presented in **Plate 8-1**.

In addition, PDG identified existing land uses in the downtown by estimated square footage amounts and applied generally accepted parking standards to those land uses to determine how many parking spaces were required in the downtown to service existing businesses. Results of that analysis indicated that there is an average of about 225 parking spaces in the downtown. Thus, other problems are creating the perception of inadequate parking in Downtown Mason.

However, “perceived” parking problems can easily become “real” parking problems if people refuse to patronize the downtown because they feel they will not be able to find a parking space. This lack of patronage by consumers will obviously destroy the viability of downtown.

Thus, DMRC and the City must address parking issues to ensure the economic viability of the downtown, as well as to entice new businesses into Downtown Mason. Recommendations include:

- **Existing parking spaces need to be clearly marked** as public or private, to assure consumers that they are free to park in appropriate locations.
- DMRC should work with the owners of private parking lots to determine if **sharing of their lots** with other consumers or visitors to the downtown is possible. Businesses that use their parking lots only at select times (funerals, church services, etc.) may be willing to provide their lots during off hours for other consumers. Or if the business had a select number of parking spaces reserved for their employees and/or customers, maybe the balance could be open to the public.
- **Special parking lots just off Main Street could be reserved for owners and employees** so that they are not parking in prime parking spaces on Main Street. Reserved spots or parking stickers could be utilized to secure these spots for owners and employees. Convincing these individuals that they should not park in prime downtown parking spaces is critical.
- There are several areas in the downtown where adjacent buildings each have their own private parking spaces behind their buildings. These areas often have changes in elevation and are cluttered with trash receptacles, telephone poles, walls, fences, garages, etc. If the **areas behind several of the buildings were developed as one large parking lot** and designed to group trash receptacles behind screened areas; move poles, fences, garages, and other obstacles; and address changes in elevation, a larger area could be paved as a single parking lot, with landscaping and proper traffic flow, resulting in more parking spaces than the sum of the many smaller lots combined.
- Areas that have potential for this treatment are identified in **Plate 1-1**, and include:
  - The block bounded by North West, North East, Main and Church Streets;

- The block bounded by North East, Church, and Main Streets and Mason-Montgomery Road;
- The block bounded by North Forest, North West, Church, and West Main Streets; and
- The area around the Whippy Dip and the Sheldon building.
- **Additional parking lots could be considered** in key locations as identified on **Plate 1-1**, including:
  - Part of the lot where the **Reber building** was located should be available for some additional parking spaces according to the City Engineer.
  - The **lot between the Fifth Third Bank parking lot and DuPriest Antiques** could be designed to incorporate traffic patterns with the Fifth Third Bank parking lot. This lot should be heavily landscaped, as it has high visibility in the downtown.
  - The **area south of building #23**, which is now a restaurant, could be expanded to create a much larger parking area. This proposed parking lot could also serve as parking for the proposed amphitheater and other passive recreational activities proposed for the banks of Muddy Creek in this area.
  - The **lot between buildings #80 and #81** could be designed as a parking lot to service businesses in this section of Reading Road, as well as the train depot proposed to be located west of this area. Once again, this lot should be heavily landscaped.
  - The **area south of vacant building #24**, which has potential for a restaurant, could be developed as a parking lot to service general public parking, overflow from the amphitheater activities, and the bike trail, as well as servicing the business which ultimately locates in the building.
- It is imperative that **no existing on-street parking be removed in the future**. In addition, opportunities for **returning on-street parking** along Main Street and Reading Road should be pursued.
- **Existing public parking lots should be upgraded**. Improvement should include adding landscaped islands or other landscaping wherever possible, resurfacing, relining, and adding proper identification of the public parking lots through signage. Care should be taken to properly provide for and mark pedestrian walking areas around these parking lots.
- **All parking lots should be properly signed**, in a coordinated fashion as mentioned in the signage section. Directional signs to the parking lots should also be provided throughout the downtown.
- DMRC should develop an **educational program about parking**. Brochures and maps identifying public parking spaces and lots should be developed and distributed by merchants and businesses. Parking opportunities should be advertised in the newspaper and with all individual advertisements. Informational maps could be posted at key locations in the downtown to direct people to public parking lots.

### Prioritization of Parking Lots

Obviously, not all of the recommended parking lots can or should be constructed at the same time. Various factors will play key roles in determining which parking lots should proceed first, including:

- Control of the land. The City, DMRC, or a third party will need to acquire control of the property. This could be through purchase of the land or through an easement, lease, or some other formal agreement.
- Funding availability. Funds may be available for certain parking lots sooner than others, either through grants, donations from private individuals, contributions of labor or materials, etc. The City and DMRC should be flexible enough to change priorities based on funding availability. For example, the CDBG-Downtown Tier 2 grant could fund a parking lot as part of the overall program. Thus, parking lots proposed in the first phase area could be funded sooner than others.
- Timing. Some parking lots or improvements will be more critical to the Downtown Plan implementation process than others. Or, some may be held up due to other processes that are underway. Once again, flexibility is key, provided that the goal is to adhere to the general concepts of the Downtown Plan. For example the parking area behind Bldg. 23 should be tied to the timing and location of the amphitheater.
- Logic. It may become apparent through the planning process, that certain parking lots should be done before others. This priority may also change as the planning process evolves. Flexibility and logic should prevail. For example, if the amphitheater is moved to the west side of Mason-Montgomery Road, then the parking should move as well.

Given the above parameters, potential prioritization of the recommended parking improvements would be those that are included in the Phase 1 area, as follows:

- Signage that properly identifies the parking as public or private, or with restricted hours, should be provided.
- Coordination and redesign of parking areas in three blocks:
  - The block bounded by North West, North East, Main, and Church Streets
  - The block bounded by North East, Church, & Main Streets, & Mason-Montgomery Road.
  - The block bounded by North Forest, North West, Church, and West Main Streets.
- A new parking lot just east of the Fifth Third parking lot south of Main Street.
- Existing lots should be scheduled for repaving and upgrading.

The balance of the parking lots and improvements should be implemented in a logical sequence as the planning process evolves.

The Design and Promotions Subcommittees should work with the City to implement these recommendations.

## 9. Street Treatment

The largest surfaces in any downtown are the streets, alleys and sidewalks, all of which are generally asphalt or concrete. The condition, material, color, and texture of these surfaces dictate a lot of the aesthetics of the downtown environment, and play a large role in the sense of place, the level of pedestrian-friendliness, and the temperature of the downtown (asphalt and concrete maintain heat).

Modern construction techniques provide for a variety of ways to distinguish pavement and sidewalk treatments. Clarifying the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic can often be accomplished by changes in pavement treatment. Traffic calming methods can also employ pavement treatment to dictate desirable actions by drivers. Changes in pavement treatment also create a more diverse and appealing aesthetic character for the downtown.

Recommendations that the City and DMRC should consider include:

- **The main intersections should be designed to include a variation in texture** to differentiate the pedestrian crosswalks. Bricks, pavers, and/or pressed brick patterns should be used at all intersections to delineate (outline) the pedestrian walking areas. This is especially true for all intersections along Main Street and Reading Road. The differentiation in texture will also serve as a traffic calming device, alerting traffic to slow down as it approaches pedestrian areas. Please note that the actual walking surface should be smooth, for easier maneuvering for wheelchairs and baby strollers.
- **The centers of key intersections should also be designed of a different texture treatment** to highlight a major focal point in the downtown. For example, an “M” for Mason could be created from bricks in the middle of the intersection, surrounded by the pedestrian crosswalks. At a minimum, this treatment should be considered for the intersection of Main Street and Mason-Montgomery Road and the intersection of Main Street and Reading Road. (Refer to **Plates 4-2.**)
- It would be aesthetically pleasing to utilize the **pressed brick treatment on the asphalt on all streets in the downtown**. However, this new technique has not been tested on heavily traveled roads and there is some concern that it might not be very long-lasting. As an alternative, the City should consider **using this treatment on all side streets**, such as North Forest, West, East, and Short Streets, as well as First, Second, Third, and Fourth Avenues. To carry the theme onto Main Street and Reading Road, **the parking lanes** should be pressed with this same brick treatment. (Refer to **Plates 4-2 and 9-1.**)
- As mentioned elsewhere in this report, all underground utilities, as well as curbs and gutters, should be replaced as needed prior to any resurfacing of streets or alleys.

The Design Subcommittee should work with the City and DMRC to implement these recommendations.

## 10. Land Uses

The market study completed by the Danter Company and the existing land use analysis conducted by PDG identified and evaluated existing land uses in the downtown (refer to **Plate 10-1**) and potential viable additional land uses for the downtown. In addition, one of the public visioning sessions identified businesses that could enhance the economic viability of the downtown. The key people interviews and the telephone and intercept surveys portion of the market study specifically addressed desirable stores and services for Downtown Mason. Thus, many people provided input into the types of businesses they would like to see attracted to Downtown Mason in the future.

Recommendations include:

- Downtown Mason needs to **attract young people, seniors, existing residents, employees from existing business and industries, and tourists** from Kings Island, the Beach, and other major attractions into the downtown. This existing consumer base is a captive audience that needs to be enticed into the downtown to spend money and socialize.
- **Converting the old municipal building into a thriving business** as soon as possible after its being vacated by the City is critical to maintain the momentum and activity created by having City offices in the downtown. The City should hire a firm to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study on the adaptive reuse of the building, including the identification of viable uses and associated renovation costs. A restaurant is an ideal new use for the building, as it would bring many people into the downtown at all times during the day. An interested party is presenting its plans to the City now, and the City should strive to offer whatever incentives it can to assure that a successful venture occurs there quickly.
- DMRC should **recruit additional businesses** to the downtown that were identified as part of this planning process. These include:
  - Unique shops, specialty retail stores, and boutiques
  - Antiques and collectibles shops
  - Restaurants (ethnic, family, not chains), cafes, sports bars, ice cream shop, diner, and/or candy stores
  - Appliance, used merchandise, and hardware stores
  - Shoes, jewelry, and miscellaneous clothing stores
  - Stationary and book shops
  - Hobby and toy stores
  - Repair shops
- DMRC should consider facilitating the **development of a mini-entertainment district** in the downtown. The construction of the proposed amphitheater, the many bike trails, and the addition of a variety of historic markers and pocket parks would aid in this endeavor. Sports bars and cafes, as well as art stores, and artist-in-residence facilities could add to the dimensions of an entertainment district. If the Fifth Third Bank building is converted back to an opera house, plays and other theatrical performances could occur there, as well as at the amphitheater.



- Consideration should be given to **organizing all existing theater arts and cultural arts activities and organizations in the City**. Consolidating their offices in a single building in the downtown, as well as convening programs and activities at various locations in the downtown would help create the sense of a cultural/arts district. One possible location is the Fifth Third Bank building.
- DMRC should encourage property owners to **convert the first floors of the buildings in the downtown to retail uses**, as the needs arise, and move offices and other non-consumer intense activities to the upper floors.
- **Vacant lots in the downtown should be marketed** for new uses, with buildings being designed to complement the existing architectural styles. An in-fill development program should be developed to offer incentives to people investing in the downtown as opposed to greenfield sites. Vacant lots are identified on **Plate 10-1**.
- **A more permanent home for the farmers market** in the downtown should be identified and secured, possibly the school administration building parking lot and side streets near it, or other vacant lots in the downtown. The farmers market should become a regular feature of the downtown, very actively promoted and supported by the community.
- The City and DMRC should **develop a facade and building renovation program** that provides incentives to building owners and merchants to upgrade buildings and facades to local design standards. (Refer to **Plate 10-2**.) A low-interest loan program, a grant program through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - Downtown Revitalization program, a lender commitment program, Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) tax incentives, etc. should be pursued to encourage private investment in the downtown. Another potential source of funding is the City's CDBG-Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). (These programs are discussed in more detail in the financing assistance section.)
- As the downtown becomes more densely developed and additional space is needed for retail and office uses, the **homes along the south side of East Main Street should be considered for conversion** to unique shops and boutiques or offices. Conversion of these homes, with the addition of decks and boardwalks along the backs of the buildings would tie nicely into the development of the amphitheater and passive park along the north side of Muddy Creek (as proposed elsewhere in this report and illustrated in **Plate 5-1**).
- The potential exists for **additional single-family home conversion along the south side of Church Street** between the railroad and Mason-Montgomery Road. This could be considered a second stage of downtown revitalization for Downtown Mason.
- The addition of **Bed and Breakfast's** to the downtown would provide opportunity for overnight stays in a unique downtown setting, providing an alternative to the franchise hotels and motels along I-75 and I-71. Building #61, on West Main Street, presents a possibility for this type of opportunity. The homes on East Main Street and Church Street mentioned above for potential conversion to retail use could also provide some opportunities for Bed and Breakfast operations.

- The 1999 DOI report also contained additional land use recommendations, including:
  - The stakeholders need to **promote a “buy-in” feeling** among current merchants to encourage redevelopment efforts.
  - A civic meeting space should be identified in the downtown.
  - Eventually, as the downtown revitalization continues, the hours of various stores will need to be increased to draw residents into the downtown during evening hours. Hours should also be coordinated among all the merchants in the downtown.

The Economic Restructuring Subcommittee should pursue the implementation of these recommendations.

## 11. Buildings and Historic Resources

The buildings in Downtown Mason are a major asset to the sense of place that is felt when one enters the downtown. Their proximity to the street and to each other, their architectural styles, and their historic integrity necessitate that special interest be paid to them. **Plate 11-1** includes a map of all buildings in the downtown, with their assigned number, and a list of businesses and addresses. Also identified are buildings that have already been inventoried for potential listing on the National Register of Historic Places and vacant lots and buildings.

To capitalize upon these existing assets in the downtown, the following recommendations are made:

- The **Art Deco municipal building** should be preserved and converted to a new use.
- Other vacant buildings in the downtown should be renovated and marketed to **potential new users**. A **feasibility study should be conducted of all vacant buildings** in the downtown to determine their viability, structural integrity, condition, and estimated renovation cost. Potential reuses could also be identified as part of this analysis. The City buildings could especially benefit from such a study.
- **All historic buildings should be preserved and restored** to their original designs, whenever possible. The downtown has already lost at least three historic buildings to demolition (refer to **Plate 11-1**). It is imperative to preserving the downtown facade and sense of place so that no more buildings be destroyed.
- **Historic buildings should be inventoried, submitted for listing** on the National Register of Historic Places or a local historic register, and adequately **marked and identified** as such for the public to acknowledge.
- The City and DMRC should consider **designating the downtown as an historic district** and nominating for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. According to DOI, this listing, along with local preservation ordinances, may help protect the commercial buildings in the downtown and promote the heritage tourism marketing.
- **Design standards should be adopted and enforced** regarding all future design changes to existing buildings along Main Street, Reading Road, and side streets in the downtown, as well as to control the design of new buildings constructed within the downtown. At a minimum, the *Secretary of the Interiors Standards and Guidelines for Renovating Historic Buildings* should be adopted by the City and enforced by a designated Design Review Committee. It should be noted that the standards for Main Street may be different than those for other streets in the downtown.
- A committee should be appointed to work with Fifth Third Bank to **determine the feasibility and cost of restoring all or a portion of their current bank building on Main Street back to a theater/arts center**.
- A **facade and building renovation program**, as explained elsewhere in this report, should be established.

- **Landscaping, awnings, and appropriate signage** should be encouraged for all buildings in the downtown and local building codes should be enforced to assure that fire or other disasters do not destroy existing buildings in the downtown.
- **A train depot or railroad car should be acquired** and located in the triangular area east of the railroad and west of South Forest Street, especially if/when the Turtle Creek Excursion Train is restarted.
- DMRC should **sponsor seminars on the design of window treatments** to assure that businesses are getting the most impact from their window displays. Local florists and other shops could display their goods in windows of offices or other non-retail facilities, (with appropriate merchant identification signage, of course), to create a strong visual impact along the sidewalks throughout the downtown.
- Equally important, any **windows in vacant upper floors should be properly treated**. For example, uniform treatment of curtains or drapes, shutters, etc. make the upper floors appear to be lived in floor space, as opposed to vacant space.
- The City and DMRC should establish and enforce a maintenance code for buildings in the downtown.
- If the adaptive re-use of a specific building is especially important to the viability of the downtown, DMRC could **prepare and publish a Request for Proposals (RFP)** soliciting developers from across the State and possibly the nation (depending on the size of the project) to submit a proposal for that building. Many developers are seeking opportunities for building renovation projects, especially if enough incentives (such as tax credits) are offered. The City of Galion, Ohio recently utilized the RFP process with some success for the redevelopment of the Central Hotel and the Big Four Depot, both vacant historic buildings in the downtown. A developer recently received approval of a tax credit request, which was the last financing approval needed for the hotel renovation project. The City of Maumee also utilized the RFP process to recruit a developer for the vacated Children Services Board Property on the Maumee River. Two developers have been selected for projects on this property as a result of that process.

The Economic Restructuring Subcommittee should coordinate these activities with appropriate parties and recruit the individuals or consultants needed to implement the recommendations.

## 12. Management and Organization

In order to maintain a vibrant downtown, a solid management approach and management team is required. The State of Ohio and the National Trust for Historic Preservation established a **National Main Street Program** in Ohio in 1997. This program utilizes a four-point approach to downtown revitalization. These four elements are:

- **Organization.** Builds a Main Street framework that is well represented by civic groups, merchants, bankers, property owners, citizens, public officials and chambers of commerce. A strong organization provides the stability to build and maintain a long-term revitalization effort.
- **Design.** Enhances the attractiveness of the business district. Historic building rehabilitation, appropriate in-fill construction, street and alley clean-ups, colorful banners, landscaping, and lighting all improve the physical appearance of the downtown as a quality place to shop, work, and live.
- **Economic Restructuring.** Analyzes current market forces to develop long-term solutions for revitalization. Municipal infrastructure investment and business expansion, retention and recruitment of new businesses, and creative conversion of unused space for new uses sharpen the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional retail merchants and service businesses.
- **Promotion.** Markets the downtown as a destination, to entice shoppers, investors, and visitors. Street festivals, retail events, heritage tourism and image development campaigns are some of the ways a local revitalization organization encourages consumer traffic downtown.

The City of Mason, through the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee, has adopted the Main Street approach. In 2000, DMRC transitioned from a Steering Committee into four working subcommittees, representing the four elements of the Main Street approach. Each subcommittee has a defined purpose centered around the issues described above for each of the four elements.

A **mission statement** was developed by the DMRC for the downtown:

*"To revitalize and maintain 'Downtown' as the focal point for the City of Mason by creating a gathering center providing retail, office, cultural, entertainment, and residential opportunities while preserving Mason's heritage, character, and quality of life."*

Each of the four subcommittees has aggressively pursued their goals and the mission of the DMRC, and many successes have resulted. DMRC should review this report and verify tasks assigned to each of the four subcommittees to further pursue, analyze, and implement goals. Specific recommendations for the continued management of the Main Street program include the following:

- The City and DMRC should maintain **membership in Downtown Ohio, Inc. (DOI)** and utilize their technical expertise whenever possible. The Assessment completed by DOI in 1999 contains many recommendations that have been incorporated into this plan. A summary of DOI's recommendations is included in **Exhibit J**.

- DMRC and the City should **hire a full-time Downtown Manager** to be the key person coordinating all activities in the downtown as his/her primary job. The Downtown Manager should manage the activities of the four subcommittees and coordinate activities with the City on a regular basis. Attached as **Exhibit K** is a draft job description for the Downtown Manager position, which was prepared by the DMRC Organization Subcommittee and forwarded to Council for its review.
- DMRC and the City should **continue to implement the four-point Main Street approach**, develop a stronger Main Street program, and **pursue Ohio Main Street status** with DOI.
- **A Merchants Association should be established** as part of the DMRC and/or the Chamber of Commerce. Building consensus among stakeholders is critical. Members of the Merchants Association should pay dues and meet on a regular basis.
- **Membership in DMRC should be expanded**, through continued promotion of the group and through broader outreach to non-members. The larger the local base of support from merchants, the greater the chances of success in accomplishing the many recommendations in this report, as well as the overall goals of the DMRC. In addition, one of the review criteria for the CDBG-Downtown grant program is the percentage of merchants participating in the lead organization.
- DMRC should **continue its efforts to coordinate** the activities and needs of the downtown **with the City of Mason**. Having the City administration and various department heads actively participate on the various subcommittees of DMRC is critical to the flow of accurate and complete information. A continuous flow of communication and information between the City and DMRC is critical to the successful implementation of a revitalization effort. Reconciling differences and conflicted priorities is critical, as is building consensus among stakeholders.
- **A Design Review Board should be established**, in a joint effort with the City, to establish design guidelines for the downtown and to assure that the guidelines are understood, utilized in design plans, and enforced. Enforcement needs to be addressed consistently and fairly, and in a manner that does not discourage investment in the downtown. This process must be coordinated with existing development review and enforcement processes at the City. It should be noted that having design guidelines adopted by the City, as well as a Design Review Board, is another requirement of the CDBG-Downtown grant program.
- DMRC should **establish a private for-profit investment group**, composed of individuals with vested interests in the downtown, to purchase, renovate, lease, and/or sell properties within the downtown, consistent with the goals of the downtown plan. This could be a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC).
- DMRC should **establish a private, non-profit organization** to undertake specific activities and to serve as a foundation to which individuals can donate land, buildings, or money and receive a tax deduction for contributions to a charitable organization. This organization should file for 501(c)3 or comparable status.

- DMRC and the City should **consider establishing a Community Development Corporation (CDC)** to undertake certain projects consistent with the downtown plan. CDC's can be recipients of certain grant funds for which private and public organizations are not eligible. This would open new avenues to receiving funds into the downtown improvement process.
- The downtown merchants (and stakeholders) must get the community involved in implementing this revitalization plan, along with the City Council and Administration.

The Organization Subcommittee should work on these recommendations.

### **13. Marketing and Promotion**

The DMRC Promotions Subcommittee has sponsored several new marketing and promotional activities in Downtown Mason, including:

- Publication of four editions of the *DMRC Quarterly*, a newsletter sent to all Mason residents and businesses updating them on the status of the Downtown Mason Revitalization Program.
- Sponsorship of the October 7, 2001 “Back in Time” Ice Cream Social on the lawn of the library in Downtown Mason.
- Sponsorship of a DMRC booth at the 2000, 2001 and 2002 Heritage Festivals in Downtown Mason.
- Sponsorship of the DMRC stocking stuffer event at the 2001 Christmas in Mason Festival. Over 1000 empty stockings were distributed to children, who then had their stockings filled by visiting seventeen businesses in Downtown Mason.

Throughout this planning process, residents, City officials, DMRC members, merchants, and property owners were given many opportunities to provide input regarding the types of future activities and events that they would like to see happen in the downtown.

Future suggestions include:

- Feature articles on DMRC in the City newsletter, *Mason Matters*.
- **More annual festivals and social events**, including music festivals, art festivals, and holiday parades.
- More events that focus on the **family, youth and seniors**.
- More **concerts in the park**. The proposed amphitheater and gazebo will provide the environment within which these activities can occur.
- A **Murder Mystery Dinner Theater**, which could possibly be held in the new restaurant in building #23, which has a history as a “haunted hotel,” or in the proposed train depot or railroad car.
- **Annual Publication of a flyer** which publicizes downtown events and activities.
- **Joint promotions and cooperative advertising** including all the merchants and service providers in the downtown.
- Coordinated **window displays** that provide well-designed themes and promote the services and products sold in the downtown. Development of well-designed window displays could be the subject of workshops sponsored by DMRC.



- DOI provided several additional recommendations in its 1999 report, which include:
  - Brochures should be designed to promote downtown walking tours and the history and heritage of Mason.
  - The excellent school system, the employment opportunities, and the proximity to two interstate highways should be utilized to promote Mason as a desirable place in which to live and manage a business.
  - A market-driven strategy should be prepared and implemented to reach visitors and residents alike.

The Promotion Subcommittee should be responsible for implementing these recommendations.

#### 14. Technical and Financial Assistance

For any downtown program to succeed, technical and financial assistance and incentives must be available to encourage and entice property owners to invest further in their properties. There are several programs available, and many initiatives that the City and/or DMRC could take to provide assistance to merchants and building owners. Recommendations include:

- The City should **pursue a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - Downtown (DT) Revitalization Grant** (recently dubbed a "Tier 2" grant) from the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD), Office of Housing and Community Partnerships (OHCP). The City could request up to \$400,000 to leverage other private and public funds to complete public infrastructure projects, and/or private facade and building improvements that address code issues. Almost all public improvements would be eligible.

Some requirements of the program include the following:

- A City-approved Downtown Plan must be completed and adopted by the City.
- Design Review Standards must be adopted and a Design Review Board appointed.
- A lead downtown organization must exist and be at least two years old.
- A downtown market study must be completed.
- A local person must be designated to manage the downtown program.
- A minimum of \$1:\$1 leverage of other funds must be committed. [Please note this will make the City eligible, but not competitive. Funded programs in the past have had \$4:\$1 and higher leverage ratios.]
- The City must commit to a minimum of 10% of the CDBG amount in cash.
- A promotional strategy for the downtown must be prepared and adopted.
- A minimum of 20% of the buildings in the target area must commit to physical improvements. [Once again, this makes the City eligible, but not competitive. At least 50% should be committed.]
- Targeted activities can be in a portion of the central business district provided that the area is cohesive and well-defined.
- A Community Assessment must be prepared and submitted in Spring 2003, in order for the City to be eligible to submit an application in September 2003.

This is a very complex application to prepare and submit. The sooner the City and DMRC agree to submit, the sooner the process can be started.

- The City should also **consider submittal of a CDBG-DT “Tier 3” grant for a special project** of significant impact to the downtown, but which does not meet the requirements of any of the other CDBG programs. For example, if Fifth Third Bank was willing to free up part or all of its facility for use as a theater/arts center, funds could be requested to assist with a portion of that cost.
- DMRC should request that the City **establish a Community Reinvestment Areas (CRA)** in the downtown. A CRA would allow property owners to request real property tax abatement of increased taxes resulting from physical improvements to their buildings.
- DMRC should work with local banks within the City to **establish a Lender Commitment Program**, whereby the banks would loan funds to property owners and businesses in the downtown to renovate or expand their facilities, provided that they meet the requirements of the downtown program. The banks are able to meet some of their Community Reinvestment Act requirements through programs such as these. In some cities, the bank writes-down 1% interest for its CRA requirements and the City pays the bank 1% of the interest, so that the property owners receive a 2% reduction in the interest amount.
- The **CDBG-Economic Development (ED) program should be pursued for any specific project** in the downtown that will result in 10 or more new jobs being created. The City can request up to \$400,000 in grant funds for infrastructure or up to \$500,000 to loan to a business. Up to \$25,000/new job can be requested, and 51% of those jobs must be targeted to persons from low and moderate income households. The conversion of the old municipal building into a restaurant is a project that could easily meet the requirements of this program.
- The City could **establish a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) for facade and building improvement projects** from either its CDBG-RLF or from local funds. Program requirements could be set up to assure that recipients comply with the downtown plan and design standards, etc.
- **Architects could be retained** to assist building owners or merchants with the design of facade improvements or building renovations. Often, individuals cannot visualize how a building could look, or what it might look like if it were converted back to its original design. Providing architectural services at low or no cost to the property owner can help entice individuals to properly upgrade their buildings. The City can propose to use CDBG-DT Tier 2 grant funds to pay for these architectural services.
- **Design seminars** could be sponsored by the City and DMRC to assist property and building owners with understanding **how to work with zoning and building codes, as well as architectural design standards**. Explaining the processes and requirements to property owners up-front can make compliance with the regulations less strenuous and formidable.
- DMRC could request assistance from the **Ohio Historic Preservation Office (OHPO) and its Building Doctor Program** to educate building owners on the proper methods of renovating historic structures. Once again, understanding the concepts behind the regulations can make compliance with them less onerous.

- OHPO representatives could also discuss the **historic preservation tax credit program** to interested parties. People investing large sums of money on renovating historic structures may be more willing to do so if they were aware of the tax credit program.
- The Design Subcommittee of DMRC should **develop and adopt design standards** for all future development and redevelopment in Downtown Mason.
- DMRC's Promotion Subcommittee should **continue to pursue fund-raising programs** such as "Adopt a streetlight (bench, planter, etc.)", buy a brick programs, and other interesting methods of raising funds for local programs. These local funds can be used as leverage to acquire some of the State grants mentioned above.
- DMRC should work with the City to determine if the establishment of an "**historic overlay zone**" in the downtown would be beneficial. Overlay zones provide additional requirements, over and above the standard zoning requirements, for targeted areas. Issues that could be addressed through this overlay zone include: setbacks, landscaping, driveways, lighting, signage, construction materials, and other design elements that may or may not be addressed in other codes.
- DMRC, at some point in the future, should consider the **establishment of a Special Improvement District (SID)** for generating funds to support infrastructure, planning, marketing, maintenance, economic development, management, and other activities in the downtown. The SID, if agreed upon by the majority of the property owners, would place a tax on properties within the SID and these funds would be placed in a special account to finance specified downtown projects. Some communities are even considering using SID funds to construct elevators that would make a series of building handicapped accessible on their second and third floors.
- The **City should work closely with DMRC** to provide current and related information on proposed City projects that affect the downtown, such as the sewer project along Muddy Creek, improvement plans for U.S. 42, plans for the government and community center, additions of bike paths, etc. There is so much happening so fast within the City of Mason that constant coordination and communication is necessary to make sure that everyone is on the same page. First hand information provided by the City to the DMRC and other local groups on a continuous basis will go a long ways toward reducing misunderstanding between downtown stakeholders and "City Hall."

The Economic Restructuring Subcommittee should pursue implementation of these recommendations.

In summary, this Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan includes numerous implementation steps. Adoption of the Plan by City Council is imperative to achieving consensus among the stakeholders and the community.

Once the plan is adopted, a strong public-private partnership is needed to begin step-by-step implementation of the recommendations. Design professionals will have to be retained to prepare the actual streetscape design plans and bidding documents. Negotiations with property owners are paramount to implementing many of the ideas expressed within this Plan, including the pocket parks, additional parking lots, shared parking lots, the amphitheater, the depot, etc.

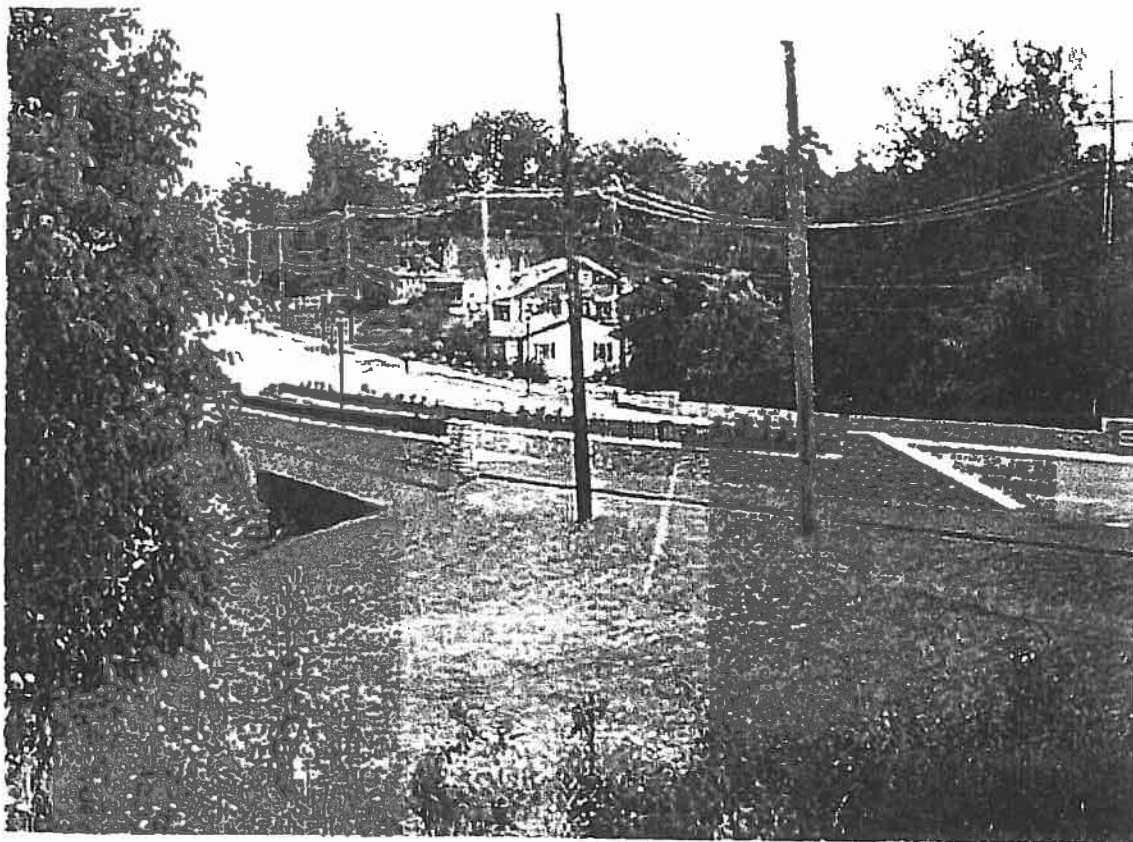
DMRC must continue to strengthen its organization and gain greater stakeholder support for the Plan. A Downtown Manager must be hired to coordinate and oversee all of these activities. Funding and technical assistance must be pursued.

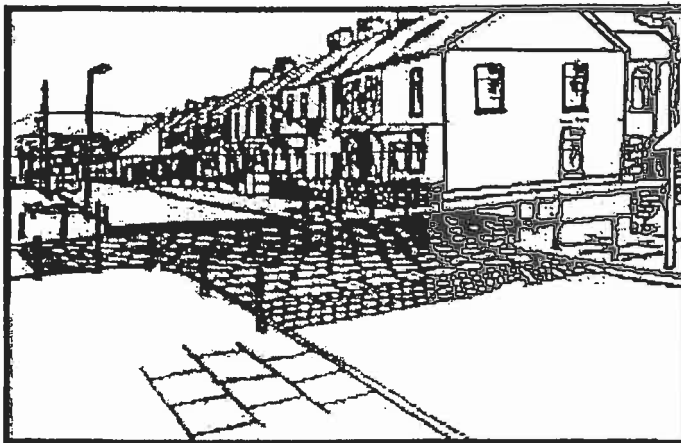
However, none of this will happen without a strong working relationship between the City, DMRC, stakeholders and property owners in the downtown, as well as a strong spirit of cooperation and a shared willingness to achieve this vision for Downtown Mason.

1

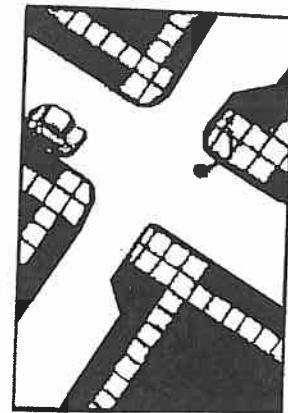


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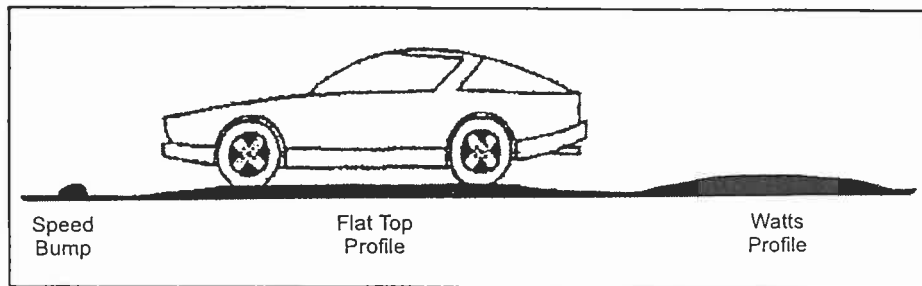




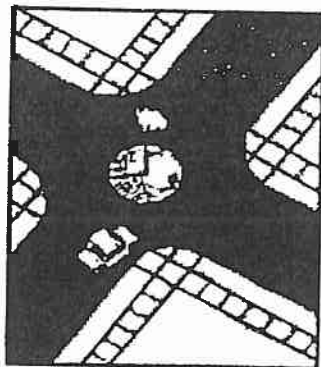
Raised intersections can slow cars at the crosswalks.



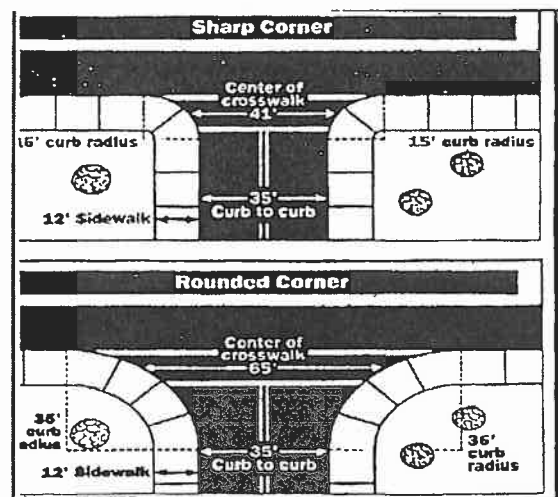
A "neckdown" slows traffic by widening the sidewalk at the corner.



This diagram shows the difference between speed "humps" and "bumps".

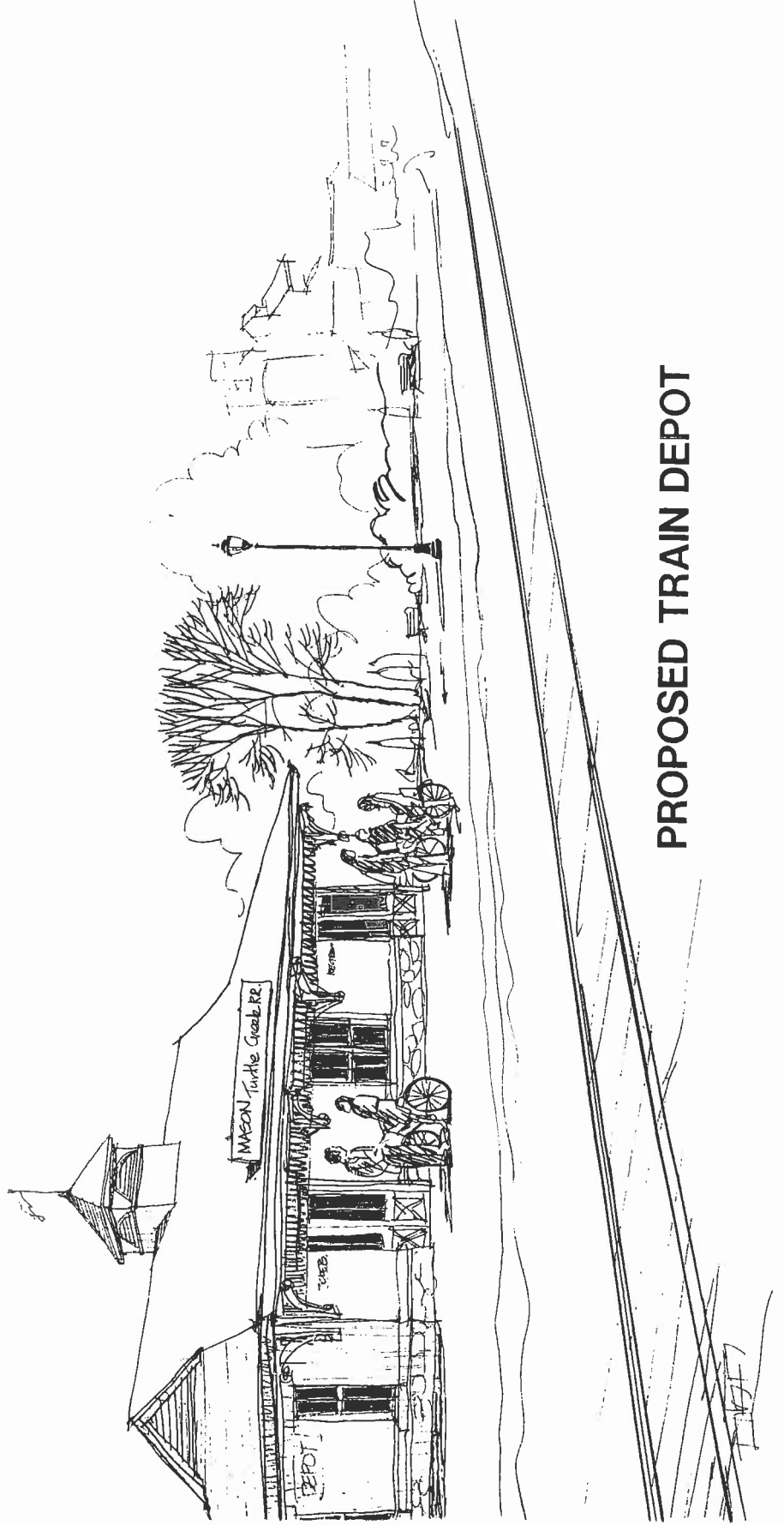


Mini traffic circles slow traffic.



Tighter corners mean slower cars.

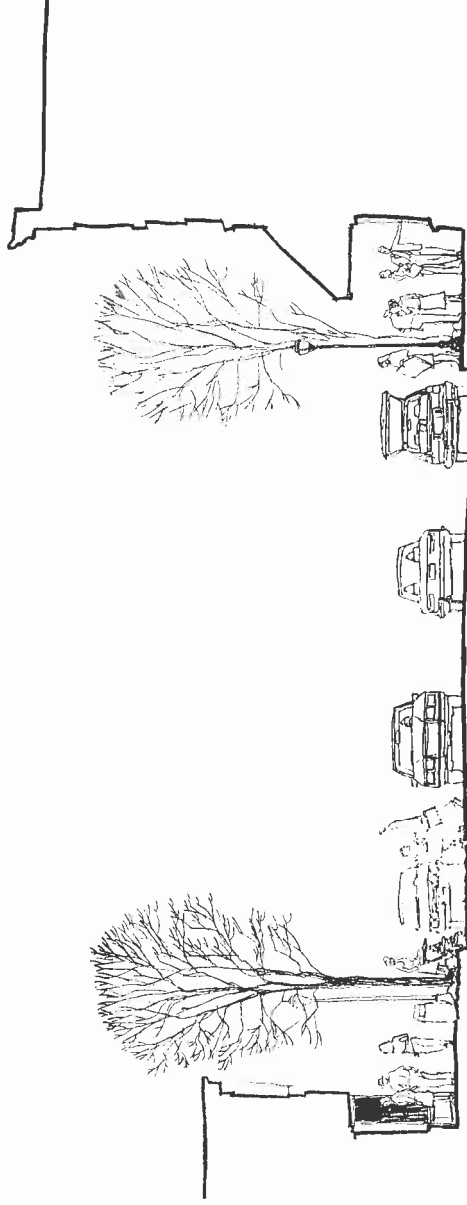
## Traffic Calming Techniques



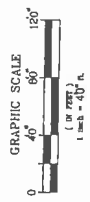
PROPOSED TRAIN DEPOT







TYPICAL DOWNTOWN STREET SECTION

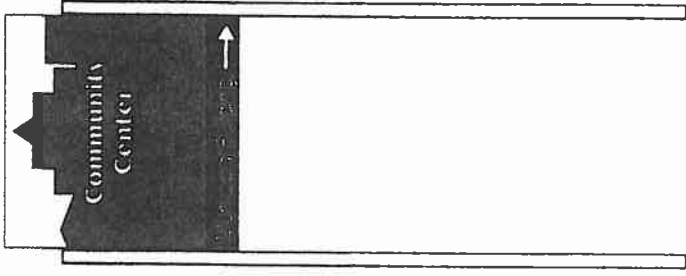
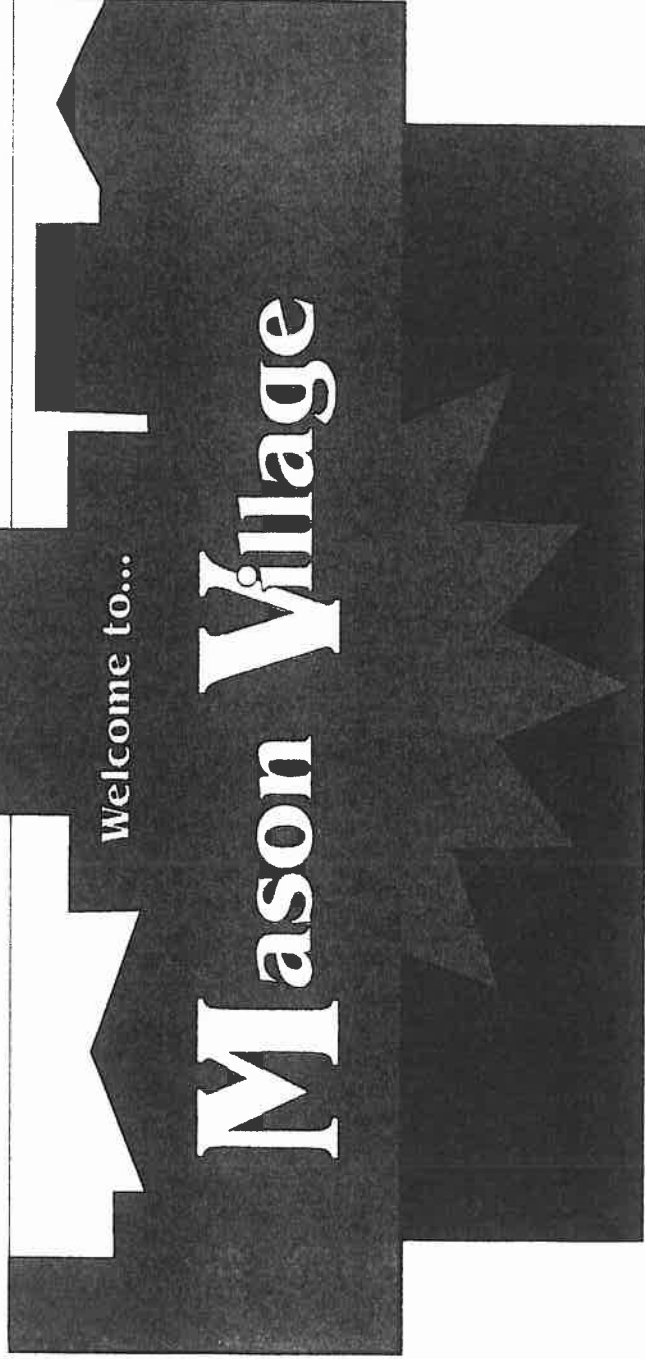
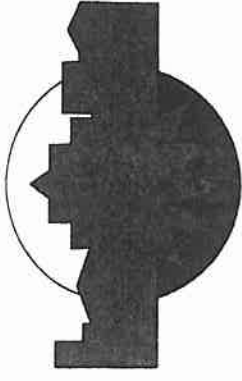


Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc.



PLATE 6-1  
PROPOSED GATEWAY

Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc



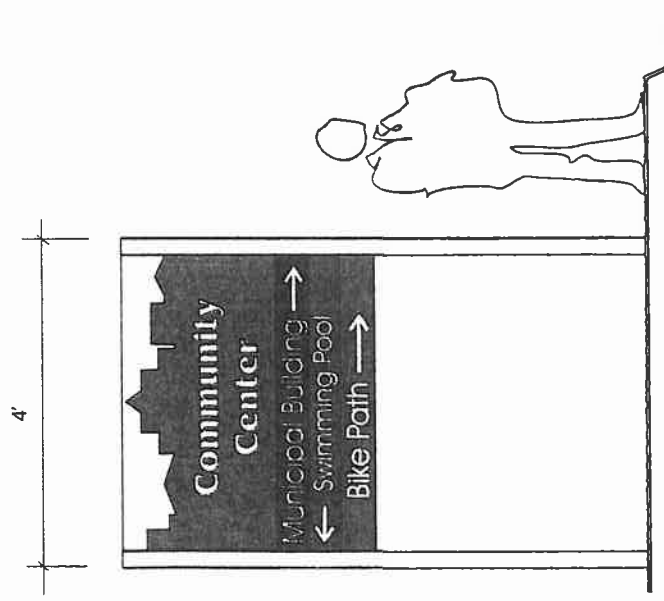
# A Proposed Signage System for Mason, Ohio

Poggenmeyer Design Group, Inc. PDG Planning  
Bowling Green, Ohio

## Large Secondary Directional & Identity

Ground-mounted signs or monument-type signage which announce arrival to a district or major destination (i.e., Coal Mine, Downtown, etc.)

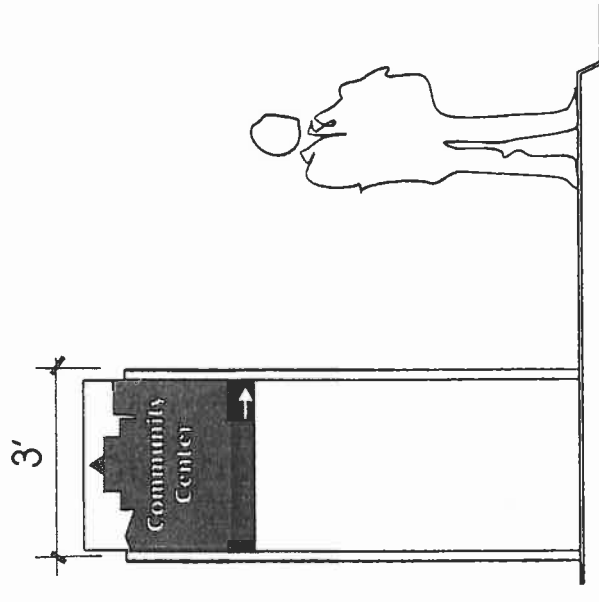
Vehicular-larger scale signs located at the entryways to districts or major destinations.



## Small Secondary Directional & Identity

Ground-mounted signs or monument-type signage which announce arrival to a district or destination.

These signs are vehicular and pedestrian - small scale and located at secondary entrances to districts and main destination entrances (i.e. Uptown District.)



## Secondary Directional & Identity Signs

Proposed Coordinated Signage System for Mason, Ohio

### Pedestrian Identity and Directional

These signs are primarily pedestrian in scale and identify entry into districts or provide direction to attractions or information about a property.

Signs may be mounted to street lights, free standing poles, or mounted to buildings.

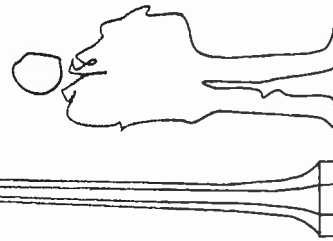
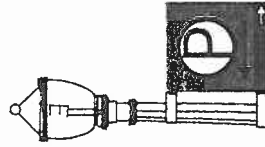


Pedestrian Directional

### Parking Directional

These signs mount to traffic structures or street lights. They direct vehicles to public parking areas.

They are vehicular-small scale and are located at key intersections, primarily Downtown.



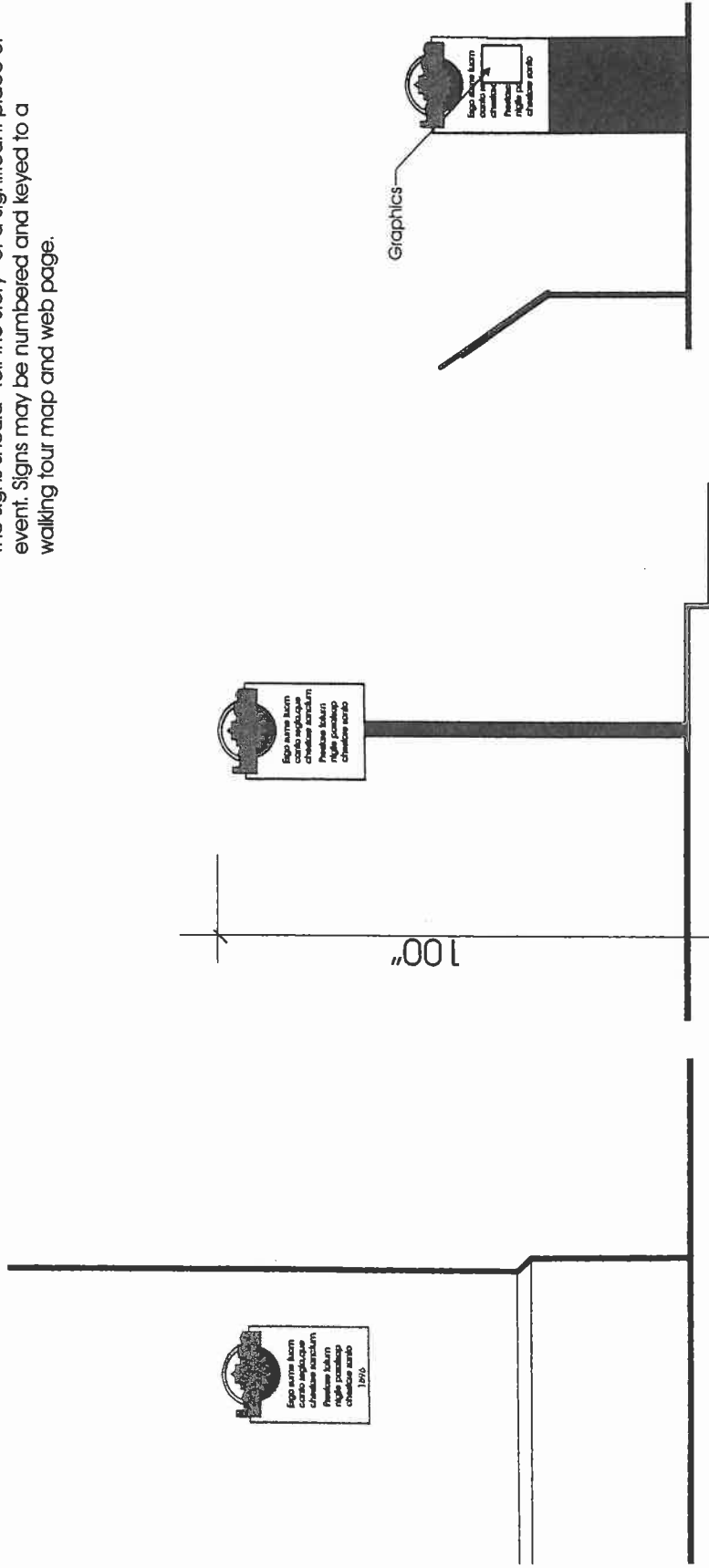
Parking Directional

## Parking & Pedestrian Identity & Directional Signs

## Historic Markers

Pedestrian-scale signs that mark a historic site. The sign includes graphics and no more than 20 lines of interpretive text.

The signs should "tell the story" of a significant place or event. Signs may be numbered and keyed to a walking tour map and web page.

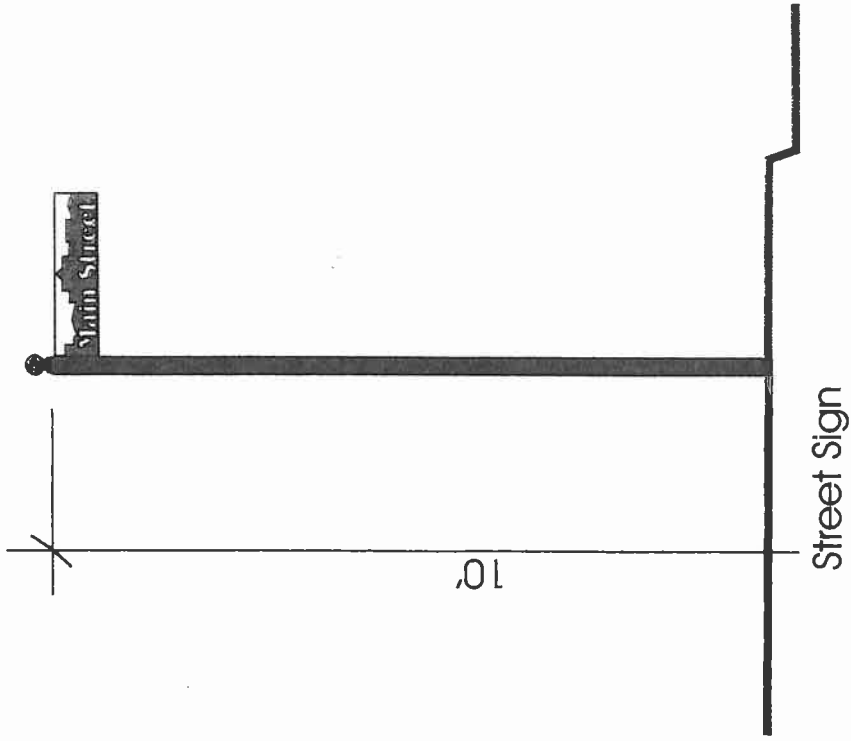


Wall-Mounted Interpretive Panel

Free Standing Interpretive Panels

### Street Signs

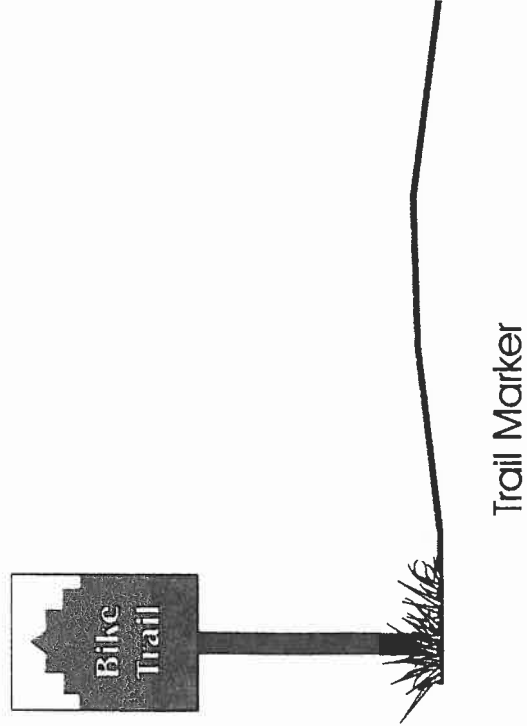
These signs identify streets and numbers and should reinforce the district identity through the use of color and graphics. They are located at each street corner.



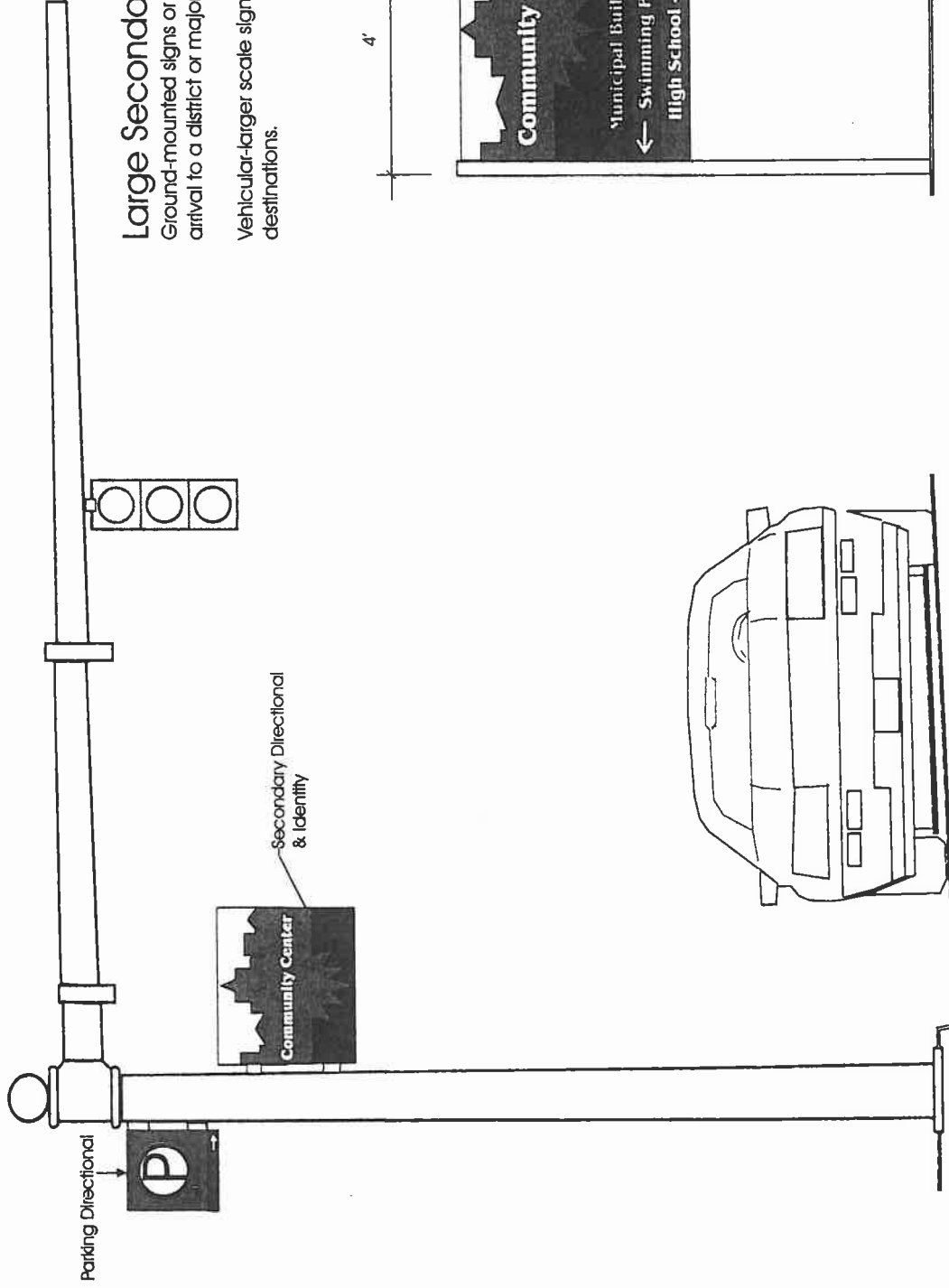
### Trail Markers

Pedestrian-scale signs that mark and guide people to and along designated trail routes.

Signs include no more than two lines of text and may include the trail name and logo.



### Streets & Trails Signs



### Large Secondary Directional & Identity

Ground-mounted signs or monument-type signage which announce arrival to a district or major destination

Vehicular-larger scale signs located at the entryways to districts or major destinations.

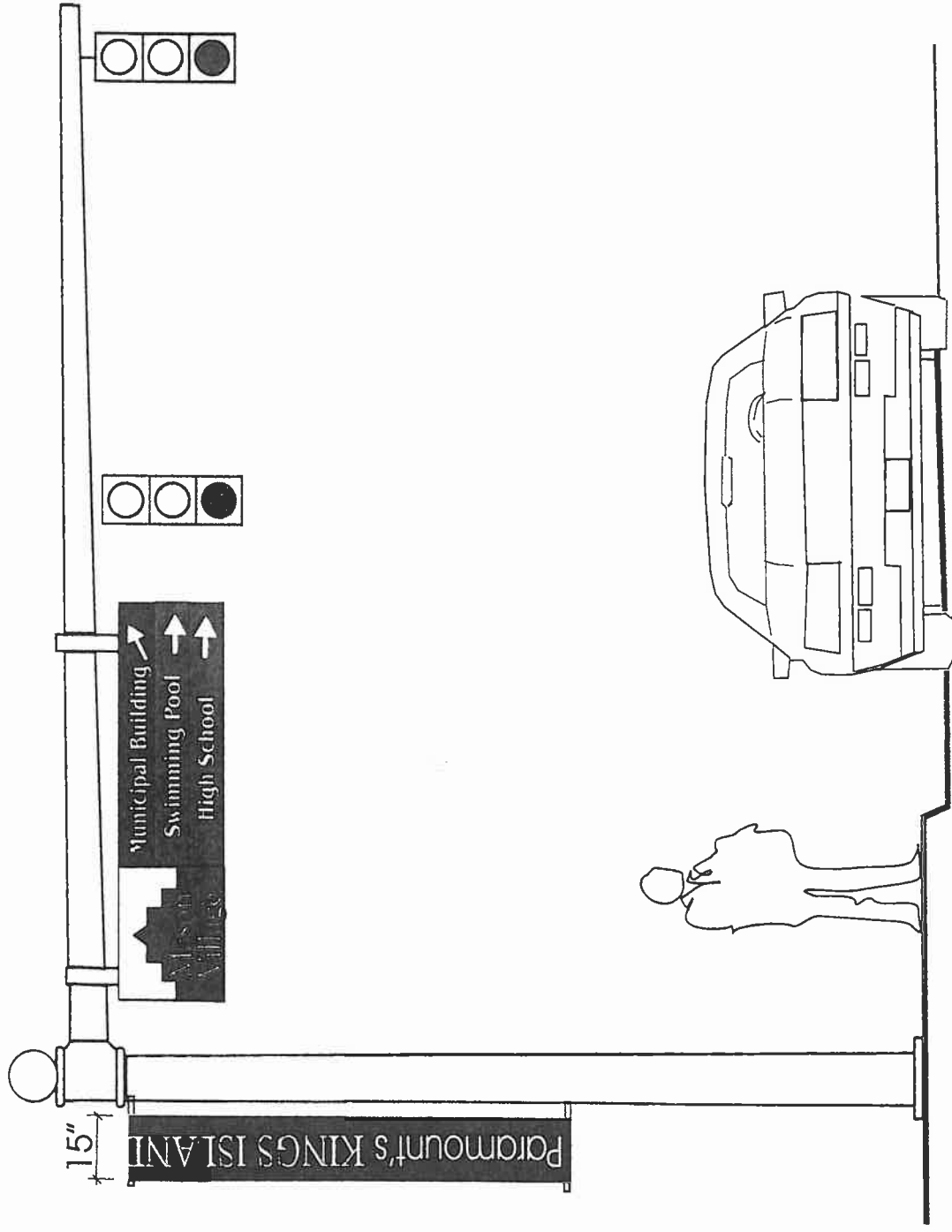
### Small Secondary Overhead Directional & Identity

### Identity & Directional Signage

Proposed Coordinated Signage System for Mason, Ohio

Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc.





## Primary Overhead/Directional & Identity

Signs that attach to traffic structures (street lights and signals).

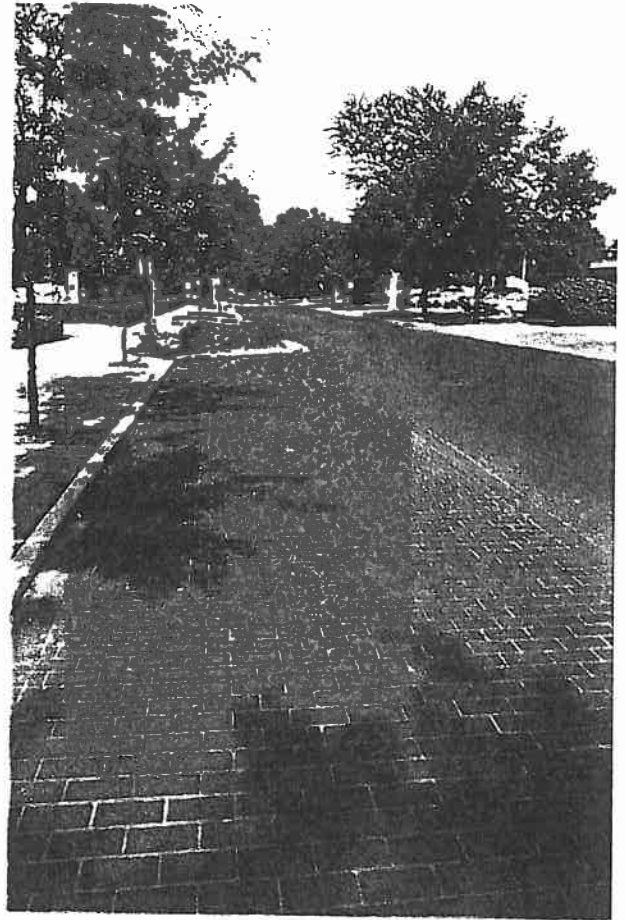
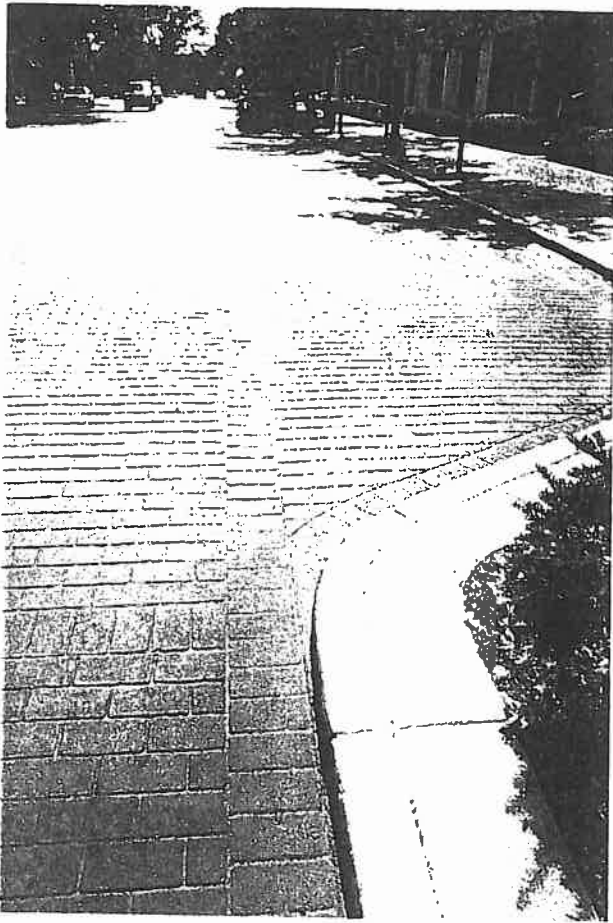
These signs direct vehicles to primary City destinations and major districts.

Signs are vehicular-large scale, located along major routes and at key intersections.

**Banners:**  
Should be seasonal, marking special events or celebrations.

Use different colors and designs to constantly update the look and feel of the area.

## Directional & Identity Signage



**Plate 9-1**

## Plate 10-1

# Mason Downtown Revitalization Plan

## Land Use Definitions

**Commercial, convenience:** Small commercial areas providing limited retail goods and services, such as groceries and dry cleaning operations for nearby residential customers.

**Commercial, office:** Administrative, executive, professional, research, or similar organizations, and laboratories having only limited contact with the public, provided that no merchandise or merchandising services are sold on the premise, except such as are incidental or accessory to the permissible uses. (Law offices, insurance agencies, CPA, architectural and engineering firms, etc.)

**Commercial, retail:** Commercial enterprises that provide goods and/or services directly to the customer, where such goods are available for immediate purchase and removal from the premises by the purchaser. (Shops, gas stations, bakeries, etc.)

**Commercial, service:** Retail establishments that primarily render services rather than goods. Such services may include, but are not limited to copy shops, printing services, packaging, photo services, photo processing, laundry, cleaners, banks, dentists, animal hospitals, and other similar operations.

**Multi-Family Residential:** A building or portion thereof designed for occupancy by two or more families living independently in which they may or may not share a common entrance and/or other spaces.

**Single-Family Residential:** A permanent structure entirely detached, independent from any other principal structure, and exclusively used by one or more individuals of the same family.

**Industrial:** Research and development activities, manufacturing, compounding, processing, packaging, storage, assembly, and/or treatment of finished products from previously prepared material, which activities are conducted wholly within an enclosed building. Finished or semi-finished products may be temporarily stored outdoors pending shipment.

**Institutional:** A facility that provides a public service and is operated by a federal, state, or local government agency; private or public utilities; public or private schools or colleges; churches; public agencies; and/or tax-exempt organizations.

**Public:** Any building held, used, or controlled exclusively for public purposes by any department or branch of the government: federal, state, county, or municipal, without reference to the ownership of the building or realty upon which it is situated. A building belonging to or used by the public for the transaction of public or quasi-public business.

**PLATE 11 - 1**

<b>BUSINESS</b>	<b>BUILDING #</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>
Akos Promotions, Inc./Tom Hayes Construction	1	210 W. Main 212 W. Main
Community Concepts, Inc., Amity Assoc. Prof. Mngt.	1	126 W. Main 205 W. Main
Yost Pharmacy/Main St. Embroidery	1	120 W. Main 124 W. Main
Dixie Union Station/Hendrick's TV Serv	2	110 W. Main 112 W. Main
Tokarsky & Assoc. Architects/Mason Fire Dept. Offices	3	108 W. Main      H
Busken Bakery	5	106 W. Main
Antique Shop / SF home	6	100 S. West
S.F. home	6	106 E. Main
Multi-Family 12 apartments	7	108 E. Main
Intuitions Hair Salon	8	110 E. Main
Pleasure Inn	9	112 E. Main
S.F. home	10	116 E. Main
Malhotra Real Estate & Pied Piper Music	11	118 E. Main
Brenda's Quality Cleaning	11	118 E. Main
American Family Insurance (Pat Gehring)	12	120 E. Main
Nicodemus Wallpaper hanging	13	124 E. Main
Pfister Animal Hospital	14	126 E. Main
1 <sup>st</sup> Fl vacant business - 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor-2 residences	15	128 E. Main
Main Street Coin Laundry (2 residents) vacant	16	200 E. Main
Gary Hardin, D.D.S.	17	202 E. Main

H - NRHP Inventory Forms at OHPO

Marathon Gas Station	18	131 E. Main
Tucker's Whippy Dip	19	127 E. Main
Sheldon	20	125 E. Main
S.F. Home	21	107 E. Main
Mason Framing Gallery, Suburban Interiors, & Global Trade Network	22	105 E. Main 102 E. Main
Sam & Fischer Attorneys	23	101 E. Main H
Just for Kids Dance Academy	24	107 W. Main
Russ Hutchins Insurance & Stylarama Salon	25	113 W. Main
Coal Network, Inc.	26	115 W. Main H
Veterans of Foreign Wars #9622	27	119 W. Main
Roys Art Studio	28	123 W. Main
Paula Lee Allstate Insurance	29	125 W. Main H
Dowrey/Triwood Insurance & Picture Pony Com	30	127 W. Main H
Mason Municipal Bldg.	31	202 W. Main
S.F. home	32	210 W. Main
KOS Sportscard	33	212 W. Main
City of Mason Engineering Office	34	214 W. Main H
Angelo's Pizza	35	216 W. Main
Bauer Insurance	36	224 W. Main
Batsche & Peters Law Offices	37	300 W. Main H
Dr. Michael Emming, D.D.S.	38	304 W. Main H
Ed Sale Financial Services	39	306 W. Main
Jack's Driving School & Muennich Inc., Auto Report	40	308 W. Main
Bob & Gary's Barber Shop Tanning Salon	41	314 W. Main
MLK Chamber of Commerce	42	316 W. Main

H - NRHP Inventory Forms at OHPO

Sprint Telephone Co.	43	318 W. Main	
S.F. Home	44	400 W. Main	
S.F. Home	45	402 W. Main	
S.F. Home	46	404 W. Main	
Mason Lumber & Coal (Kitchen display)	47	502 W. Main	
storage building	48	504 W. Main	
S.F. Home	49	508 W. Main	
S.F. Home	50	512 W. Main	
S.F. Home	51	516 W. Main	
S.F. Home	52	520 W. Main	
S.F. Home	53	524 W. Main	
S.F. Home	54	526 W. Main	
S.F. Home	55	530 W. Main	
S.F. Home	56	529 W. Main	
S.F. Home	57	523 W. Main	
Mason Lumber & Coal Co. (Vacant)	58	521 W. Main	
Vacant (Storage)	59	501 W. Main	
Mason Lumber & Coal Co.	60	503 W. Main	
S.F. Home	61	321 W. Main	
S.F. Home	62	319 W. Main	
Barry Spaeth, Attorney/Philip Dubois Cert. Planner	63	315 W. Main	
Geo. Parke, Attorney/Lipke Products, Inc.	63	315 W. Main	
Fifth Third Bank	64	225 W. Main	H
DePriest Antiques	65	207 W. Main	H
Barne's Auto Service	66	201 W. Main	
Speedway Gas Station	67	101 Reading Road	

H - NRHP Inventory Forms at OHPO

Mason Chiropractic/Clean Clothes Co.	68	111 Reading Road 113 Reading Road
Mason Drive Thru/Habitat Consignment Furniture	68	117 Reading Road 115 (A) Reading Road
BV V Studio Photographers	68	115 (B) Reading
Community Mental Health Center of Warren County	69	201 Reading Road
Ben Tan Salon	70	207 Reading Road
Schuster Law Firm	71	209 Reading Road
Peoples Building & Loan	72	225 Reading Road
Baysore's Flowers	73	301 Reading Road
2 family residence	74	305 Reading Road
Mason Fine Arts Center	75	309 Reading Road
Domino's Pizza	76	311 Reading Road
Family Center Counseling	77	317 Reading Road
Snow White Cleaners	78	319 Reading Road
American Legion Post 194	79	401 Reading Road
Heritage Awards	80	407 Reading Road
Nationwide Insurance/Bruce Holliday)	81	421 Reading Road
Peeler, McGary, & Zopff Attorneys	82	423 Reading Road
Mason Animal Hospital	83	424 Reading Road
S.F. Home	84	418 Reading Road
Voorhis, Sloan, Welsh, & Crossland Architects	85	414 Reading Road
Vacant commercial	86	410 Reading Road
Shorten Funeral Home	87	400 Reading Road
Golf Lab	88	322 Reading Road
Matthew Lorocan, DDS & SW Lagerman, DDS	89	318 Reading Road

H - NRHP Inventory Forms at OHPO

New China Restaurant Grand Illusion Hair	90	316 Reading Road 314 Reading Road
Kidd's Coffee	90	312 Reading Road
James Whitaker, Andrea Hicks, Thomas Shackelford, Attorneys	91	224 Reading Road
Mason Vision Center	92	218 Reading Road
Mason Public Library	93	200 Reading Road
Senour-Flaherty Insurance Agency	94	104 Reading Road

P:\PDG\Clients\1133\002\docs>List of Businesses in Target Area.wpd



***DOWNTOWN MASON REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE (DMRC)  
PROMOTIONS SUBCOMMITTEE***

**OUTLINE OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FUTURE GOALS  
FOR NOVEMBER 20, 2000 JOINT MEETING**

*Spokesperson: Debbie Sanders*

**I. 2000 Accomplishments:**

- Sponsorship of a Downtown Mason booth at Heritage Festival.
- Development of a temporary logo for Downtown Mason (used on stationary, the Heritage Days banner and other publications of DMRC)
- Development of a Downtown Mason newsletter to be published on a regular basis. (Debbie Sanders will be responsible for publication of newsletter, the first copy which will be available for distribution before the 11/20 joint planning meeting).
- Publication of four positive news articles on Downtown Mason
- Review of Rosemary Springman's book *Around Mason* to develop possible themes for Downtown Mason:
  1. Fine Arts
  2. The Old Depot Train Station
  3. Farmer's Market
  4. Opera House (including a "Community Christmas Party" which was held at the Opera House in 1929)
  5. Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre
  6. Drake Hotel
  7. A "Four Seasons of Downtown" theme
    - Spring – community cleanup, nature, family activities
    - Summer – sports, barbecues, picnics
    - Autumn – harvest, farmer's market
    - Winter – bonfires, reading, crafters/ing
  8. Sprinkles Opera House

**II. 2001 Goals:**

- Recruit more Downtown property owners, businesses and residents to DMRC. (Distribution of invitation to 11/20 joint meeting to downtown residents, businesses and property owners is a first step).
- Development of a Downtown Mason Web Page.
- More frequent and consistent news articles and guest editorials on plans and activities of DMRC. Possible themes include recent investments in Downtown Mason, (e.g., Tokarsky and Voorhees architectural offices).
- Development of a *Rumor Mill* feature in the Downtown Mason Newsletter which will be used to dispel myths about the downtown initiative, (e.g., tearing down buildings).
- Articles on Downtown Mason in *Mason Matters*

- Development of a theme to incorporate in downtown streetscaping, (e.g., signage, banners, benches, planters, street lamps, pavers, trees). Will work closely with Design Subcommittee on this goal.
- Sponsorship of a spring joint subcommittee meeting, possibly a barbecue on the lawn of the library.
- Development of one or two new special events in downtown.
- Work with Downtown merchants to develop interesting window displays which capitalize on a downtown theme.

***DOWNTOWN MASON REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE (DMRC)  
DESIGN SUBCOMMITTEE***

**OUTLINE OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FUTURE GOALS  
FOR NOVEMBER 20, 2000 JOINT MEETING**

*Spokesperson: Carl Hendricks*

**I. 2000 Accomplishments:**

- Sponsorship of a Downtown Mason booth at Heritage Festival
- Took photographs of desirable design elements in downtowns including Mason. (Photos will be on display at 11/20 meeting).
- Development of preliminary list of desirable design elements for Downtown Mason:
  1. Historic photos in window panes in Downtown Mason storefronts.
  2. Develop a theme/logo for downtown to incorporate in all streetscape elements including signage, pattern of interlocking pavers, planters, benches, lighting, facades and window displays).
  3. Incorporate design elements which make Downtown Mason “walkable” and pedestrian friendly, e.g., connections to downtown from neighborhoods and new civic center. (Present preliminary ideas for the bridge/bikeway from new civic center to downtown).
  4. Pocket parks
  5. More landscaped public parking lots (Will require land acquisition).
  6. A focal point in downtown (both interior and exterior) where public can meet and stage special events. Downtown as a community gathering place/center.
  7. Identification of historic buildings in downtown and possible designation on state or federal register of historic buildings/places.
  8. Recruit more business anchors to downtown, e.g., restaurants, ice cream parlor. (This activity will be led by Economic Renaissance Subcommittee and will be based on results of marketing study). One idea mentioned was recruiting a restaurant to the fire house.
  9. Development of a town square in downtown. Maintain downtown as the staging area for festivals and special events.
  10. Improve traffic flow in downtown. (Based on results of traffic analysis component of comprehensive downtown plan which will be completed in 2001. Consider possibility of re-routing truck traffic).
  11. Conduct a parking inventory and plan to expand parking in downtown. (Based on results of parking component of comprehensive downtown plan which will be completed in 2001).
  12. Secure cost estimates for burying utilities or locating them behind buildings. (Will be done as part of comprehensive plan).
  13. Selection of street trees which do not hide businesses. (Will be done as part of comprehensive plan).

14. Adaptive re-use of municipal facilities (possibly as an art center, farmer's market).
  15. Veteran's memorial in downtown.
  16. Introduce trolley service in downtown.
  17. Keep historic society/museum an integral part of downtown.
- Completion of building and infrastructure surveys to qualify Downtown Mason for use of CDBG funds. Council expected to approve use of funds for downtown comprehensive plan in late November.
  - Development of "Request for Proposals" to hire a planning/architectural firm to work with the Design Subcommittee to develop two alternate design plans for Downtown Mason.

## II. 2001 Goals

- Interview and selection of planning/architectural firm to work with Design Subcommittee to develop two alternate design plans for Downtown Mason. Plans will incorporate ideas noted above. Plans should be completed by late summer 2001 and available for presentation to public for their input fall 2001. Depending on support from city and community, CDBG funds can be used to incorporate approved design elements in downtown.
- Development of an Overlay District and Design Guidelines in downtown to protect historic and architectural integrity of downtown buildings and streetscape. Guidelines can address issues such as building setbacks, architectural styles, paint colors, landscape, signage, restrictions on demolition, etc. Design Subcommittee will work with a planning consultant to oversee the project and to ensure broad-based public input. This will likely be a 2002 project.
- Conduct a complete inventory of historically significant buildings in Downtown Mason and prepare a plan to encourage property owners to nominate buildings for listing on state and/or federal historic register.

***DOWNTOWN MASON REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE (DMRC)  
ECONOMIC RENNAISSANCE SUBCOMMITTEE***

**OUTLINE OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FUTURE GOALS  
FOR NOVEMBER 20, 2000 JOINT MEETING**

*Spokespersons: Michael Cannon and Michael Comperchio*

**I. 2000 Accomplishments:**

- Sponsorship of a booth at Downtown Mason Heritage Festival
- Development of Downtown Mason marketing survey for distribution at Heritage Festival. (Spokespersons will review survey findings).
- Developed list of vacant and soon-to-be vacant buildings in downtown. This list of available properties will be used to recruit businesses to downtown. (See bullet #5 below).
- Development of preliminary list of desirable types of businesses to attract to downtown which included:
  1. Restaurants – both quality sit-down and convenience (not fast food) to meet the needs of Mason’s daytime working population. A family style restaurant that would also support night life in downtown was mentioned. There should be a variety of food offered, and a quality niche restaurant like Golden Lamb would be desirable.
  2. Coffee shop (similar to Victor Kidd’s shop)
  3. Book stores, especially they type that would be inviting to the entire family
  4. Popcorn/candy store
  5. Ice cream parlor/sandwich shop
  6. Collectibles (would make Downtown Mason a regional shopping destination). Examples include maps, coins, train shop (already have one), sports cards, etc.
  7. Desire for “anchors” and draws in addition to Yost Pharmacy and the bank
  8. Downtown should be walkable with multiple greenway and pedestrian connectors
  9. Desire for non-franchise businesses
  10. Businesses should be family friendly
  11. New businesses should contribute to downtown Mason being a destination point.
  12. Need to capitalize on Mason’s growing and culturally and diverse community, a community with disposable income.
  13. Possibly “resurrect” idea of Downtown Mason as an art community
  14. Market downtown for both sports and intellectual outlets
  15. Tap senior citizen market
  16. Capitalize on existing businesses

- Identified Major Strengths and Challenges for Downtown Mason:

Major Strengths of Downtown:

- Eagerness to see downtown successful
- Quality of life
- Schools as a marketing asset
- Good place to raise a family
- Accessibility to interstates
- Mix of long time and new residents
- Potential for tapping tourism trade, (e.g., Paramount Kings Island, Jack Nicklaus Golf Center).
- Strong/supportive city administration
- Future availability of land for development
- Already have businesses downtown which are family friendly, e.g. Yost Pharmacy, Intuitions, Whippy Dip
- Future availability of buildings for business recruitment
- High visibility (21,000 cars/day)
- Railroad heritage
- Strong service base, e.g., churches, library, bank, pharmacy
- Excellent parks (downtown should tie in with these both physically and from a marketing standpoint)
- Architecture (e.g., PTD building and bank)
- Quaint, historic charm of downtown

Major Challenges of Downtown:

- Need for more family friendly activities and to develop downtown as a gathering place
- Lack of merchants association
- Cleanliness
- Outdated/unsightly utilities
- Lack of specialty shops
- Need for more restaurants
- Lack of parking
- Traffic congestion
- Vacant Thriftway (recently purchased by St. Susanna's) and adaptive reuse of post office and municipal buildings
- Need for more trees and landscaping and downtown parks
- Service and retail gaps and voids
- Need to understand Downtown Mason's market (existing and future)
- Need for a common vision for Downtown Mason
- Develop downtown as a destination spot
- Need to connect downtown to new municipal complex
- Need to preserve Mason's history
- Lack of accessibility to greenspace and existing parks

- Lack of gathering spots (indoor and outdoor)
  - Building conditions, especially façades
  - Lack of capital for existing businesses to expand
- Developed Ideas for Adaptive Re-use of Vacant Downtown Buildings:
    1. Possibility of developing city building as closed air market with booths featuring interesting retail renderings like gourmet coffees, salsa, etc., (e.g., downtown Columbus market).
    - 2.
- Identification of Downtown Stakeholders:
    1. Current downtown business owners and property owners
    2. Residents (both downtown and non-downtown)
    3. Mason businesses (outside downtown)
    4. Investors
    5. Commuter who drive through Downtown Mason)
    6. People who used to live in Mason (previous generations)
    7. Those people who are not involved in Mason community

## **II. 2001 Goals:**

- Development of “Request for Proposals” to hire a firm to conduct a comprehensive marketing analysis for downtown. Analysis would likely include two components: 1) demographic and economic profile of downtown including analysis of market gaps, competition and opportunities, and; 2) intercept surveys, business and property owner interviews, and phone surveys of prospective customers outside existing customer market. Project should be completed fall 2001.
- Analysis of designating Downtown Mason as a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) whereby property owners could receive tax abatement on value of improvements to buildings.
- Analysis of using portion of CDBG funds to establish a façade improvement loan program for downtown property owners.
- Investigation of other tax and financial incentive programs to help stimulate new investment and re-investment in Downtown Mason.
- Work with city or downtown organization to recruit targeted businesses to Downtown Mason, based in part on results of marketing analysis.

***DOWNTOWN MASON REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE (DMRC)  
ORGANIZATION SUBCOMMITTEE***

**OUTLINE OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FUTURE GOALS  
FOR NOVEMBER 20, 2000 JOINT MEETING**

*Spokesperson: Dick Yost and Sheryl Short*

**I. 2000 Accomplishments:**

- Transition between Downtown Mason Steering Committee and establishment of four working subcommittees: Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Renaissance. Today approximately ?? volunteers serve on these four working subcommittees. The purpose of each subcommittee is outlined below:

**Organization** – To build collaborative partnerships between a broad range of organization, agencies, businesses and individuals, and to mobilize volunteer support for the revitalization effort. A key tenet of the Organization Subcommittee is the recognition that many individuals and organizations in the community have a stake in the economic viability of the downtown.

**Promotion** – To market the downtown’s unique characteristics and assets 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. The Promotion Subcommittee also assists the Organization Subcommittee in developing communication activities for the overall revitalization effort.

**Design** – To improve the downtown’s physical environment and rehabilitate historic and traditional commercial buildings. Design also entails improvements to the downtown streetscape including lighting, parking areas, signs, sidewalks, landscaping, infrastructure (streets, curb and gutter and utilities), and window displays. Design also works with the Promotion Subcommittee to assess how promotional materials and other downtown elements convey a visual message about the downtown and what it has to offer.

**Economic Renaissance** – To strengthen and diversify the existing economic base of the downtown area. Economic Renaissance activities include developing programs to help existing downtown businesses expand, recruitment of new businesses to downtown, development of a plan to convert unused space into productive property while providing a balanced mix of businesses, converting unused space and sharpening the competitiveness of downtown businesses.

- Development of a mission statement for the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee :  
“To revitalize and maintain ‘Downtown’ as the focal point for the City of Mason by creating a gathering center providing retail, office, cultural,



entertainment, and residential opportunities while preserving Mason's heritage, character, and quality of life."

- Lead organization for sponsorship of a Downtown Mason booth at Heritage Festival.
- Organized 11/20/00 joint meeting with four subcommittees to celebrate successes of DMRC and to update the community on accomplishments and future goals.
- Developed a flyer on the downtown initiative which features the mission statement and encourages more volunteers for the downtown program. The flyer was distributed in downtown booth at the Heritage Festival and resulted in the recruitment of ?? new volunteers to the DMRC.
- Delineation of the boundary of the downtown, both the "downtown core area" and the "downtown focus area".

## **II. 2001 Goals:**

- Designation of a downtown lead organization, (e.g., a downtown merchants' association, an arm of the Chamber and/or City of Mason, or a separate 501-c3 organization. Lead organization will have an office and full-time downtown manager to oversee the downtown program.
- Fundraising for the downtown initiative, (e.g., "Adopt a Streetlight/Bench/Planter" program, corporate donations, grants and foundations, etc.).
- Establish long-term (five year) goals for the downtown initiative.



DOWNTOWN MASON CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

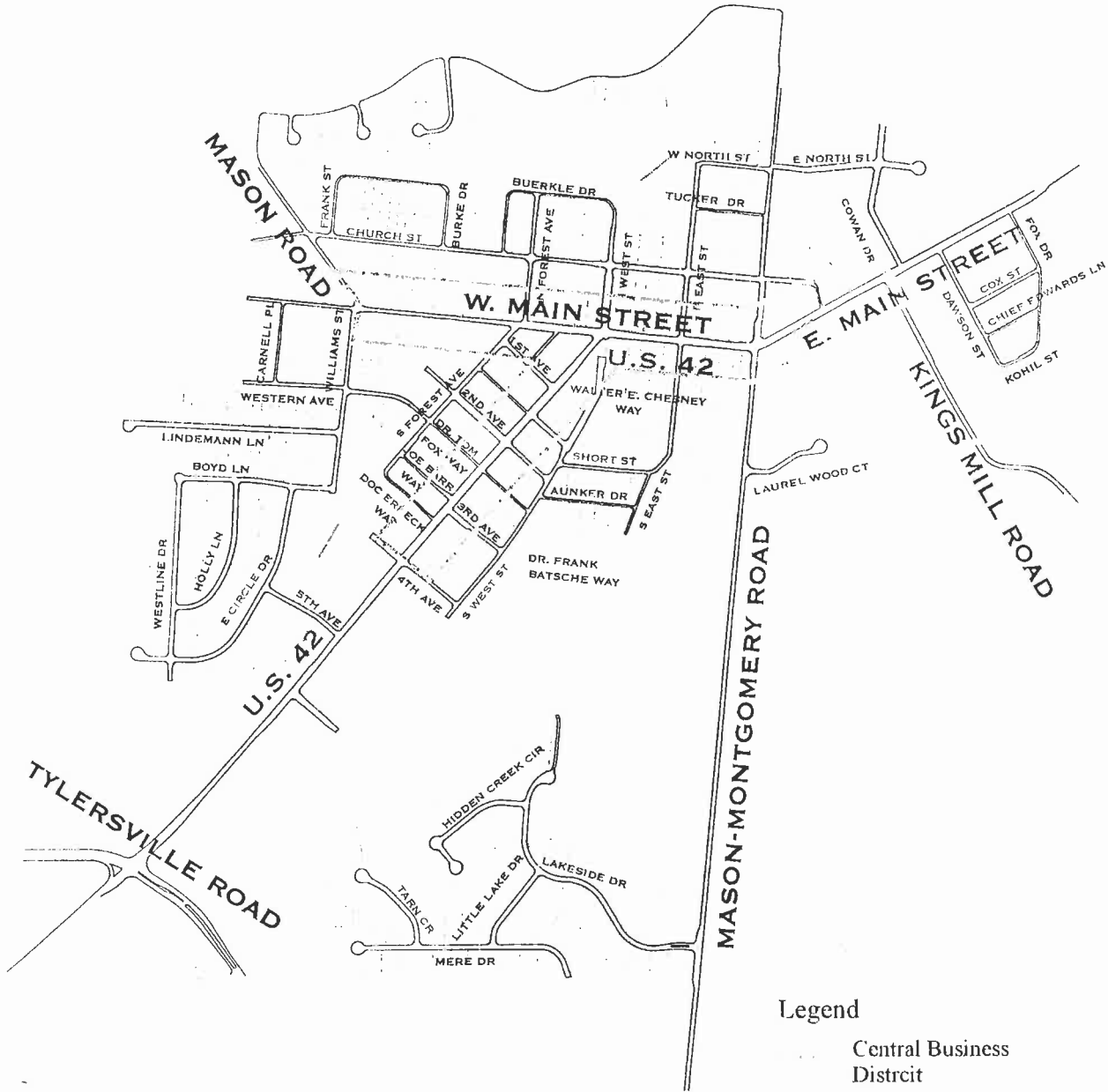
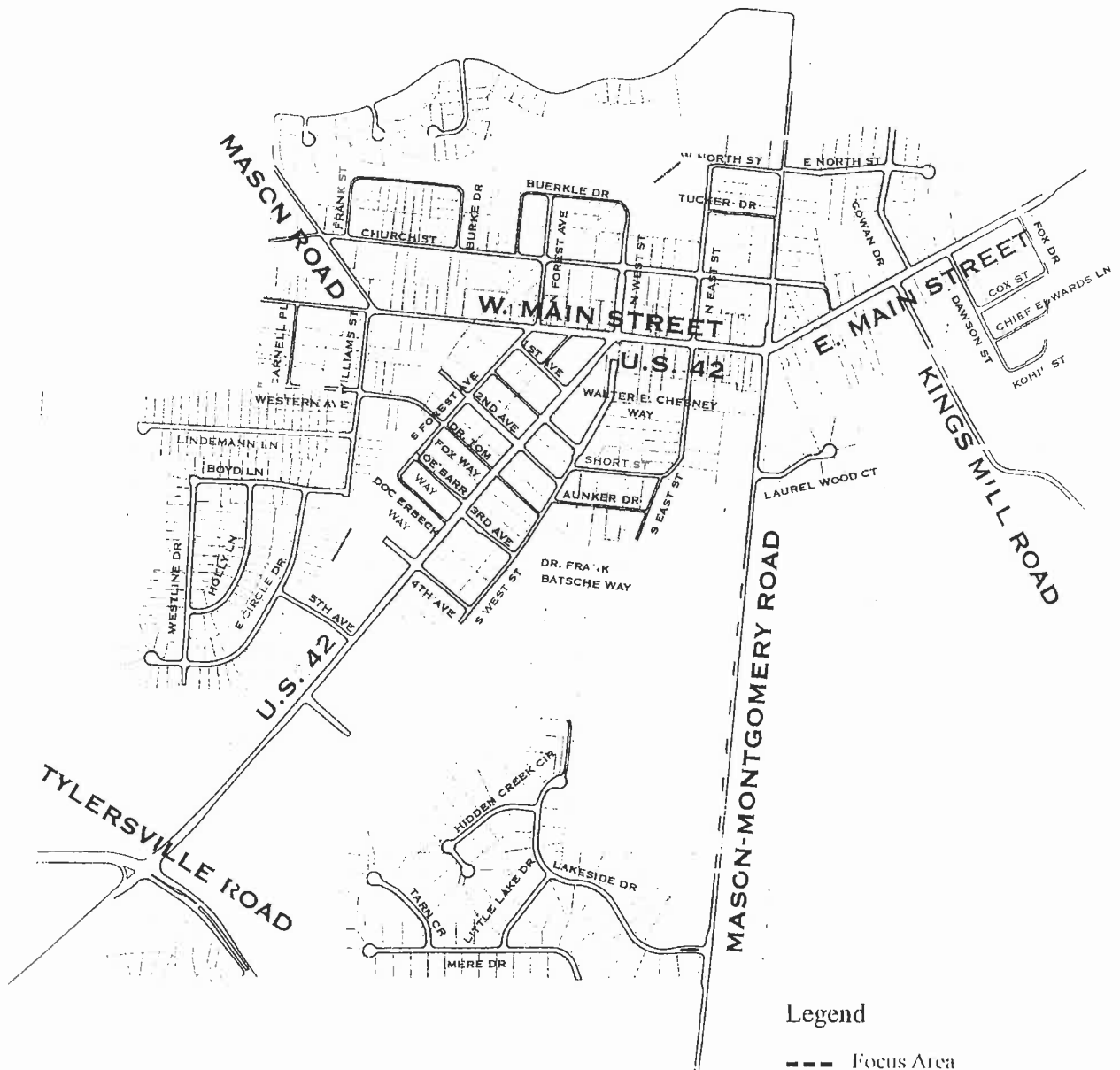




EXHIBIT C

## DOWNTOWN MASON REDEVELOPMENT FOCUS AREA



**Downtown Mason  
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)  
August 2001**

After compiling valuable information from a variety of sources, this summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for Downtown Mason was compiled. It is likely not all inclusive, but provides a framework for the preliminary planning efforts.

***Strengths***

Small Town Feel. The Main Street area and surrounding neighborhoods create a sense of "hometown" with an intimate scale, wide range of building styles and ages, and a general sense of rootedness. Historic gas light fixtures, pavers and street trees help to reinforce the small town image.

The People. There are some businesses and their owners, such as the Yost Pharmacy and Busken Bakery, that have been located in Downtown Mason for many years and provide anchors to the community. There is a sense of place that many experience because of their lifelong associations with the people that live and work downtown. Preserving this sense of connection with each other is a priority. Sharing this connectedness with newer arrivals is also desirable.

Existing Buildings. Most of the older buildings in Downtown Mason share a common architectural theme. Made from brick in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial Italianate style, this theme is common to many Ohio communities. There is a mix of residential buildings that add interest and charm to the downtown. Special buildings include the old opera house (now the 5/3rd bank building) located at the southeast corner of Reading Road and Main Street.

Local Economy. The population of Mason has a higher income and more disposable income than a lot of cities. There are a wide range of nationally known firms with offices and facilities in Mason providing significant employment opportunities. The nationally known Paramount Kings Island and associated tourism development brings thousands of people to the City of Mason. The City income tax generates substantial revenue for the City, which has allowed the City to attempt to keep up with infrastructure improvements.

Special Events. The Heritage Festival and the new ice cream social bring many people into the downtown. People seem to like these types of events and want more of them.

Proximity to Large Cities. Mason's proximity to Dayton and Cincinnati provides many opportunities for residents to live in Mason and work or play in the larger cities.

A Strong, Proactive City Government. Mason has numerous services and benefits provided by the City, and it appears that the administration has been very proactive in the past decade. The cooperative arrangement between the School District and the City on the Community Center is indicative of this proactive stance.

### ***Weaknesses***

**Traffic.** The heavy flow of commercial truck traffic on SR 42 along Main Street is a significant detraction from the downtown. The small scale of Main Street does not accommodate heavy truck traffic very well and walking down the sidewalks can be a less than pleasant experience as a result.

**Lack of identity.** The arrival and departure experience of Downtown Mason is disjointed. The land uses along Reading Road and East Main Street are a mix of residential, commercial and institutional. Parking tends to be located between the sidewalk and the buildings, which creates a fragmented pedestrian and vehicular experience.

**Limited retail.** There is a prevalence of service type uses in the downtown, with the ground floors primarily used for offices. The lack of active retail on the ground floor works against a lively ambiance for visitors and residents.

**Lack of restaurants.** There appears to be a strong need for restaurants (upscale and family), cafes, ice cream shops, etc. in the downtown. Residents have to go outside the downtown, and often outside the City, for a choice of decent restaurants.

### ***Opportunities***

**Arts & Culture Focus.** It is increasingly difficult for small, locally-owned businesses to compete with the “big box” retail found throughout suburbs like Mason. A focus on local arts and culture would permit the downtown to present totally unique, “one-of-a-kind” items and entertainment experiences. Innovative programs such as an “artist in residence” program, which would allow well-known artists to live and work in Downtown Mason could help to stimulate cultural development of the downtown. An arts festival that presents high quality music, drama and art could also begin to define Downtown Mason as an Arts & Culture destination.

**Vacant Buildings.** The municipally-occupied buildings represent a significant opportunity for Downtown Mason to reinvent itself as a more compelling destination for residents and visitors alike. Some potential uses include a year-round farmers market, a cultural arts center, new retail with upper level office, restaurant, sports bar, etc.

**Vacant Land.** There are several significant vacant parcels on Main Street which also represent an important opportunity for downtown. In-fill construction of retail or mixed use buildings, new landscaped parking facilities, and/or green space or gathering areas in these vacant lots would help to further the new identity for Downtown Mason.

**Muddy Creek Flood Plain.** This riparian corridor which passes through the downtown area represents an opportunity to preserve the ecological richness of the area, introduce a better pedestrian/bike connection to the downtown and improve water quality. Riparian buffer zones can preserve and protect the river’s edges and promote the development of continuous trails along the river. This “River Walk” could be an attraction itself, drawing visitors and residents wishing to enjoy the Muddy Creek, its history and ecology.

**Pedestrian Linkages.** There are many opportunities to link parks, residential areas, the new municipal complex and the community center to the downtown.

### ***Threats***

**New Municipal Building.** The municipal buildings and their users will soon depart for the new community center on Mason-Montgomery Road, just such of the downtown. This will result in a significant loss of people and daily activity in the downtown.

**Heavy Traffic.** Current traffic through the downtown, including truck traffic, is detrimental to the pedestrian-friendly environment desired for the downtown. Most of this traffic is not utilizing downtown businesses or services.

**New Growth Centers.** The growth being experienced by the City of Mason is bringing new retail/office centers to the community. Often these commercial centers compete with the downtown for tenants and consumer dollars. The downtown has several disadvantages compared to greenfield sites when it comes to new development, especially as defined by today's new commercial standards.

**DOWNTOWN MASON  
VISIONING WORKSHOP  
SUMMARY  
September 19, 2001**

On September 19, 2001, over 50 Mason residents and community leaders participated in a Visioning Workshop to discuss several of the issues facing the downtown. The workshop participants were divided into five groups to discuss and make recommendations regarding the following topics:

- Traffic
- Parking
- Image
- Economic Vitality and Viability
- Focal Point/Green Space

An outline of issues to discuss was prepared by PDG and distributed to each group, so that all the key issues presented to date on each of these subjects could be discussed during the workshop.

At the conclusion of the small group discussions, a member of each group presented the findings to all of the workshop participants. The resulting observations and recommendations will be incorporated into the *Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan* being prepared by the DMRC with the consulting assistance of Poggemeyer Design Group, whose staff facilitated the Visioning Workshop discussions.

The overriding observation of the workshop's participants was that Downtown Mason needs to be a vital, family-oriented gathering place for Mason's residents. The residents of Mason are anxious to have a sense of home and community, centered in the downtown, where they can come to gather, relax, shop, socialize and eat, individually and as families. Further, the community is blessed with a substantial tax base and a primarily affluent population, hence the wherewithal to accomplish the desired downtown improvements exists.

The major observations and recommendations from the Visioning Workshop are presented below. Complete reports from each of the groups follow.

**Traffic:**

- Remove truck and other non-essential traffic from the downtown, utilizing one or more of several suggested options in conjunction with the pending traffic study results.
- Limit US 42 through the downtown to two lanes, and divert truck traffic from the East to Bethany Road and from the West to Butler-Warren Road, then on to Bethany Road.
- Create and maintain attractive and safe sidewalks throughout the downtown.
- Create and upgrade pedestrian walkways and bike paths to link the downtown to the new Municipal Complex, the schools, Muddy Creek, local parks and residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage the Turtle Creek Excursion Train to resume service to the downtown, once the downtown has something more to offer.

### **Parking:**

- Based on a recently completed parking survey, the group concluded that, while there may be a perceived parking problem in the downtown, there are in fact ample places to park. However, proper identification of that parking is a problem.
- The City should develop a coordinated signage system to clearly distinguish private from public parking and to direct people to the various public parking lots in and around the downtown.
- Printed maps or brochures of downtown public parking areas should be developed for distribution by the merchants, the Chamber, DMRC, and City offices.
- While increased downtown on-street parking is desired, the means for developing such parking will depend upon the decisions regarding downtown traffic issues.
- The group identified a variety of sites that could provide additional downtown off-street parking. (Refer to Plate 8-1.)
- There is a potential opportunity to increase the number of parking spaces available to the public along US 42 and East Main Street through a shared parking program, whereby private parking areas could be used by the public during specified hours or days.
- Many of the existing public parking lots need to be upgraded to make them more attractive and appealing, and more easily used by the public, including uniform signage, paving, definition of spaces, lighting, landscaping, and/or screened trash receptacles.

### **Image:**

- People choose to live in Mason primarily because of its “small-town” atmosphere, history, tradition, good schools, and convenient location.
- The overriding consensus was that the image for Downtown Mason needed to revolve around the history and traditions of Mason.
- Coordinated streetscaping and lighting, uniform signage directing traffic and identifying parking areas, and attractive Gateways are all important factors that need to be utilized to develop and enhance Downtown Mason’s image.
- Historic preservation and clean-up or renovation of downtown properties are needed.

### **Economic Vitality and Viability:**

- Downtown Mason needs more restaurants. A variety of desired restaurant types and possible locations were identified. The consensus was that they should not be chains but have their own local identity. They should be restaurants that cater primarily to adults, but include at least one good family restaurant.
- Similarly, a variety of unique specialty and retail shops that should thrive in Downtown Mason were identified.
- The downtown should be a pedestrian-friendly area.



- New construction and renovations should be consistent with the desired downtown image, with design standards created and consistently enforced.
- Additional special events, primarily for families, should become annual events.
- Develop a long-range plan (20-30 years), then work toward the goals in 5-year programs, focusing on the most urgent, obvious ones first.

**Focal Point/Green Space:**

- A variety of possible downtown locations for a desired focal point and additional green space were identified and discussed.
- Mason should capitalize on the Muddy Creek corridor, incorporating it into the downtown planning process.
- Four gateway entries to the downtown should include uniform, attractive signage and lighting, landscaping, greenery and possibly statuary.

## TRAFFIC Downtown Mason Visioning Workshop 9/18/01

**Overall theme** of Revitalization for Downtown Mason:

Mason Downtown Revitalization needs to be approached incrementally, and should be evolutionary not revolutionary. Continued growth and change are inevitable in and around Mason, and they need to be managed in the context of an orderly, logical and well thought-out plan, not reacted to after the fact. Revitalization steps should be manageable, affordable, deliberate, and properly prioritized and scheduled, rather than an attempt to do or fix everything immediately. Downtown improvements must be coordinated with planned developments in other areas of the City.

The following goals were summarized from a variety of information collected to date, including numerous interviews with people in the community. During this Visioning Workshop, please concentrate on **how to accomplish the goals** that have been suggested.

This Group will discuss **Traffic Issues**, both pedestrian and vehicular, and related issues **other than parking**.

GOAL 1. To remove truck and other non-essential traffic from the streets of downtown. There are currently 21,000 vehicles/day passing through the downtown. Obviously, most of this traffic is not stopping to do business in the downtown.

How could the City divert non-essential traffic around the downtown?

- Business vs. truck routes (pros and cons)
  - Along what corridors could non-essential traffic be rerouted?
  - Should a separate truck route be identified? Where?
  - Will completion of the Tylersville Road improvement project resolve most of the problem with downtown traffic?
- Synchronizing the timing of traffic signals
  - Could any signals benefit from being synchronized? Where?
- What design improvements would help essential traffic flow better through the downtown?
  - Improved radii of intersections. Where?
  - Wider streets? Where?
  - Removing parking from streets. Is this a good long-term solution for the downtown? Many communities have learned that removing parking from the streets removes commerce from the streets. Cities like Toledo are putting parking back on the streets in a major revitalization effort.
  - Other?

GOAL 2. To create and maintain attractive and safe sidewalks throughout the downtown. It

is people that spend money in the downtown, not vehicles. How can the City entice people to walk in the downtown?

- Creating pedestrian connectors between main streets and parking areas. Where? There are many spaces between buildings that are not used, not maintained, not lit, etc. Could they be used to connect parking and the main sidewalks?
- Upgrading the condition of the sidewalks? Should the existing sidewalk design (which includes bricks in select areas) be duplicated or replaced? How? Where?
- Providing handicapped accessibility? Where are the problem areas?
- Properly lighting the sidewalks? Do people prefer the decorative street lighting as opposed to ODOT typical street lighting? Should the lighting be extended into the parking lots?
- Separating the vehicular and pedestrian traffic better? Are there asphalt areas where it is unclear if they are meant for pedestrians or vehicles? Where? How can we resolve the problem?

GOAL 3. To link the downtown by pedestrian and/or bike paths to the new Municipal Complex, Muddy Creek, local parks, and residential neighborhoods. [The City has recently completed a pedestrian/bikepath study, that contains some suggestions. There will be a 10' bikepath and a 5' sidewalk on opposite sides of the new bridge being constructed on Mason-Montgomery Road over Muddy Creek. This is just south of Main Street.]

- Is the new Mason-Montgomery Road providing an adequate linkage to the new Municipal Complex and Schools? Should any pedestrian-friendly additions be made along the Road or the bridge? If so, what?
- Would connections to any of the following be possible or worthwhile: Heritage Oak Park, Pine Hill Lakes Park, Rose Hill Cemetery, shopping centers, etc.? If so, where and how?

GOAL 4. To encourage the Turtle Creek Excursion Train to resume providing service to Mason and to the downtown. Is this worthwhile? Where could it go to and from? What problems could it create or solve?

- There is a railroad heritage that is a part of Mason history. Could this be tied into the downtown revitalization process at all? How?
- Would instituting a trolley system throughout Mason be worthy of consideration? What agency/department or who should be responsible for this?

**DOWNTOWN MASON VISIONING WORKSHOP**  
**REPORT OF TRAFFIC GROUP**  
September 19, 2001

The participants in this Visioning Session summarized their conclusions and recommendations as follows:

**GOAL 1.     *Remove truck traffic and other non-essential traffic from the streets of downtown.***

1.     Limit US Route 42 to two lanes through the downtown.
2.     Divert truck traffic from the East from I-71 to State Route 741 to Bethany Road.
3.     Divert truck traffic from the West (from Tylersville Road) north to Butler-Warren Road on to Bethany Road.
4.     Establish restrictions for trucks driving through the downtown (6:00 PM til 6:00 AM).
5.     Completion of Tylersville Road connection will not alleviate the traffic problems of the downtown.
6.     US 42 should not be widened from Tylersville Road to the start of the downtown target area at 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Doing so will create alignment problems.
7.     Traffic lights should be better synchronized between Snider Road to Kings Mill Road along US 42.
8.     Complete connection of Snider Road between Tylersville Road and US 42.
9.     Connect Mason Road to Rockgarden Court to tie in western residential neighborhoods to the downtown.
10.    Extend left hand turn lanes to allow for stacking of cars at Tylersville Road and US 42, at Tylersville Road and Snider, at Western Row Road and Snider, and at Western Row Road and US 42.
11.    Widen intersection at Western Row Road and US 42 for easier turning.
12.    Remove porch of Fifth Third Bank to expand turning radius at West Main Street and U.S. 42.
13.    Monitor potential expansion of industrial development at US 42 and Bunnell Road. The expansion of the industrial development at that location may generate additional truck traffic.
14.    Remove on-street parking on East Main Street (on the south side) between Mason-Montgomery Road and Kings Mills Road.
15.    Realignment of South Forest Avenue is needed between 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue to W. Main Street.

**GOAL 2.     *To create and maintain attractive and safe sidewalks throughout the downtown. It is people that spend money in the downtown, not vehicles. How can the City entice people to walk in the downtown?***

1.     Ensure that sidewalks and bikepaths are included along the new proposed connector from SR 741 to US 42 (north of Hanover Drive). This will connect the eastern subdivisions and neighborhoods to Heritage Oak Park. These walkways and bikepaths should then be extended to connect Heritage Oak Park to the downtown.
2.     Complete the sidewalk from Hanover Drive to Heritage Oak Park.
3.     Install a new traffic light at US 42 and Hanover Drive.
4.     Allow for more time at crosswalks at the intersection of US 42 and West Main Street.
5.     Improve sidewalks conditions throughout the downtown and have uniformity of construction and streetscape design.
6.     Update existing lighting throughout the downtown and install new lighting at major pedestrian areas.

**GOAL 3.     *To link the downtown by pedestrian and/or bike paths to the new Municipal Complex, Muddy Creek, local parks, and residential neighborhoods.***

1.     Add new bikepaths and walkways from the new Municipal Complex to downtown and Heritage Oak Park.
2.     Add walkways and bikepaths from Tylersville Road west past WLW to Snider Road.
3.     Connect Birchwood Farms (neighborhood west of downtown) to downtown with walkways and bikepaths.
4.     Add walkway on MR/DD property along Muddy Creek to Tylersville Road and US 42.

**GOAL 4.     *To encourage the Turtle Creek Excursion Train to resume service to Downtown Mason.***

- 1     Resume the train service from Mason to Lebanon with a stop (train depot) in downtown Mason.
2.     Institute a trolley system (public transportation) for Mason that would connect the downtown to area parks, neighborhoods, schools, and employment centers.

# PARKING

## Downtown Mason Visioning Workshop

9/18/01

**Overall theme** of Revitalization for Downtown Mason:

Mason Downtown Revitalization needs to be approached incrementally, and should be evolutionary not revolutionary. Continued growth and change are inevitable in and around Mason, and they need to be managed in the context of an orderly, logical and well thought-out plan, not reacted to after the fact. Revitalization steps should be manageable, affordable, deliberate, and properly prioritized and scheduled, rather than an attempt to do or fix everything immediately. Downtown improvements must be coordinated with planned developments in other areas of the City.

The following goals were developed based on information gathered to date, including numerous interviews with people in the community. During the Visioning Workshop, please concentrate on **how to accomplish** the following goals:

GOAL 1. To understand the parking problems, whether they are real or perceived. There are approximately 937 parking spaces in the downtown, 103 of which are on-street parking spaces; 559 of which are clearly private, as they are beside or behind places of business; 88 of which are clearly public, as they are marked as such; and 165 of which are unclear and unmarked, but could be assumed to be private. (Refer to the map.) Of the total spaces available, 22 were designated for handicapped parking.

There are approximately 196,184 square feet of businesses in the downtown, categorized as follows:

Retail	28,622
Office	50,750
Service	76,240
Government	7,302
Other public (library, etc.)	19,500
Civic	13,770

According to generally accepted parking standards, there should be 712 parking spaces available to accommodate the existing businesses in the downtown. Thus, according to this analysis, there is currently an overage of 225 spaces.

These standards assume the following:

- 1 parking space per 250 sf for general retail
- 1 parking space per 200 sf for government buildings
- 1 parking space per 200-750 sf of office space (we used 350)
- 1 parking space per 200-300 sf for services (we used 250)
- 1 parking space per 300 sf for library space
- 1 parking space per 300 sf for civic organizations

Although the analysis indicates adequate parking spaces in the downtown, all interviews and surveys indicate the opposite. Thus, the “perceived” problem has become a “real” problem in Downtown Mason, and we must deal with it.

GOAL 2. To provide more opportunities for on-street parking. Although we would prefer to have people park off-street in parking lots, people generally prefer to park on-street.

- Thus, can additional on-street parking be added?
- If so, where?

GOAL 3. To provide more off-street parking facilities. Additional parking lots are said to be needed. [The City will have a small area in the northeast corner of the Main St/Mason-Montgomery Road intersection available for parking and/or green space.]

- Where could new lots be constructed?
- How can we eliminate the “perception of distance” so that consumers feel okay about walking half a block from the parking space to their destination?

GOAL 4. To provide for better identification of public vs. private lots through a coordinated signage system.

- Is there a problem differentiating between private and public parking?
- Which lots or areas?
- How can this be resolved?

GOAL 5. To encourage the sharing of parking lots.

- What organizations or companies in the downtown use their parking lots only at select times? What times are these?
- Could the parking lots be used by the general public at times other than those?
- How could we pursue this?
- Which lots?

GOAL 6. To upgrade existing parking lots, to make them more attractive and appealing to the general public, including landscaping and green areas to temper the mass of asphalt and make them more aesthetically pleasing. [The City is working on new zoning requirements for landscaping, which may or may not apply to the downtown. The DMRC intends to adopt design regulations next year, which could address this issue.]

- Which lots would benefit from upgrading?
- What sort of guidelines should be recommended?

GOAL 7. To identify areas behind/beside buildings where private parking, trash receptacles, electric poles, etc. are currently haphazardly arranged, and that could benefit from organized, paved, marked, and shared parking, with screened trash receptacles

and green areas.

- Where are areas that exemplify this statement?
- How can we approach resolving these issues?

GOAL 8. To encourage employees and property owners to park in special parking areas so as to leave premium spaces available for their customers.

- Where do owners and employees currently park?
- Where could they park?
- Would reserved parking places in lots not considered prime entice owners and employees to refrain from parking in key parking spaces?

GOAL 9. To educate the public about where to park in Downtown Mason.

- What can the community, Chamber, DMRC do to educate the public regarding parking?
- [Brochures; ads; Maps on permanent signs throughout the downtown “You are here” , “P” for parking, significant buildings, etc.]



# DOWNTOWN MASON VISIONING WORKSHOP REPORT OF PARKING GROUP

September 19, 2001

The participants in this Visioning Session summarized their conclusions and recommendations as follows:

**GOAL 1.**      *To understand whether the parking problem is perceived or a real problem.*

Based on the parking survey conducted, the group concluded that the parking problem raised in the Downtown Mason area is a perceived problem and not a real problem.

**GOAL 2.**      *To provide more opportunities for on-street parking.*

Based on the physical characteristics (width of the street and building frontage) of the immediate downtown area (US 42), on-street parking is not seen feasible at this time. The group discussed that on-street parking can only be provided if the road is widened by either demolishing various buildings within the effective area or restricting traffic to one-way along US 42 and Church Street between N. East Main Street and N. West Main Street. Demolition of buildings was NOT considered a feasible option.

**GOAL 3.**      *To provide additional off-street parking facilities within the downtown area.*

There was consensus amongst the group that additional off-street parking could be accommodated at the rear of buildings.

Specific areas were identified:

- Behind Nicodemus Wallpaper (Bldg Code 13 - 124 E. Main);
- Behind Sam & Fischer Attorneys (Bldg Code 23 - 101 E. Main);
- Adjacent and behind Just for Kids Dance Academy (Bldg Code 24 - 107 W. Main);
- Behind the Russ Hutchins Insurance & Stylarama Salon (Bldg Code 25 - 113 W. Main), Coal Network, Inc. (Bldg Code 26 - 117 W. Main), and Veterans of Foreign Wars (Bldg Code 27 - 119 W. Main);
- Between Fifth Third Bank (Bldg Code 64 - 225 W. Main) and DePriest Antiques (Bldg Code 65 - 207 W. Main);
- Behind the business establishments between N. East Main and N. West Main;
- Behind Mason Vision Center (Bldg Code 92 - 218 Reading Rd);
- Behind the Municipal Building (Bldg 31 - 202 W. Main); and
- Behind Bauer Insurance (Bldg 36 - 224 W. Main).

**GOAL 4.**      *To provide better identification of public vs private lots through a coordinated signage system.*

The group agreed that since parking is a perceived problem, then parking identification is a major problem in the area, and the City should develop a coordinated signage system to distinguish private vs. public parking.

**GOAL 5.    *To encourage the sharing of existing parking lots.***

To develop an effective parking system and increase the number of parking spaces available along US 42 and East Main Street, the group identified several areas where shared parking areas would improve the parking situation in the area. The following is a list of areas identified:

- Tucker's Whippy Dip (Bldg 19 - 127 E. Main) and Sheldon (Bldg 20 - 125 E. Main);
- Between Reber Auto Body & Repair (Bldg 5 - 100 E. Main) and the Pleasure Inn (Bldg 9 - 112 E. Main);
- The block of Mason-Montgomery and N. East Main Street between Buskar Bakery (Bldg 4 - 106 W. Main) and Yost Pharmacy (Bldg 1 - 120 W. Main);
- The block of N. East Main and W. Main Street between Mason Municipal Building (Bldg 31 - 202 W. Main) and Bauer Insurance (Bldg 36 - 224 W. Main); and,
- Between Jack's Driving School ( Bldg 40) and the Sprint Telephone Company (Bldg 43 - 318 W. Main).

**GOAL 6.    *To upgrade existing parking lots to make them more attractive and appealing to the general public.***

The group also identified the importance of upgrading landscaping standards in parking lot areas to help create an aesthetically-pleasing environment. This can be accomplished by creating landscaped boulevards and islands, and by screening trash receptacles with wooden fences with gates or shrubbery.

**Goal 7.    *To encourage employees and property owners to park in designated areas so to leave the premium spaces available for customers.***

This issue was not seen as a major problem for parking in the downtown, but in areas where parking is limited for customers it is recommended that designated areas be identified. The parking areas located adjacent to the Municipal Building were identified as troublesome areas, when it came to premium parking, only at particular times when the Municipal Building was heavily used. This problem is going to be eliminated soon, when the Municipal Building relocates to the new facility on Mason-Montgomery Road.

**Goal 8.    *To educate the public about where to park in Downtown Mason.***

The group agreed that educating the public about parking in the downtown would help eliminate the perceived problem of parking. Methods such as brochures and signage could help solve the problem.

# DOWNTOWN IMAGE

## Downtown Mason Visioning Workshop

9/18/01

**Overall theme** of Revitalization for Downtown Mason:

Mason Downtown Revitalization needs to be approached incrementally, and should be evolutionary not revolutionary. Continued growth and change are inevitable in and around Mason, and they need to be managed in the context of an orderly, logical and well thought-out plan, not reacted to after the fact. Revitalization steps should be manageable, affordable, deliberate, and properly prioritized and scheduled, rather than an attempt to do or fix everything immediately. Downtown improvements must be coordinated with planned developments in other areas of the City.

Goals have been developed based on the information gathered to date, including numerous interviews with people in the community. During the Visioning Workshop, please concentrate on **how to accomplish** the following suggested goals:

This group will discuss Downtown Image issues, such as streetscaping, open or green space, building facades, overhead electric lines, street lighting, banners and flags, and the overall preservation of the historic and "small town feel" that are so important to residents of Mason.

GOAL 1. To identify an image for Downtown Mason and determine how to incorporate it into the future planning of the downtown.

- Has the "Imagine Mason" theme for the City been accepted and has it caught on? [There are banners throughout the new areas.]
- How can it be incorporated throughout the downtown? [Possibly "Imagine Downtown Mason" or "Imagine Historic Mason"?]
- How can the theme be incorporated in the redevelopment efforts?

GOAL 2. To develop a streetscaping theme and begin implementing it throughout the core target area as soon as possible, with the goal of extending the streetscaping eventually throughout the larger Downtown Mason target area.

- Should the existing sidewalk streetscaping theme, which includes some bricks and mostly concrete, be upgraded and continued, or should it be changed?
- Should the existing street lighting in the downtown be continued and enhanced, or should a new light fixture be selected? Should that light fixture be the same as, or complimentary to the new light fixtures added throughout the new areas?
- Are the electric utility lines obtrusive to the appearance of the downtown? In any specific places? Solutions?
- How can the streetscaping create and / or preserve the "small town" feel of Downtown Mason?

- Can any steps be taken to aesthetically tie the new bridge being constructed on Mason-Montgomery Road into the downtown? [Construction is underway.]
- Can any steps be taken to aesthetically tie proposed intersection improvements at US 42 on the south side into the downtown? [These have not been designed yet.] What are they?

GOAL 3. To encourage the preservation of historic structures and/or sites in the downtown.

- How should existing historic structures be preserved?
- Which ones?
- Should the DMRC encourage private property owners to nominate their properties to the National Register of Historic Places?
- Are there any historic walking tours of the area?

GOAL 4. To encourage private property owners to clean up and/or renovate their properties.

- Should the DMRC and/or the City develop a building and facade revitalization program, offering loans, grants, and/or tax incentives for owners to renovate their buildings?
- How?
- Should any parameters be added to the program?
- Should the DMRC and the City establish a set of standards that renovation plans must meet to qualify for these incentives?
- How could this be enforced?
- Should the City establish a maintenance ordinance that requires that properties be maintained and upgraded to certain standards?

GOAL 5. To establish a uniform signage system for the downtown.

- What types of signage should be included? [Directional, business, street names, parking locations, etc.]
- Should it be coordinated with an overall City signage system?

GOAL 6. To develop a focal point, as well as green spaces and /or open spaces within the downtown.

- Are there opportunities for green spaces and/or parks in the downtown? If so, where? [The existing park in the southwest corner of the intersection of Main St. and Mason-Montgomery Road will be eliminated with the intersection improvement project which is currently underway.]
- Should a focal point be developed in the downtown? If so, where?

- What type of focal point would be best in Downtown Mason? [Gathering area, gazebo, park, area along the Creek, statues, fountains, garden, etc.]

GOAL 7. To establish “Gateways” into the downtown. A “gateway” would serve as an entry portal into the downtown, with signage, landscaping, greenery, statuary, decorative lighting, etc.

- In what locations could gateways be designed?
- What should the gateways consist of?
- Should gateways be expanded to include the entire City?
- If yes, suggested areas?

**DOWNTOWN MASON VISIONING WORKSHOP**  
**REPORT OF DOWNTOWN IMAGE GROUP**  
**September 19, 2001**

This group was comprised of eight members, equally divided between persons who had always lived in Mason and persons who were "transplants." It was interesting to watch the interaction between the two groups, and to hear why people had stayed there all their lives and why people had selected Mason. Many of the reasons were the same: small town atmosphere, history and tradition, good schools, convenient, great location, small town with big town amenities nearby, etc. The participants in this visioning session summarize their conclusions and recommendations as follows:

**GOAL 1.      *Image/theme.***

- While a specific theme was not determined, the group was in consensus that the theme should revolve around history and tradition, perhaps something like "Olde Mason", a tradition to continue.
- They were not locked into the "Imagine Historic Mason." Several of them said they did not "get" the Imagine Mason anyway! The comments were that Imagine Mason had its purpose, but did not really catch on in the community nor does it fit what we want now.

**GOAL 2.      *Streetscape.***

- It may be a pipedream, but the group would love to put all the overhead electric utilities underground. We discussed costs and some ways of funding, etc.
- The group had no problem with the streetscaping that exists now, but if you have to rip up the existing to do the underground utilities, then that might be great time to make a change of some sort.
- Regarding pavers, the group liked the idea of using colored concrete pavers (the interlocking type) that can be set in sand.
- Regarding lighting, the group would like to continue the lighting that already exists in the downtown and match the Mason-Montgomery Road lighting. Lighting should accent business and help with security. One man thought the light posts should be set one in front of each business and a business address affixed to the post. Note: that may be too many lights in some areas and would give a staggered appearance if the buildings were not aligned the same on both sides of the street.
- NO bikepath in the downtown!
- US 42 off Tylersville Rd. should be considered for a gateway & could be tied into the downtown that way.
- Lights can be put on the new bridge to match the downtown lights. The conduit could be placed on bridge during construction so the lights can be added later.

**GOAL 3.      *Historic Preservation in the downtown.***

- Design Review Board is needed to help preserve historic structures. The City has lost many historic buildings in the past and the group does not want to lose more.
- The only historic structure that was mentioned specifically was “the Old Dinner Bell.”
- The group did not want to impose such strict regulations that businesses were discouraged from locating in the downtown, but did want to ensure that property values were preserved and that historic structures were preserved.
- Would like to see the downtown return to the older look that many of the committee recalled from their youth.

**GOAL 4.      *Clean up/renovation of properties.***

- Committee felt strongly about developing a facade and revitalization program, offering low interest loans. Advertise the community vision, sell it, stress it, but not be so restrictive as to discourage business.
- Have a standard for Main Street and then try to expand this throughout the downtown eventually. May already have codes or requirements on books, but they are not enforced.
- Committee felt that a trickle down effect would occur throughout the community and that peer pressure would encourage businesses to take note and participate in fixing up their properties.

**GOAL 5.      *Uniform Signage System for the downtown.***

- Definitely needed!
- Emphasize address i.d. for each building - on light posts?
- Committee liked the Beckley signage ideas and way-finding and wanted it uniform throughout the area. Make it useful, but also tasteful.
- Committee agreed that parking needs to be signed as public/private, etc.

**GOAL 6.      *Focal point/green space.***

- Committee did not feel there is an opportunity for “a” single focal point in the downtown.
- Suggested pocket park concept, or several “gathering” places or smaller focal points throughout the downtown, thus giving the image of openness and green space through planters, street trees (appropriate for a downtown - slow growth, low maintenance, not so dense as to hide buildings or distract from signage, etc.).

- The group suggested benches and lighting in pedestrian alleys to encourage not only gathering, but the use of rear parking, etc.
- Add coziness in dead spaces or in alleys.

**GOAL 7.      *Gateway(s).***

- US 42 at Tylersville Road - for sure.
- Tie in with the rocks at Mason-Montgomery Road.
- Have gateway not so permanent that it could not be moved if the corporate limits moved due to annexation, etc.
- Want gateway to essentially say: "Take note, you are entering into OUR downtown, slow down, notice and enjoy." Use similar themes throughout community.



# ECONOMIC VITALITY AND VIABILITY

## Downtown Mason Visioning Workshop

### 9/18/01

**Overall theme** of Revitalization for Downtown Mason:

Mason Downtown Revitalization needs to be approached incrementally, and should be evolutionary not revolutionary. Continued growth and change are inevitable in and around Mason, and they need to be managed in the context of an orderly, logical and well thought-out plan, not reacted to after the fact. Revitalization steps should be manageable, affordable, deliberate, and properly prioritized and scheduled, rather than an attempt to do or fix everything immediately. Downtown improvements must be coordinated with planned improvements in other areas of the City.

Goals were established based on the information gathered to date, including interviews with numerous people in the community. During the Visioning Workshop, please concentrate on **how to accomplish** the following suggested goals:

This Group will discuss the economic vitality and viability of the downtown: What can make it an exciting place to be for consumers and residents, while making it economically viable for business owners? The Market Study completed by Danter (a summary is available) indicates that there is adequate disposable income available within the Effective Market Area to support additional restaurants and unique shops, as well as additional office space. There is a desire to make Mason unique and different from its neighbors, and to tap a niche that is not already being met in other areas. There is also general consensus among downtown planners that downtowns cannot compete with stores that generally locate in malls, such as general clothing, shoe stores, department stores, etc.

GOAL 1. To recruit new restaurants to the downtown.

- What types of restaurants should be recruited?
- Where should they be located?
- Are there any existing buildings that could be renovated as a unique restaurant? [The City Building, the Engineering Building, Lumber Yard buildings, etc.]
- Are there any existing areas that could be developed as a restaurant? [Open space near American Legion, lot by 5/3 parking lot, etc.]
- Can adequate parking be developed to service the restaurants?
- Any ideas as to where that parking could be located?
- Who should be responsible for recruiting a restaurant?

GOAL 2. To recruit unique specialty and retail shops to the downtown.

- What types of unique shops should be recruited?
- Are there any existing buildings in which they could be located?
- Are there any single-family homes that could be converted to quaint retail shops? Where? [House in SE corner of Kings Mill and Main, etc.]
- Should design regulations be instituted to identify the type of renovation desired? (For example, the yellow single-family home that was converted to an antique store on South West Street.)

- Would Bed and Breakfast operations be acceptable in Downtown Mason? Which buildings could be used for these?

GOAL 3. To provide additional special events, youth activities, cultural and arts venues, and other activities in the downtown. (The Ice Cream Social is new this year, the Heritage Festival is an annual event.)

- What additional special events could be considered for the downtown? List as many as possible.
- What youth activities, senior activities, or other special group activities could be planned for the downtown? (Note that the library had an exceptionally successful summer program for children this past summer.)
- Should the old Opera House, which is now the 5/3 Bank, be renovated back to its original condition? If yes, what groups could utilize the facility? Is there any merit to considering this?
- Should the downtown be turned into an arts and crafts center, with artisans having workshops and sales areas, and possibly living quarters on upper floors?
- Should the Farmers Market be recruited to the downtown (as it is scheduled to lose its current location)? Where could it be housed? Could it be successful as a year-round farmers market?

GOAL 4. To identify and recruit a new tenant for the Municipal Building and other vacant buildings?

- What would the best use be for the Municipal Building?
- Any suggestions for specific uses for any other specific sites or buildings that are or will be vacant? [e.g. Engineering Bldg, Dance Studio, etc.]
- Are there any buildings that are underutilized that would benefit from a higher use? If yes, which ones?

GOAL 5. To capitalize on the tourism business at Kings Island and other attractions by enticing some of these visitors to the downtown.

- What future activities or shops in the downtown would complement existing tourism attractions and entice visitors to travel to the downtown?
- How can downtown merchants entice the tourists to the downtown?
- Is signage adequate to direct tourists from Kings Island (as one example) to the downtown? If not, where should the signage be located?
- Should the City or the DMRC provide transportation linkages and/or services between Kings Island and other attractions and the downtown? If yes, how?
- Should brochures on the downtown be developed and distributed at Kings Island & other attractions, hotels, restaurants, etc?
- Should the DMRC consider a Kiosk at Kings Island advertising Downtown Mason?

GOAL 6. To consider the establishment of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or other 501(c)3 to consider various private sector development projects within the

downtown. This organization could also accept charitable contributions from donors.

- Are there key people in the community who could be tapped to participate in private development projects if the need arose? (For example, purchase a building and renovate it, and then lease it to a tenant.)
- Are there any specific projects that come to mind that could happen now if a CDC were available?

GOAL 7. To encourage merchants to undertake joint advertising and publicity campaigns.

- Are there any joint advertising campaigns underway at this time? Of, yes, what and where?
- What opportunities exist for joint advertising?
- Who should coordinate this activity?

**DOWNTOWN MASON VISIONING WORKSHOP**  
**REPORT OF ECONOMIC VITALITY AND VIABILITY GROUP**  
**September 19, 2001**

The participants in this group summarized their findings and recommendations as follows:

**GOAL 1.      *Recruit new restaurants to the downtown.***

1.      The types of restaurants that the group felt should be recruited to the downtown and could be successful included:

- Ethnic
- Casual Gourmet
- No Chains
- Train Depot related
- 2nd floor location – with a porch for outside dining
- Diner (50's – 60's theme)
- Pub-style sports bar
- Ice Cream Shop/Soups and sandwiches
- At least one to include children
- Place with music
- Spaghetti warehouse - type

It was felt that more than a couple restaurants are needed and could easily be supported and be successful in Downtown Mason. Generally speaking, they should cater to the upscale residents of the Mason area. The group's thought was that almost any good restaurant, regardless of type or location, would be very welcome and do very well.

2.      The group discussed potential locations for restaurants in the downtown and suggested the following:

- Gilberts/Dance Studio
- City Building
- Current single-family residences, especially those that are rented
- Yellow house behind the bank
- Across from St. Susanne's
- West Main – Bldg #56
- Opera House

The group also discussed the fact that Church Street should be considered as an extension to the downtown target area, and that some of the single-family residences along Church Street could be converted to restaurants.

3.      The group discussed who would be responsible for recruiting restaurants, as well as other businesses to the downtown. It was decided that the best solution was that the City should hire a Downtown Manager type person to work with DMRC (as well as the Chamber of Commerce) on these issues.

## **GOAL 2. *Recruit unique specialty and retail shops to the Downtown.***

1. The types of shops that the group felt should be recruited to the downtown included the following:

- Hobby shops
- High-end toys
- Formal wear – purchase and rental, male and female
- Second-hand book store
- Clothing
- Bike Shop
- Music
- Instrument and instrument repair
- Sheet music
- Recorded music
- Appliance Repair
- Shoe/leather repair
- Tobacco/Cigar Shop
- Family/Religious Books
- Wine shop
- Chocolate
- Sporting Goods

The group felt that focus should be on the upscale, specialty market. The City may need to subsidize or assist some businesses to get started and to make the downtown an attractive financial undertaking for them.

2. The group also discussed where these shops should be located, with the following suggestions:

- Converted single-family homes
- Renovations of existing buildings
- New buildings as infill for currently vacant lots

The group felt that renovations of old buildings to accommodate new businesses must be consistent with desired downtown image, as being discussed in other groups. The design of these new or renovated facilities needed to address:

- Landscaping
- Awnings
- Signage
- Code Enforcement
- Design Standards (which the group felt were needed)

3. The group felt that the City should definitely encourage Bed & Breakfast facilities in the downtown. Suggested areas included the home on the south side of West Main, which, with its large lot, would make a great B&B.

4. The group felt that it was very important to make the downtown a PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY area.

5. Suggestions for a location for a Farmers Market included:

- School Administration Building parking lot
- Side Streets
- Other vacant areas near the downtown

**GOAL 3. *Additional special events that the group felt should be considered by the DMRC, City, Chamber, or other organizations promoting Downtown Mason included:***

- Concerts in the Park
- Concerts/Music Fests
- Holiday-related parades
- Art Festivals
- Muddy Creek Ampitheatre (create and utilize)

The group felt that the City should definitely renovate the Opera House on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Fifth Third Bank building, restoring it to its original purpose and function. They also felt that the City should encourage and welcome artists to become artists-in-residence, but that this should not be THE focus of the downtown revitalization efforts.

**GOAL 4. *Identify the best future adaptive use for old Municipal Building.***

The group addressed this issue throughout the discussion and decided that a restaurant was the best option for an alternative use for the current Municipal Building.

**GOAL 5. *Capitalize on existing tourism to the area.***

The general consensus of the group regarding capitalizing on existing tourism at Kings Island, the golf center, etc., was the "Build it and they will come" approach. Shops and restaurants that will appeal to the residents of Mason will also appeal to many of the tourists to the area, so the question then becomes the best way(s) to get the story out – brochures, flyers, kiosk at Kings Island, advertising, etc.

**GOAL 6. *To develop a vehicle for the City to use to buy, sell, or lease property easily.***

The group was asked if a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or some other 501(c)3 was needed to allow the City and/or DMRC to option, acquire, sell, lease, or authorize transfer property easily. It was felt that the City or DMRC should consider using the existing County 501(c)3 organization.

**GOAL 7. *Promote joint advertising and publicity campaigns among merchants.***

The group felt that there was no joint advertising or =publicity campaigns going on now among merchants, partially because there are not a lot of merchants in the Downtown. They felt that once there is a viable Downtown, they should do joint promotions, probably coordinated by a downtown organization, DMRC, the Chamber, or an individual hired as a downtown Manager.

### ***General/Summary Comments:***

Other conclusions that the group reached were:

- Develop a Long Range Plan (20-30 years), then work toward the goals of that plan incrementally, perhaps in five-year increments, prioritizing and working on most urgent and obvious goals first.
- Think Revolutionary NOT Evolutionary when making the Long Range Plan – dream more than a little.
- Preserve the historic character of the downtown buildings.
- Right now you have to “Imagine Mason”.
- Think outside the Main Street box – both geographically (include Church Street) and with regard to what Downtown Mason can and should become.
- Make it a pedestrian-oriented downtown. This does not necessarily mean no vehicular traffic, but definitely concentrate on pedestrian-friendly designs.
- Provide an upscale, consistent theme throughout the downtown.
- Don't lose sight of the nature and affluence of many Mason residents. Try to add restaurants, shops and businesses, and activities that will appeal to these families that want an active downtown, with an identity that they can easily patronize.
- Consider making US 42 two one-way streets through the downtown (with Main Street being east-bound, and Church Street being west-bound).
- The main – if not the only – reason that people have moved and are moving to Mason is the quality of the schools. The City needs to do whatever it can to support the School District and to maintain the high quality of education that Mason residents now enjoy.

# FOCAL POINT AND/OR GREEN SPACE

## Downtown Mason Visioning Workshop

9/18/01

**Overall theme** of Revitalization for Downtown Mason:

Mason Downtown Revitalization needs to be approached incrementally, and should be evolutionary not revolutionary. Continued growth and change are inevitable in and around Mason, and they need to be managed in the context of an orderly, logical and well thought-out plan, not reacted to after the fact. Revitalization steps should be manageable, affordable, deliberate, and properly prioritized and scheduled, rather than an attempt to do or fix everything immediately. Downtown improvements must be coordinated with planned improvements in other sections of the City.

Goals were developed based on the information gathered to date, as well as interviews with numerous people in the community. During the Visioning Workshop, please concentrate on **how to accomplish** the following suggested goals:

This group will focus on the creation of a focal point in the downtown that would serve as a central gathering place or as a visual landmark. It will also consider the potential for additional green space or open areas in the downtown.

**GOAL 1.** To establish a focal point in the downtown.

- What type of focal point would be appropriate for Downtown Mason?
- Should any of the following facilities be considered as part of a focal point? Gazebos, bandstands, picnic tables, benches, ponds, fountains, special effects lighting, public restrooms, playground equipment, flowers, memorial plaques (e.g. veterans memorial), murals, etc.?
- What is the best location for a focal point?
- What are alternative locations for a focal point?

**GOAL 2.** To increase the amount of green space and open space in the downtown and/or to better utilize existing green space. [The park in the southwest corner of the intersection of Main Street and Mason-Montgomery Road will be eliminated as a result of the intersection improvement project soon to be constructed.]

- Where would additional green space best be located in the downtown?
- What type of green space should be planned and/or what types of activities/facilities should be proposed for the green spaces?
- Should the City plan some public green spaces at or under the new bridge on Mason-Montgomery Road? Where and what?
- How can existing green spaces be enhanced? [Lighting, signage, seating, flowers, trash receptacles, etc.]
- Can these proposed green spaces be connected to existing parks in the City? If yes, how and where?



GOAL 3. To capitalize on the Muddy Creek corridor by somehow incorporating it into the downtown.

- Are there any opportunities for restaurants along the Creek, picnic areas, walking paths, etc?
- If so, where? [What about the residential area along the south side of East Main, east of Mason-Montgomery Road? These lots are extremely deep, going all the way to Muddy Creek.]
- How can access to Muddy Creek be achieved? {Any opportunities with the new bridge construction project?}

GOAL 4. To establish "Gateways" into the downtown. A "gateway" would serve as an entry portal into the downtown, with signage, landscaping, greenery, statuary, decorative lighting, etc.

- In what locations could gateways be designed?
- What should the gateways consist of?
- Should gateways be expanded to include the entire City?
- If yes, in what suggested areas?

**DOWNTOWN MASON VISIONING WORKSHOP**  
**REPORT OF FOCAL POINT AND/OR GREEN SPACE GROUP**  
September 19, 2001

The participants in this visioning session summarized their conclusions and recommendations as follows:

**GOAL 1.      *To establish a focal point in the downtown.***

1.      What type of focal point would be appropriate for Downtown Mason?

It was thought that most cities were planned with a central gathering area, at downtown center, a central plaza with a fountain or some feature, a place where pedestrians can gather, walk, converse. Mason did not develop this way, but now has the size and revenue to create such a space.

It was suggested that the new Municipal/school development is the new focal point in Mason. The building design will have a federal look and include a plaza, a clock tower, a fountain with waterfalls, and landscaping that is carried down the street to the new bridge.

It was suggested that the downtown should incorporate the new municipal building into the downtown because of its connectivity with bike paths and landscaping, and use the area as parking for the Heritage Festival because it will be a gathering spot and an easy walk to the Downtown.

It was suggested that incorporation of the new Municipal building area into the downtown might reduce the need to undertake a major transformation of the downtown area, and that less invasive techniques could be used in the downtown.

The intersection of Reading Road and Main Street appears to provide an opportunity to make intersection improvements and to create a focal point. The Speedway parcel is prominent and could easily accommodate a clock tower.

One person felt the focal point should accommodate speakers at the Heritage Festival.

2.      What facilities should be considered as part of a focal point?

The facility selected should be unique and part of our image. It should be approachable.

A gazebo type structure should be incorporated for speakers at the Heritage Festival.

Benches should be placed in various gathering points along the downtown area.

It is thought the features to be incorporated in the new municipal building should be carried throughout the downtown area. There seemed to be general agreement that a clock tower should be considered for a focal point in the Reading Road/Main Street area.

There seemed to be some dissatisfaction with the lighting in the Downtown, but nothing was really said, as though the group all were in silent agreement about something.

It was suggested that traffic lights mounted on poles at the side of the street would add quaintness and eliminate some of the overhead wires.

3. What is the best location for a focal point?

The intersections of Reading Road/Main Street and Main Street/Mason Montgomery Road are not currently pleasing or efficient. Improvements at both locations should include a focal point.

The Reading Road/Main Street intersection should be considered for a traffic solution that is used throughout Europe and in many cities in the US – a roundabout.

Since something like this takes up a big area, the intersection may have to take out some buildings (possibly including the Speedway, insurance building, the shopping center).

If a roundabout is not feasible, possibly a modification of the idea could be created that would incorporate a center island focal point.

The Speedway station parcel is owned by Marathon and seems to turn over every three years. It was suggested that while this property is quite prominent and that while 21,000 to 24,000 cars pass through the downtown daily, this property has not been extremely productive. It was noted that Marathon will not negotiate for the sale of the property. This would restore safety to the intersection and enable left hand turns to West Main Street, which are currently prohibited.

Pedestrian crossings at this location are not safe.

The Main Street/Mason-Montgomery Road intersection improvements will improve the intersection for traffic, but the area is not large enough to accommodate a focal point in the center of the street. The improvements will completely use the vacant lot on the southwest corner by Just for Kids Dance Academy (#24) and will take half of the public parking lot on the northwest corner by Buskar Bakery (#4). The Reber Auto Body & Repair building (#5) on the northeast corner will be removed; however, the entire lot will not be needed and this could be used as a focal point/greenspace area.

Some in the group felt that the old Municipal Building should be leveled and the area used as a focal point.

The two lots between Fifth Third Bank (#64) and DePriest Antiques (#65) could accommodate a focal point area and the lot used for 5/3 parking could be relocated to the rear area of the lots.

The vacant lot between Angelo's Pizza (#35) and Bauer Insurance (#36) is vacant and used only for Christmas tree sales. This could be a greenspace or incorporated into a focal point area.

The library is in a central location and improvements there could be continued. Some thought the library grounds are not large enough to accommodate a focal point.

The area around the Opera House and the Library has a lot of history to it.

4. What are alternative locations for a focal point?

Behind Main Street along the Muddy Creek

The Indiana and Ohio Railway line was discussed. It was suggested that a depot along the rail line could become the focal point. It was suggested that the Turtle Creek Railroad could be established between the downtown and Lebanon.

**GOAL 2. *To increase the amount of green space and open space in the downtown and/or to better utilize existing green space.***

Where would additional green space best be located in the downtown?

Some people felt that the old Municipal Building should be leveled and the area used as a greenspace.

The two lots between FifthThird Bank (#64) and DePriest Antiques (#65) could accommodate a greenspace area and the lot used for Fifth Third Bank parking could be relocated to the rear area of the lots.

The vacant lot between Angelo's Pizza (#35) and Bauer Insurance (#36) is vacant and used only for Christmas tree sales. This could be a greenspace area.

The area between the library and the Opera House could be a greenspace requiring the demolition of the insurance building.

The Shopping Center next to the Speedway has a deep parking lot that could incorporate greenspace and carry the landscaping theme found across the street at the library.

St. Suzannes Church is considering a building project which could open up the front of their church lot for greenspace. Since they are just in the planning stage, it would be a good opportunity to begin discussions.

The Reeber Auto Body & Repair building (#5) on the northeast corner of Main Street/Mason-Montgomery Road will be removed as part of the improvements to the intersection; however, the entire lot will not be needed and this could be used as a greenspace area.

There are two multi-family buildings located to the south of Main Street and to the west of Mason-Montgomery Road. The first building will be taken as part of the road improvements to Mason-Montgomery Road. It was suggested the City should seriously consider taking the second building for greenspace purposes and to provide connectivity to S. East Street/Short Street.

South of Main St. and east of Mason-Montgomery Road contains long narrow parcels extending from Main St. to Muddy Creek. It was stated that the area is typified by steep slopes that come almost to the backs of the commercial and residential buildings. It was suggested the City acquire all or a portion of this steep slope area for greenspace. One member suggested the area would provide connectivity to King's Mill Road and other parks.

2. What type of green space should be planned and/or what types of activities/facilities should be proposed for the green spaces?

It was suggested by some that the entire downtown should be developed as parkland.

It was suggested that the City should widen sidewalks and create a series of pocket parks along the downtown to encourage pedestrian use. These gathering areas could include benches, flowers and other landscaping, and picnic areas.

It was suggested that a greenspace park area join Mason-Montgomery Road to Reading Road south of Main Street. It was noted that several in the group had found the paved path from the cemetery across the foot bridge to S. East Street/Short Street and wondered if this kind of connectivity could be continued.

3. Should the City plan some public green spaces at or under the new bridge on Mason-Montgomery Road? Where and what?

There was discussion about proposed enhancements to the bridge. It was stated that any changes to the plan would require a change order at this point and the full cost would be placed on the City rather than the County. It was suggested that once the bridge is built, the changes could be bid out and the cost would be less to the City. Committee members seemed excited about extension of the Mason-Montgomery Road landscaping across the bridge into the Downtown.

4. How can existing green spaces be enhanced?

This committee strongly encouraged the City to remove overhead wires in the downtown and put them underground. It was noted this would double the cost (of some aspect of the project).

5. Can these proposed green spaces be connected to existing parks in the City? If yes, how and where?

Along Muddy Creek.

**GOAL 3. *To capitalize on the Muddy Creek corridor by somehow incorporating it into the Downtown.***

1. Are there any opportunities for restaurants along the Creek, picnic areas, walking paths, etc? If so, where? How can access to Muddy Creek be achieved?

It was thought that parking lots and walking areas should be incorporated along Muddy Creek, especially to the east and west of Mason-Montgomery Road.

One member stated that the Sam & Fischer Attorney's building (#23) used to be known (or still is) the "haunted hotel." It was suggested this location would offer dynamic views and interesting

community history and should be used as a restaurant.

**GOAL 4.** *To establish "Gateways" into the Downtown. A "gateway" would serve as an entry portal into the downtown, with signage, landscaping, greenery, statuary, decorative lighting, etc.*

1. In what locations could gateways be designed?

The bridge on Reading Road.

The new bridge on Mason-Montgomery Road.

The intersection of East Main Street and Kings Mill Road

West Main Street and Mason Road (at large white residential building)

2. What should the gateways consist of?

Landscaping

Monument Signage

3. Should gateways be expanded to include the entire City? If yes, in what suggested areas?

Possibly the intersection at Reading Road/Tylersville Road

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## 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. The City of Mason does not have a full-time manager in place to facilitate the activities of the board and committees of a local revitalization program. Because of this, Mason will be faced with establishing consistent program momentum, balancing community expectations with organizational realities and identifying appropriate issues to pursue.

### Observations

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

- a) The stakeholders of Mason are proud of their community.
- b) Mason is experiencing rapid growth.
- c) There is an absence of an organized merchants association.
- d) There appears to be a good relationship between the stakeholders and the city administration.
- e) Professional services are available in the downtown area.
- f) Unity appears achievable between the "old" and "new" Mason.
- g) There does not appear to be enough communication developed between the stakeholders, merchants and city departments.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered and, when adopted by the organization, communicated to committee and organizational members.

- 1) The Mason stakeholders need to concentrate on reconciling conflicting priorities ✓ as well as managing their rapid growth.
- 2) Economically, rapid growth is a good thing, but it must be organized into a cohesive unit to give the opportunity for success.
- 3) Mason needs to work on building a consensus among the stakeholders and the merchants.
- 4) The revitalization effort should develop a focus on the central business district and create an identity for the downtown.
- 5) In order for a downtown program to be effective, the stakeholders must get the community involved along with the city council.

- 6) The stakeholders need to sit down and complete a comprehensive plan for revitalization of the downtown business area. Residents, merchants, and city officials must buy into the plan in order to reach success.



# Promotion

As one of the four points of the Main Street Approach, promotion is essential to the success of the revitalization effort. Without a strong promotional element in the work plan, it will be difficult for the group to generate long-term support.

Successful promotion accomplishes two things:

- It describes the progress and vitality of downtown to the general public, including shoppers, visitors, and “downtowners” [employees, retailers, government officials and property owners].
- It describes the success of the revitalization program. It provides a communication link between the Mason revitalization program and the public, a link that lets the group tell its story in its own way.

## Observations

- a) The committee for the revitalization of Mason is eager to see the downtown successful.
- b) There is a low turnover in shop owners and also in residents of Mason. Civic pride is obvious, and Mason has a quality of life and safety that would encourage growth and participation in both residential areas and the business areas.
- c) The central downtown business area has a low vacancy rate.
- d) Mason has a mix of long-term residents and new residents.
- e) Mason has a good business community.
- f) Mason is located near both Cincinnati and Dayton. Mason’s proximity to I-75 and I-71 as well as King’s Island, The Beach, and golf and tennis opportunities can lead to wonderful opportunities to get the tourist business into the downtown.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered, and when adopted, communicated to committee chairs and organizational members.

- 1) Brochures should be designed to promote downtown walking tours and the history and heritage of Mason to capitalize on these assets.

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- 2) The school system, potential for employment, and proximity to the Interstate should be utilized in promoting Mason as a desirable community in which to live and work.
  - 3) The committee should market the downtown to the local residents first, and then expand and market Mason as a tourist destination. Special events need to be developed to bring residents and visitors to the downtown area.
  - 4) Youth activities should be developed since The Beach and King's Island both bring a youthful audience to the area.
  - 5) The stakeholders need a market driven strategy to reach visitors and residents alike.
  - 6) Mason should continue to maintain their quality of life and that "hometown" feel.
  - 7) Cross promotion and joint advertising among the existing and new businesses would be desirable to build a unified image.
  - 8) Some type of media campaign through an existing or new newsletter should be explored to communicate with and promote the downtown.

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# Design

Good design is more than just the appearance of downtown storefronts. Design refers to all of the visual aspects of the designated revitalization area from buildings and pedestrian areas to merchandising and advertising graphics that are used in promotion. A consistently high level of quality in all aspects of design will improve attitudes towards revitalization.

## Observations

The following describes the Resource Team's observations of the design elements of the City of Mason.

- a) Mason has a wonderfully rich historic area of commercial buildings.
- b) Mason has the space for additional parking configurations that would lend themselves to additional traffic downtown.
- c) Mason's streetscape has been improved and appears to be maintained.
- d) Mason does have a few properties in the downtown that need be re-designed into usable space either as green space or in-fill construction.
- e) Mason already has design guidelines in place which have positively affected their infill areas and made good use of those spaces. These guidelines have taken into consideration previous preservation "mistakes" and have formed a progressive preservation ethic.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered, and when adopted, communicated to committee chairs and organizational members.

- 1) The stakeholders need to address the issue of parking. There is room for additional parking and a committee needs to sit down, study the issue, and make recommendations. The traffic patterns also need to be monitored and perhaps changed to accommodate and encourage downtown revitalization.
- 2) A façade improvement plan can be implemented to enhance the historical context of the downtown.
- 3) Mason appears to have several gaps or voids where buildings once stood. These spaces could be made into parks or used for correctly designed in-fill buildings.
- 4) The committee will need to study the replacement issue for the loss of the post office and city hall in the downtown area. These two offices are major generators of downtown traffic. They need to be replaced with an appropriate use that will also generate pedestrian traffic.

- 5) Mason will need to concentrate on maintaining their historic fabric. This fabric is a pedestrian generator in the form of tourists and, if it is allowed to degenerate, Mason will lose an opportunity to reach the tourism market.
- 6) The committee needs to work with the city offices and design committee in changing the current parking requirements in the city to make the downtown area more user friendly.
- 7) The historic business district may be eligible for the National Register of Historical places. This listing, along with local preservation ordinances, may help protect these commercial buildings and promote the heritage tourism marketing.

# Economic Restructuring

Economic Restructuring strengthens the community's core existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is 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 on-going task for Mason.

## Observations

The following describes the Resource Team's observations of the economic conditions of the City of Mason.

- a) Prosperity is indicated by the number of banks that appear in the central business district of downtown Mason.
- b) Mason seems to have a strong economic base upon which to build these revitalization efforts.
- c) The merchants have a strong sense of entrepreneurship to increase competition and allow for new growth.
- d) The City of Mason gives the feeling of an upper income community which assists in the flourishing of new businesses and the expansion of current businesses.
- e) Mason is fortunate to have Yost Pharmacy as a downtown anchor. The hometown feel of the pharmacy is far superior to one of the large chain drugstores.
- f) There is a low turnover in shop owners and also in residents of Mason. Civic pride is obvious, and Mason has a quality of life and safety that would encourage growth and participation in both residential areas and the business areas.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered, and when adopted, communicated to committee chairs and organizational members.

- 1) Mason needs strong leadership among the merchants to give understanding to the market place and work with new business start-ups.
- 2) Specialty shops should be solicited for the downtown business area to encourage pedestrian traffic. It is not necessary to have franchise shops when individually owned establishments have their own drawing power.
- 3) The stakeholders need to promote a "buy-in" feeling among the current merchants to encourage redevelopment efforts.

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- 4) The old Thriftway needs to be redeveloped for a present day use. Developers should be contacted and asked to submit ideas for re-use.
  - 5) Mason should look into the possibilities of finding a downtown civic meeting space as this will increase traffic in the downtown and bring economic dollars into the area.
  - 6) The downtown committee could form a partnership with the banks in the area to fund façade improvements and assist in relocation expenses.
  - 7) As the downtown revitalization continues, the hours for the various stores will need to be increased in order to draw residents to the downtown area in the evening hours.
  - 8) Mason has a unique layout and very few vacant storefronts which indicate the desirability of relocating new businesses to the downtown business district.

# City of Mason

## Downtown Manager Job Description

Salary: (Salary range set by council)

Civil Service Status: Exempt  
Reports to: City Manager

### General Function

Responsible for the creation and coordination of redevelopment and revitalization initiatives in the Downtown Mason Central Business District (CBD) and the Downtown Mason Redevelopment Focus Area. (See attached maps delineating these two areas). These revitalization initiatives are based on the mission statement of the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee (DMRC): "To revitalize and maintain 'Downtown' as the focal point for the City of Mason by recreating a gathering center providing retail, office, cultural, entertainment, and residential opportunities while preserving Mason's heritage, character, and quality of life." In the course of accomplishing the DMRC mission, the Downtown Manager will serve as liaison between downtown property and business owners, and the City.

### Essential Functions

1. Work with DMRC to plan and implement downtown revitalization initiatives which reflect the DMRC mission and which implement the recommendations made in the Downtown Mason Revitalization Plan and Market Study.
2. Identify and target specific undeveloped, underutilized or underdeveloped properties in the Downtown Mason CBD, and secure technical and financial resources necessary to redevelop or revitalize target properties.
3. Implement the "Main Street" concept to improve the design, organization, promotion and economic structure found in the Downtown Mason CBD.
4. Identify and apply for (OR Assist in identifying and applying for) grants and/or other resources to assist with redevelopment or revitalization efforts.
5. Analyze the costs and benefits of specific tax and financial incentive programs for property owners and businesses in Downtown Mason, and develop a program for instituting these programs as recommended by Administration and City Council.
6. Establish and maintain close relationships with real estate brokers, the Mason Landen Kings Chamber of Commerce, Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, Warren County Development Department, and Downtown Ohio Inc. Identify other contacts involved in the recruitment and retention of retail businesses and coordinate with these contacts to fill vacancies in downtown.

7. Establish and maintain an information system database to track Downtown Mason CBD businesses, facilities and properties.
8. Establish outreach programs to meet with business leaders and to identify and respond to their concerns relative to the Downtown Mason revitalization program.
9. Establish programs to encourage the development of entrepreneurial businesses in the Downtown Mason CBD.
10. Coordinate and promote the activities of the Downtown Mason Revitalization Committee (DMRC) and four subcommittees. This includes preparation and attendance at meetings, minute taking, and communication and coordination with all volunteer DMRC members.
11. Respond to inquires from business prospects, real estate brokers and the general public relative to Downtown Mason.
12. Oversee production of print collateral and other marketing materials designed to recruit new and retain existing businesses in Downtown Mason.
13. Secure financial support and involvement from Downtown Mason property owners and businesses for the Downtown Mason revitalization initiative.
14. Coordinated the development of a downtown merchants association or other downtown organization.
15. Plan and implement special events and marketing and promotional activities in Downtown Mason.
16. Perform other duties as determined by the City Manager on an as-needed basis.

Required Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

- Knowledge of basic economic development principles and local commercial real estate market.
- Knowledge of basic marketing and promotion principles and practices.
- Experience in public and private fundraising.
- Knowledge of local business, regulatory, land use and other planning issues.
- Knowledge of or the ability to gain knowledge of Main Street redevelopment principles.
- Knowledge of or the ability to gain knowledge of the Community Development Block Grant program.



- Self-starter, organized, assertive, enthusiastic.
- Ability to build consensus among diverse groups and organizations.
- Ability to manage and coordinate volunteers and consultants.
- Superior written and oral communication skills.
- Experience with public contract administration including preparation of RFQs and RFPs.
- Ability to develop high quality documents and databases utilizing current hardware and software.

Minimum Experience and Training

Bachelor's degree in public administration, urban planning, business administration, marketing, economics, political science or other related field, plus a minimum of two years of experience in government or business in a capacity which would be of benefit in fulfilling the duties of this position; or

Any equivalent combination of training and experience including past work experience or accreditation through the National Development Council, Economic Development Institute, Council for Urban Economic Development, and or Certified Economic Developer designation which provides the required skills, knowledge and abilities.