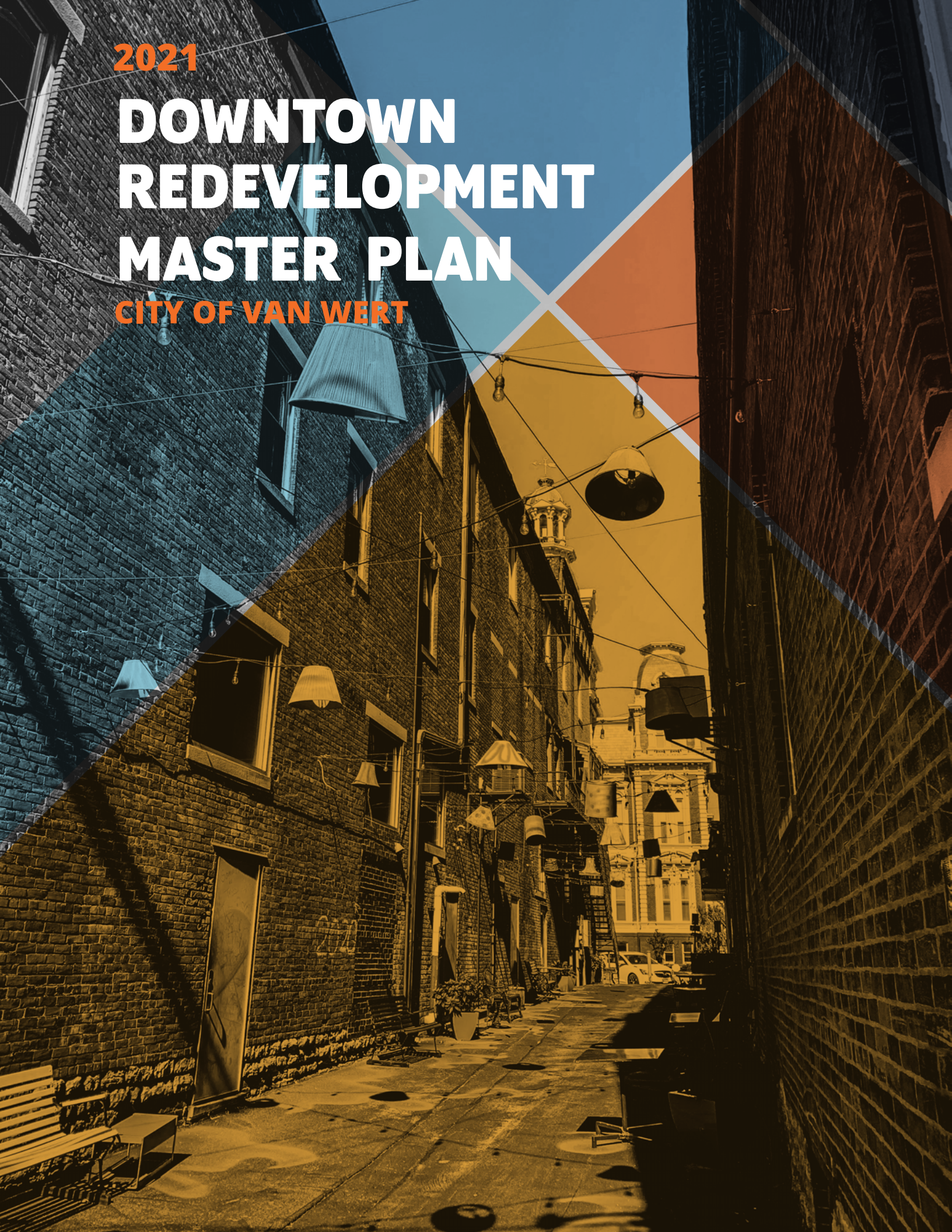


**2021**

# **DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN**

**CITY OF VAN WERT**





## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Thank you to the steering committee members, stakeholders, community members, staff, and officials who invested their time and expertise in the creation of this plan for the future of the City of Van Wert's downtown.*

### Steering Committee

Stacy Adam  
Seth Baker  
Hall Block  
Gary Clay  
Jay Fleming  
Cindy Hurless

Chuck Koch  
Thad Lichtensteiger  
Ken Markward  
Bill Marshall  
Amanda Miller  
Mitch Price

Adam Ries  
Chet Straley  
Joanne Thatcher  
Mark Verville  
Hope Wallace  
Evan Purmort

### PREPARED FOR:

This plan was prepared for The Van Wert County Foundation as a community grant to the City of Van Wert, Main Street Van Wert, the County, and all the individuals and organizations who are committed to the positive revitalization of the downtown for generations to come.

### AS A GRANT FROM:



### PREPARED BY:



# Statements of Support

---



Bodies have skeletons. Cars have chassis. Buildings have frameworks. Each serves as the starting point to which various parts are added. None of them contain all the parts of the whole, but without them, the whole would be ineffective, incomplete, or simply not exist. This document does not try to provide every detail, but to serve as a starting point in the process. I invite everyone to use this plan like a roadmap to help chart their journey in our never-ending quest to move Van Wert Forward.

**Ken Markward** - Mayor, City of Van Wert



Main Street Van Wert is proud to support and advocate for the strategic implementation of The Downtown Van Wert Redevelopment Master Plan. The public space improvements proposed in this plan are a catalyst for endless opportunities in downtown Van Wert. We all have a common goal of preserving and revitalizing our downtown, which we can achieve when working together and supporting each other's missions to make Van Wert a vibrant community to live in.

**Mitch Price** - Executive Director, Main Street Van Wert



Downtown is the very heart and soul of our community - it is our identity. Through years-long efforts of Main Street Van Wert and other local organizations, the people of Van Wert have rekindled hope and liveliness downtown that has begun to restore that identity. The Van Wert Forward project, a multi-phase development project led by The Van Wert County Foundation, will restore select buildings and reimagine them as mixed-use properties. Now, with this plan that builds on the goals of Van Wert Forward, I see a unified vision for downtown ahead with all voices at the table and all hands at the ready. What a time to be in Van Wert!

**Hall Block** - Property Manager, The Van Wert County Foundation



As the Van Wert Area Economic Development Corporation Executive Director, I have extensive knowledge of this transformational initiative. The Downtown Van Wert Redevelopment Master Plan directly aligns with our team's mission to promote and retain our existing businesses, design and implement solutions to drive investment, and facilitate the creation of new jobs in Van Wert County. We recognize that a vibrant downtown is a powerful resource for revitalization and provides physical, social, cultural, and economic benefits. We believe working together as partners in community development is an effective way to attract workforce, build community, and encourage economic growth. We fully support this plan's initiatives as these public realm enhancements support future business growth.

**Stacy Adam** - Executive Director, Van Wert Area Economic Development



# Statements of Support

---

The Van Wert County Foundation's vision is to create a well-resourced and thriving quality of life for our community. We do this by supporting purposeful endowments, inspiring collective growth, and building initiatives for our community. In 2019, we launched Van Wert Forward as a platform to invest with courage and confidence - restoring and developing our downtown's core assets and revitalizing the heart of our community. This project was designed to build vibrancy - in a collective effort with local partners, professional advisors, and partnering projects such as this Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan. Formally adopted by The City of Van Wert, this Master Plan functions as a decision-making tool for the many organizations, businesses, and individuals who shape our community's future. The Van Wert County Foundation provided grant funding and administrative resources to create this plan as a gift to the City of Van Wert, Main Street Van Wert, and our partnering community development organizations. Onward!



**Seth Baker**

Chief Executive Officer  
The Van Wert County Foundation

## **Grant funding provided by the following funds administered by The Van Wert County Foundation.**

Lee R. & Nellie Bonnewitz and Alice B. Andersen Memorial Fund

Sarah J. Balyeat Memorial Fund

Carmody Family Memorial Fund

Harold B. & Dorothea F. Cully Memorial Fund

Mary Irene Eisenhauser Fund

Oscar & Norma C. Feigert Memorial Fund

Flickinger Memorial Trust

The Gleason Fund

Walter A. Hoffman Memorial Fund

Charles L. Ireland Memorial Fund

Runser Memorial Fund



# Table of Contents

## **01 PROJECT PURPOSE**

**8**

About the Plan  
Plan Elements  
Planning Process  
How to Use This Plan  
Additional Plan Integration Methods

## **02 UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT**

**16**

Existing Conditions Analysis  
Community Engagement  
Market Trends and Best Practices  
Key Outcomes

## **03 FRAMEWORK**

**36**

Plan Structure  
Purpose Lens  
Plan Pillars  
Objectives and Actions

## **04 PRIORITY PROJECTS**

**46**

Courthouse Plaza  
Linear Park @ Town Creek  
Streetscape Improvements  
Fountain Park Improvements  
Business Coaching and Support Program  
Business Staging Program  
Mural Arts Program  
Community Canvas Project  
Art Bench Project

## **05 IMPLEMENTATION**

**74**

Objectives and Actions







# 01

## Project Purpose

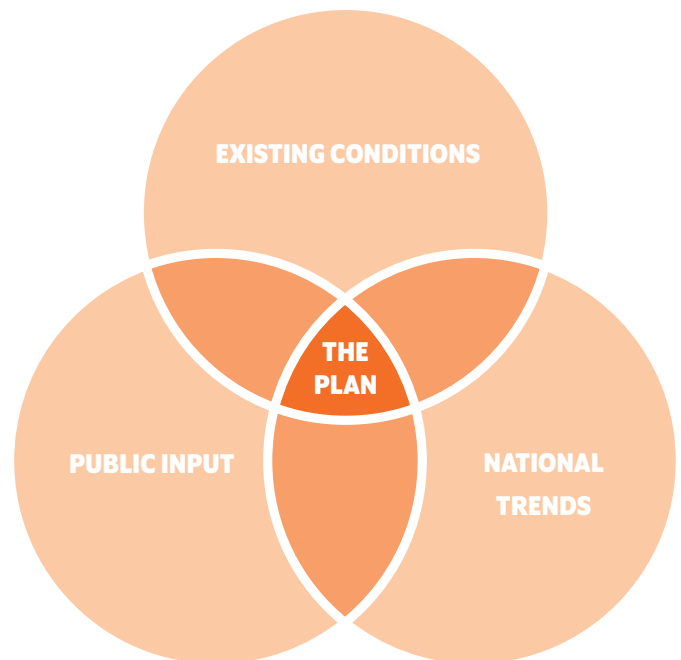
## About the Plan

In 2020, the Van Wert County Foundation and Main Street Van Wert initiated a process to create a Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan. The project evaluated the wants and needs of current and future residents in the downtown area, identified target development areas that are currently vacant or underutilized, and developed a vision and strategy for these areas that will respond to opportunities in the regional marketplace. Additionally, the Plan is intended to guide the City of Van Wert, Van Wert Forward, Main Street Van Wert, and other community organizations in the development of public projects that will enhance the pedestrian realm and private projects that will help current and future businesses, and help all stakeholders in the community foster productive relationships to help transform downtown.



### Plan Goals + Objectives

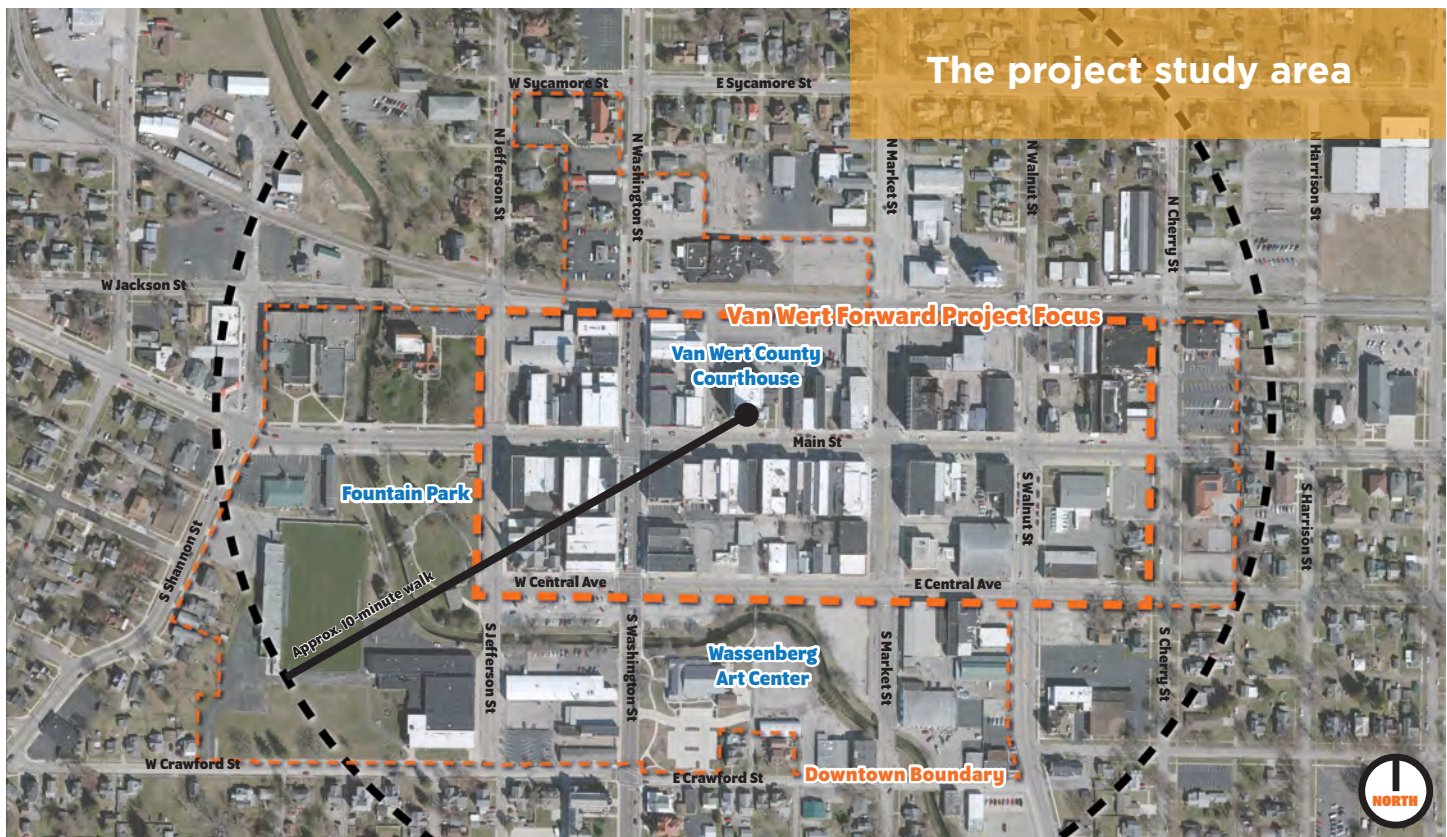
- ◇ Establish a uniform vision for downtown Van Wert
- ◇ Identify the opportunity for new catalyst projects that will generate new City revenue while enhancing the character and brand of the community
- ◇ Support future development through creative redevelopment strategies and incentives
- ◇ Create a plan that has broad public and private sector support
- ◇ Support future funding initiatives (e.g. state and federal grant programs)



*Left: The courthouse is an important landmark and was a core area of focus throughout the planning process.*

*Above: This venn diagram represents the three key plan inputs considered throughout the planning process.*





This map shows the primary and secondary project study areas.

## PLAN ELEMENTS

Many elements come together within the Plan to create a holistic and informed blueprint for future growth and development. These elements were established from quantitative and qualitative analyses alongside public input and include the following:

### Existing Conditions Analysis

The existing conditions in the study areas were examined including current land use, zoning, gateways, connections, current tenant mix, parking, streetscape, and other area-specific investigations. With an understanding of the existing conditions, the planning team and steering committee could make more informed decisions and goals for the downtown area.

### Public Engagement

Throughout the planning process, the planning team facilitated discussions among community members to delineate the common direction and goals for the downtown.

Community issues and opportunities made apparent during discussions were used to formulate both public and private projects, addressing and capitalizing on under-served and growth opportunity areas.

### Committee & Stakeholder Guidance

The planning team also facilitated discussions among steering committee and stakeholder meetings. Issues and opportunities made apparent during discussions were used to validate findings from analysis and community engagement. These dedicated community members helped create the project framework and championed the plan on behalf of their community.

### Plan Pillars, Objectives, + Strategies

After analyzing all of the foundational elements of the Plan, four Pillars were developed to guide the implementation of the vision for downtown Van Wert. Each Pillar has Objectives associated with it which are long term goals for the community. Each Objective will be achieved through several actions as detailed in the Plan.

Priority Projects + Recommendations

The plan includes design concepts and implementation strategies for key priority projects which illustrate the development potential of downtown. These priority projects are based on the market research and public engagement which occurred in the planning process. These concepts outline the future development and redevelopment which may occur in the downtown with an additional layer of detail on the design, opinion of cost, and implementation.

PLANNING PROCESS

The Master Plan process spanned approximately nine months and included both technical research and public involvement, resulting in an intuitive, informed, and proactive document.

The planning process was developed at the beginning of the project. This process helped guide project activities, many of which were carried out concurrently in order to maintain the overall project schedule.

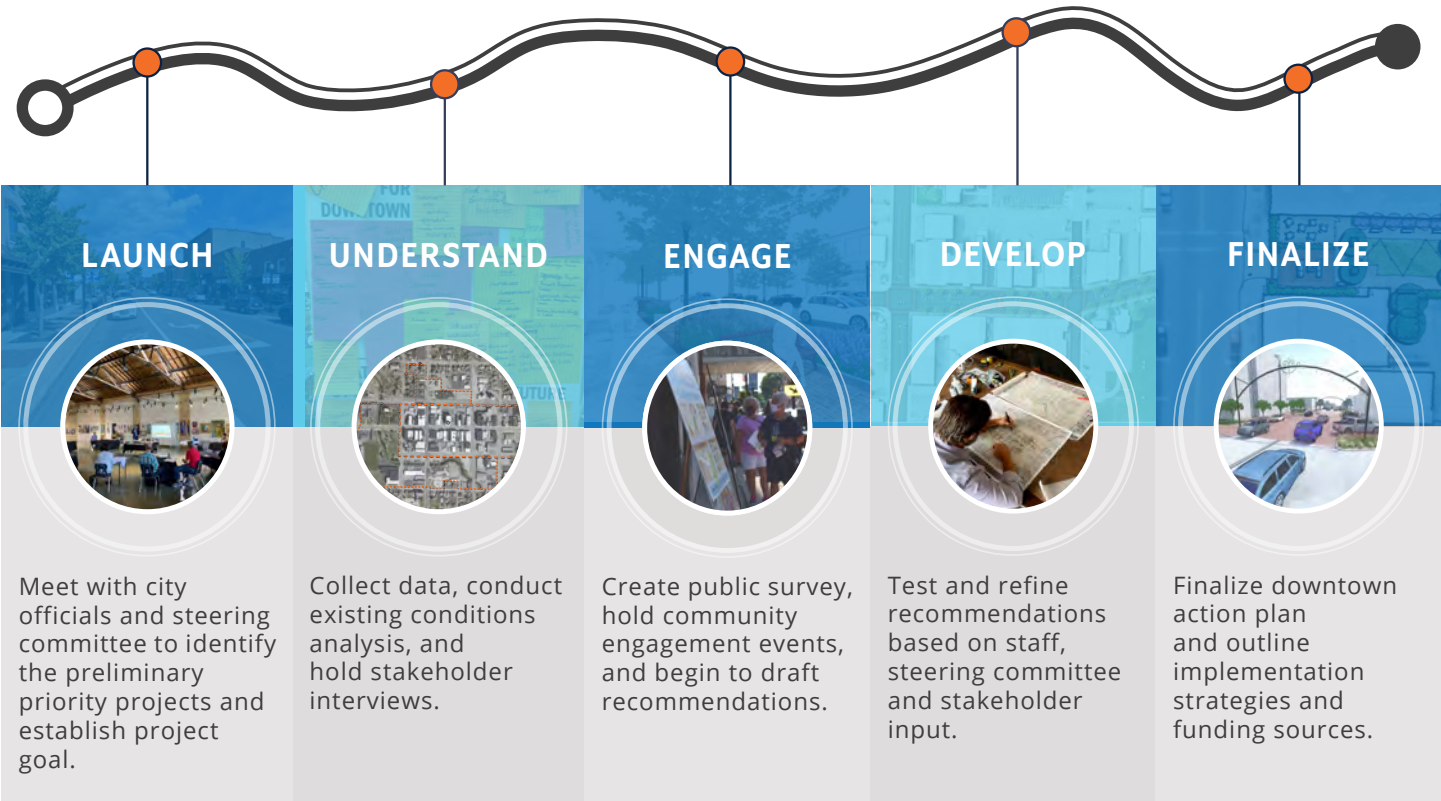
The following is a brief summary of each step in the planning process.

Project Launch

During this initial step in the planning process, the scope of services was defined for the planning team, consisting of contracted planning consultants and key members of The Van Wert County Foundation, Main Street Van Wert, and City of Van Wert staff. Members of the Steering Committee were identified and invited to participate during the project launch.

Understanding the Context

Throughout the Summer of 2020, OHM and the rest of the project team collected and analyzed data about all aspects of the City and the downtown, as well as studying regional and national trends. This information provided an understanding of the current conditions in Van Wert and informed the recommendations found in the Plan. Existing Conditions were reported to the Steering Committee for general feedback and verification.



The image above illustrates the project process and timeline followed to complete the Plan.



## Community Engagement

Concurrently with the existing conditions assessment, public input was sought using a combination of Steering Committee meetings, stakeholder interviews, public meetings, on-line survey, and socially distanced in-person engagement to gain insight into the concerns and needs of Van Wert residents.

## Develop the Plan Framework

This step in the planning process involved developing recommendations for public and private improvements in the downtown. Priority projects were identified as both area-wide programs and amenities and targeted development in the district. There was also an iterative process allowing the Steering Committee and the general public an opportunity to review and provide feedback on a draft version of the Plan. This is a key step in ensuring the Plan is supported by the public and that its recommendations are successfully implemented in the future.

## Finalize Recommendations

Once the Plan components were completed, compilation of the Plan document began. The final Plan is a concise, coherent, and easily comprehended document. It is meant to be read and used by any Van Wert community member and its straightforward design should aid in the swift implementation of its recommendations.

As a final step in the downtown planning process the Plan should be reviewed and approved by the City to ensure the plan aligns with and supports the City's vision and planned capital projects and community programs.



*Fountain Park is an important public space within the downtown and was examined and planned for as part of this project.*

## HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

The Plan is a guiding document for downtown Van Wert over the next ten years. It is the culmination of a steering committee and stakeholder engagement process to identify what are the key issues and opportunities in the downtown and identify key priority projects for the future.

The Plan is intended to serve as a guide for the Van Wert community to work collaboratively to realize the vision of the Plan. Although this Plan and the concepts have been created with extensive input and review from the steering committee and local stakeholders, it is meant to be flexible to accommodate for future opportunities and constraints that may arise. The following offers guidance on how each entity should use the Plan.

### City and County

City and County staff and leadership should be cognizant of the contents of the Plan when preparing annual work programs, budgets, capital improvement plans, and economic incentives. As future plans are updated, the concepts and recommendations within the Plan should be appropriately incorporated. This Plan should also be used as a tool to communicate with the general public and the development community on the priority initiatives for downtown Van Wert and the implementation efforts necessary to achieve those initiatives.

### Other Public Entities

Other public and semi-public organizations (e.g. Wassenberg Art Center) should familiarize themselves with the Plan and appropriately align their planning and funding efforts within the area to collaboratively support the initiatives which directly correspond to their own missions. These public entities should seek opportunities where there are shared common goals between an organization and the planning efforts that can help implement the plan.

### Private Entities

Private property owners and developers are integral in carrying out the initiatives of this Plan. This is because their individual projects and developments in downtown can come together to greatly impact the overall character and vibrancy of the City. Private entities should use the Plan as guidance for their own individual projects and as a starting point for talking with City Staff and the community.

### Van Wert Community

The Downtown Van Wert Redevelopment Master Plan is meant to unify the community around a vision for the downtown. The community members, as part of the steering committee and stakeholder groups, were integral in the creation of this Plan and will also be very important in implementation efforts. The community, including residents and business owners, should continue to support and encourage implementation for this Plan by local leadership.

## WHO WILL USE THIS PLAN?

### CITIZENS

(residents, business owners, developers)

*Use the plan to submit development proposals to the City*

### CITY COUNCIL

(elected by citizens)

*Use the plan to guide policy decisions regarding land use, zoning, and development proposals.*

### PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

(citizens appointed by City Council)

*Use the plan to provide policy recommendations to City Council*

### CITY AND COUNTY

(Planning & Development Services)

*Use the plan to communicate with the public and development community on the priority initiatives for downtown Van Wert.*



## ADDITIONAL PLAN INTEGRATION METHODS

The following are some additional methods in which the plan pillars, recommendations, and priority projects outlined in this plan can be implemented

### Annual Work Programs and Budgets

Individual City departments (e.g. Service and Parks) and administrators should be cognizant of the contents of the Plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets. Objectives in this Plan should be prioritized when reviewing downtown budgets to maximize the implementation of goals voiced by the public and included in this Plan.

### Development Approvals

Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals, including rezoning and conditional use permits, should be a central means of implementing the Plan. Decisions by elected and appointed officials should reference relevant Plan Objectives and Strategies. City plans and codes should also reflect and support the vision and recommendations in the Plan.

### Capital Improvements + the general fund

The City's plan for Capital Improvements and use of the General Fund should be prepared consistent with the Plan's policies and infrastructure recommendations. New improvements that are relevant to recipients of the General Fund (ie: Parks, Building and Planning, Engineering, etc.) as well as other tax funds such as Street Improvements should be capitalized to implement the recommendations of this Plan.

### Economic Development Incentives

Economic development incentives should be reviewed periodically to ensure consistency with the Plan and current legislation. New state ordinances may develop that change the economic landscape for funding projects in Ohio. This Plan should be leveraged to apply for funding which requires a set of guidelines or area plan, such as the Downtown Revitalization District. For a list of incentives that are available please reference the following:

[vanwerted.com](http://vanwerted.com)

### Private Development Decisions

Property owners and developers should consider the goals and strategies of the Plan in their land planning and investment decisions. Public decision-makers will be using the Plan as a guide in their development deliberations such as zoning matters and infrastructure requests. This Plan should be used as a tool by the City to clearly communicate to property owners and developers the overall vision for growth in downtown Van Wert.

## PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

### GUIDE...

...the community in evaluating proposed public, private, or joint projects

### INFORM...

...current and prospective property owners as well as developers on desirable growth patterns

### DEVELOP...

...a unique vision for the downtown based on its own set of challenges and opportunities.

### MEASURE...

...progress and effectiveness of projects in downtown Van Wert to ensure they strengthen the community as a whole







The background image shows a wooden gazebo with a dark, shingled roof, situated in a park-like setting with trees and a metal railing in the foreground. The image is overlaid with large, semi-transparent geometric shapes: a light blue triangle on the left, a dark blue triangle at the top, and an orange triangle on the right. The number '02' is prominently displayed in white, bold font on the left side, partially overlapping the gazebo's roof.

# 02

---

## Understanding the Context



# 02

## UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

### OVERVIEW

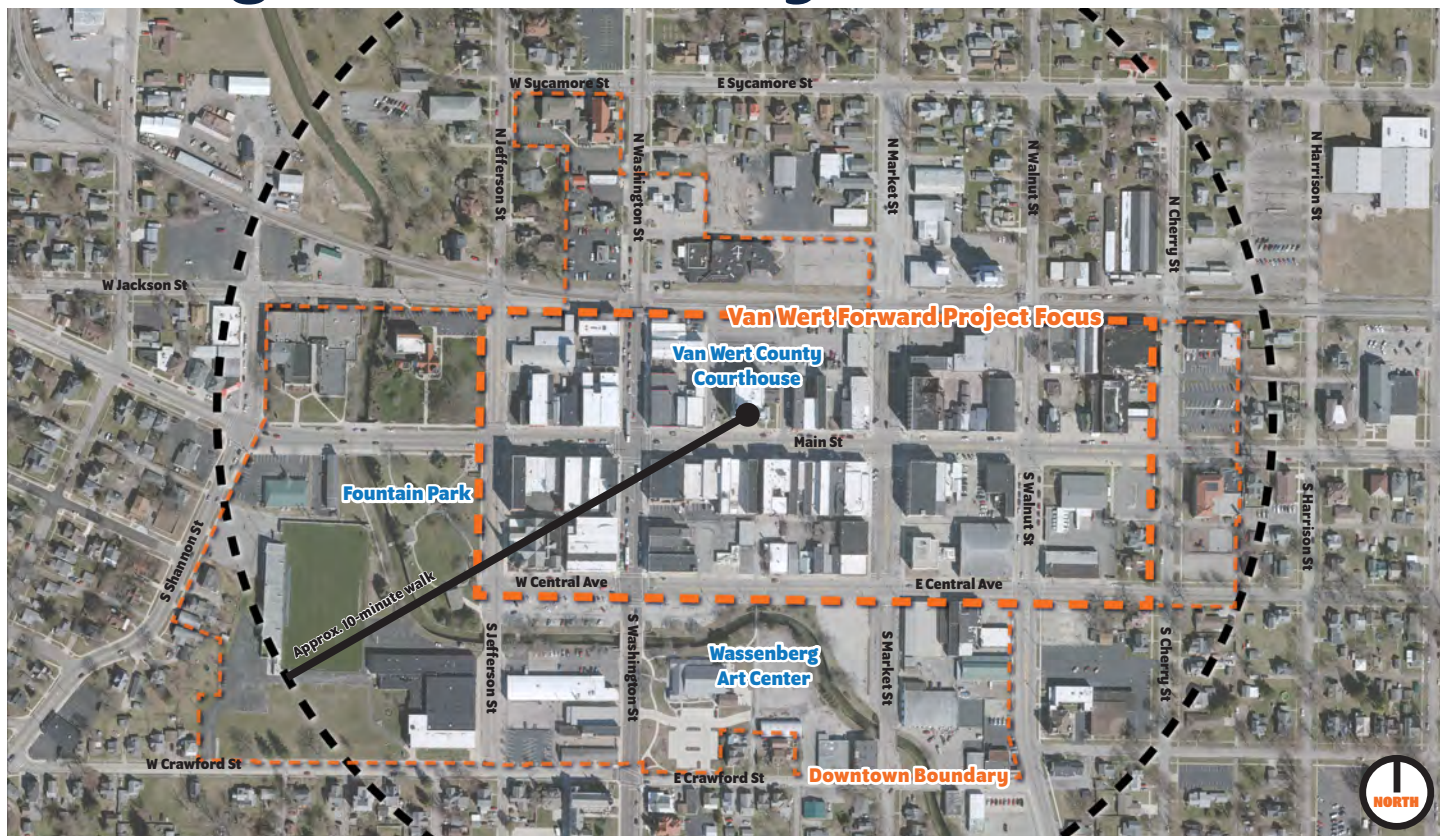
This section of the Plan outlines the key existing conditions and trends that shape the downtown. The purpose of this analysis and the findings within this section of the plan is to create a baseline understanding of the current physical, social, and economic conditions within the study area. The key findings then informed the creation of the plan framework and recommendations outlined in later chapters. Collectively the existing conditions analysis, robust public engagement, generational trends, and national best practices all informed the plan framework.



*Downtown Van Wert has a great collection of historic buildings and a traditional streetscape that contain the foundation for a walkable downtown.*



# Existing Condition Analysis



There are a number of key landmarks within the downtown that are essential places and considered as part of the future framework.

## PROJECT STUDY AREA

The Downtown study area is defined by the most urban core of Downtown Van Wert. The 27.4 acre primary study area boundary stops at Jackson Street to the North, Cherry Street to the East, Central Avenue to the South, and Jefferson Street to the West. The secondary boundary encompasses additional property along Washington Street to the North, an additional half block to the East, the block down to Crawford Street on the South, and the block over to Shannon Street to the West.

## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Van Wert is a community with a rich history. A community with a passion for the arts and entertainment, this Northwest Ohio city is home to the first county library in the United States. Great pride in community, education, and athletics makes Van Wert a great place to raise a family. A historic downtown with a dense urban core is the focus of the redevelopment study, and presents an opportunity to revitalize an important Ohio district/place.

### VAN WERT POPULATION

**10,676**  
(28,759 in Van Wert County)

### POPULATION CHANGE SINCE 2010

**-1.7%**

(true for both Van Wert City, and Van Wert County)



**\$94,847**

### MEDIAN HOME VALUE

(\$109,811 in Van Wert County)  
(\$153,668 in Ohio)



**\$43,196**

### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

(\$51,945 in Van Wert County)  
(\$54,966 in Ohio)

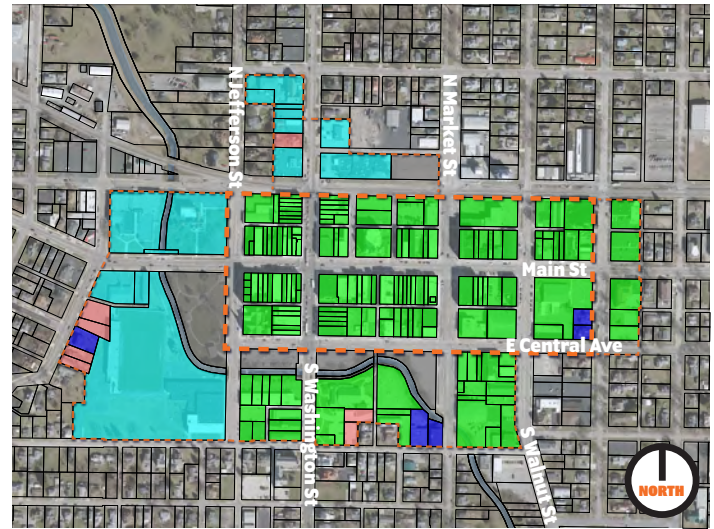
Source: ESRI Business Analyst



## Zoning and Land Use

The Zoning map to the right depicts the five different classifications present within the primary and secondary project boundaries. The primary boundary is primarily a B2 zoning designation, the Central Business zoning district, which allows for most retail and commercial uses, as well as conditional residential uses. The secondary boundary contains other business zoning districts, as well as a few residential parcels on the outskirts of the boundary.

The Land Use map to the right shows the 6 different overarching land use types within the study area. The primary boundary consists of mainly a mixed use/commercial district. Though there are many vacancies across the district today, the existing character is dense and promotes a mixture of uses. There is also a large concentration of government, educational, religious, and other institutional within the area. Fountain Park is the primary open space within downtown. Public parking serving these districts and land uses is primarily on-street parking, and the parking lots behind the Courthouse and along Central Avenue.

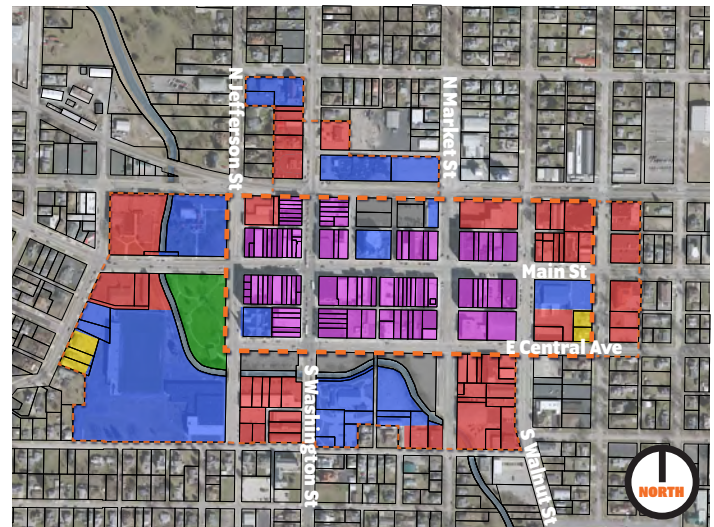


**Zoning Map**

- B2 - Central Business
- B3 - Highway & General Business
- City Owned
- R2 - Medium Density Residential
- R3 - High Density Residential



*View of Downtown Van Wert showing the streetscape and building frontage.*



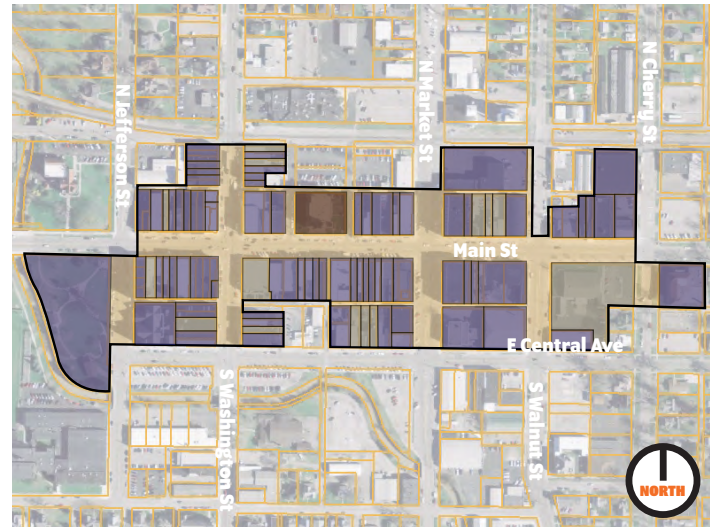
**Land Use Map**

- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Institutional
- Parks and Open Space
- Residential
- Parking



## Downtown Van Wert Historic District

A significant portion of downtown Van Wert was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2020. This designation provides access to additional capital resources from State and Federal programs for qualified rehabilitation work on contributing structures within the district. Contributing structures are those that retain visible pre-1968 historic character. Non-contributing structures are those that were constructed since 1968, or those that have been significantly altered to obscure or remove pre-1968 historic fabric.



### Historic District Map

- District Boundary
- Previously Listed Historic Structures
- Contributing Structures
- Non-contributing Structures

*Image below: Park Place West on the Corner of Main and Jefferson showcases an example of the great building stock downtown.*





## DOWNTOWN IMPRESSIONS

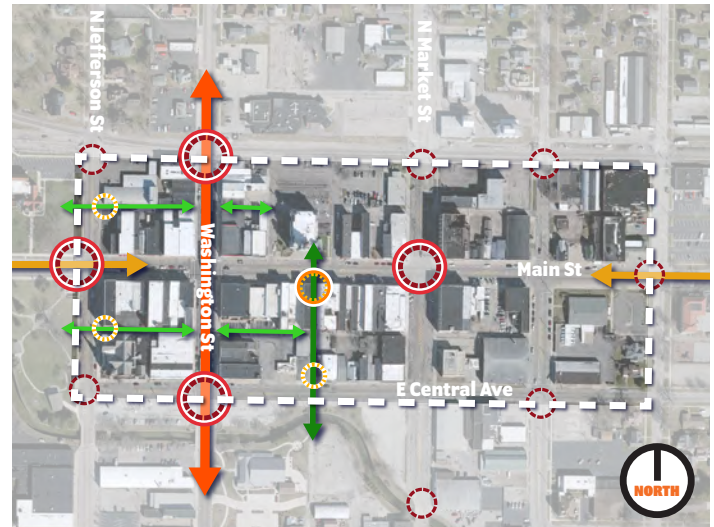
The targeted analysis in this section outlines the issues, opportunities, and the future potential for the downtown.

### Connections and Gateways

The connections and gateways map to the right shows how the planning team analyzed what the current connections are to and within the downtown. The analysis was conducted in two ways: first as a visitor coming to downtown and then as a resident. Where is parking located and available? How do I go from becoming a motorist to a pedestrian, and which paths do I want to use? What amenities and attractions are present in downtown? How do I know when I have arrived? These questions were also posed to members of the steering committee and stakeholders during the community outreach process to understand these components.

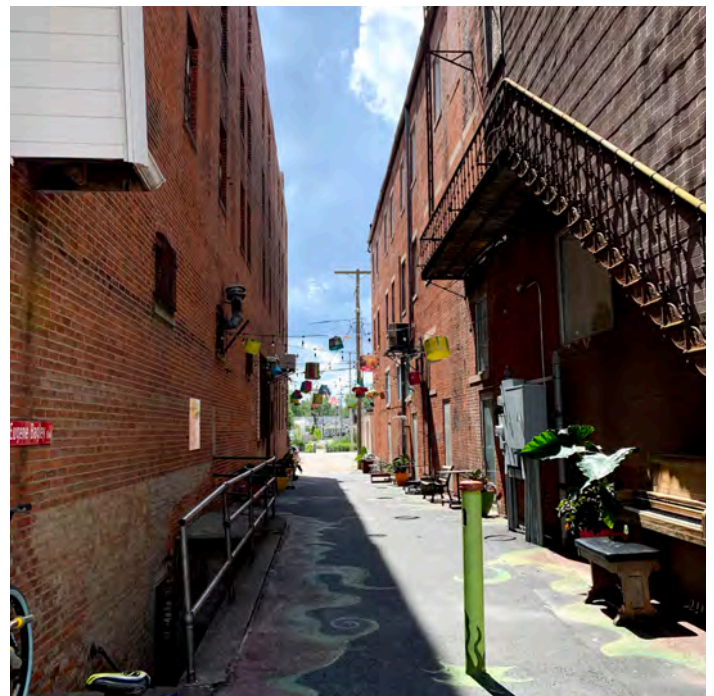
The primary vehicular and pedestrian connections that lead to the core of the study area, coupled with primary and secondary gateways, paint a picture of intuitive streets and strong connections. Primary vehicular connections are by way of Washington Street and Main Street, while pedestrian connections are primarily via Main Street and Washington Street as well as existing alley connections.

Strong gateways exist today on the corner of N Washington Street and Jackson Street as well as the corner of S Washington Street and Central Avenue. Main Street gateways are found at Jefferson Street and on the corner of Market Street. The primary pedestrian gateway at Bagley Alley helps connect residents and visitors alike to offerings of Main Street.



#### Connections and Gateways

- Primary Vehicular Connection
- Secondary Vehicular Connection
- Primary Pedestrian Connection
- Secondary Pedestrian Connection
- Primary Vehicular Gateways
- Secondary Vehicular Gateways
- Primary Pedestrian Gateways
- Secondary Pedestrian Gateways



The above image is a view of the recently completed alley that is pedestrian oriented and adorned with public art.



## Parking and Hardscapes

The following maps show a theme of a dominant hardscape with very limited green space. These factors contribute to an uncomfortable walking environment for residents and visitors.

The Green Space map illustrates a need for green space within the district. Though there is a pocket park in the downtown core, there is a green space desert in many areas of the district. Fountain Park, the park at the Wassenberg Art Center, and the green space in front of the county library are the only places currently with functional greenspace and landscaping.

The Parking map to the right points out that even though parking can be a perceived issue in downtown Van Wert, there are in fact approximately 550 spaces available to the public in the primary study area. These spaces and surfaces also do not have any greenspace components in their current condition, further adding to a concrete dominant hardscape, with limited opportunities for stormwater management.

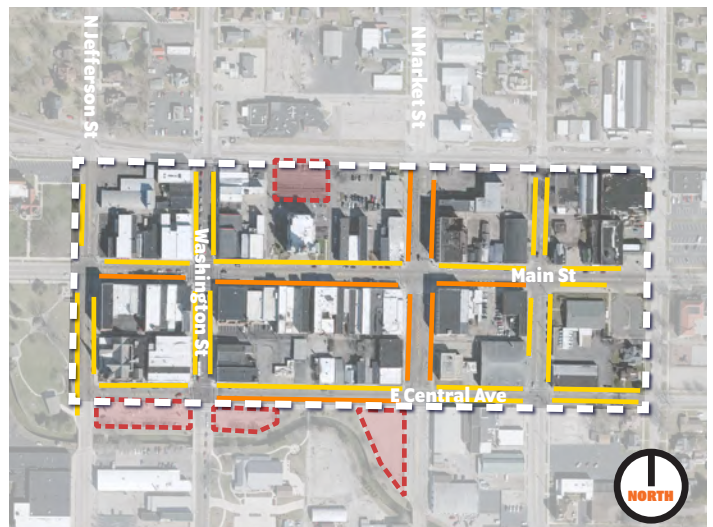


### Green Space

- Formal Green Space
- Passive Green Space



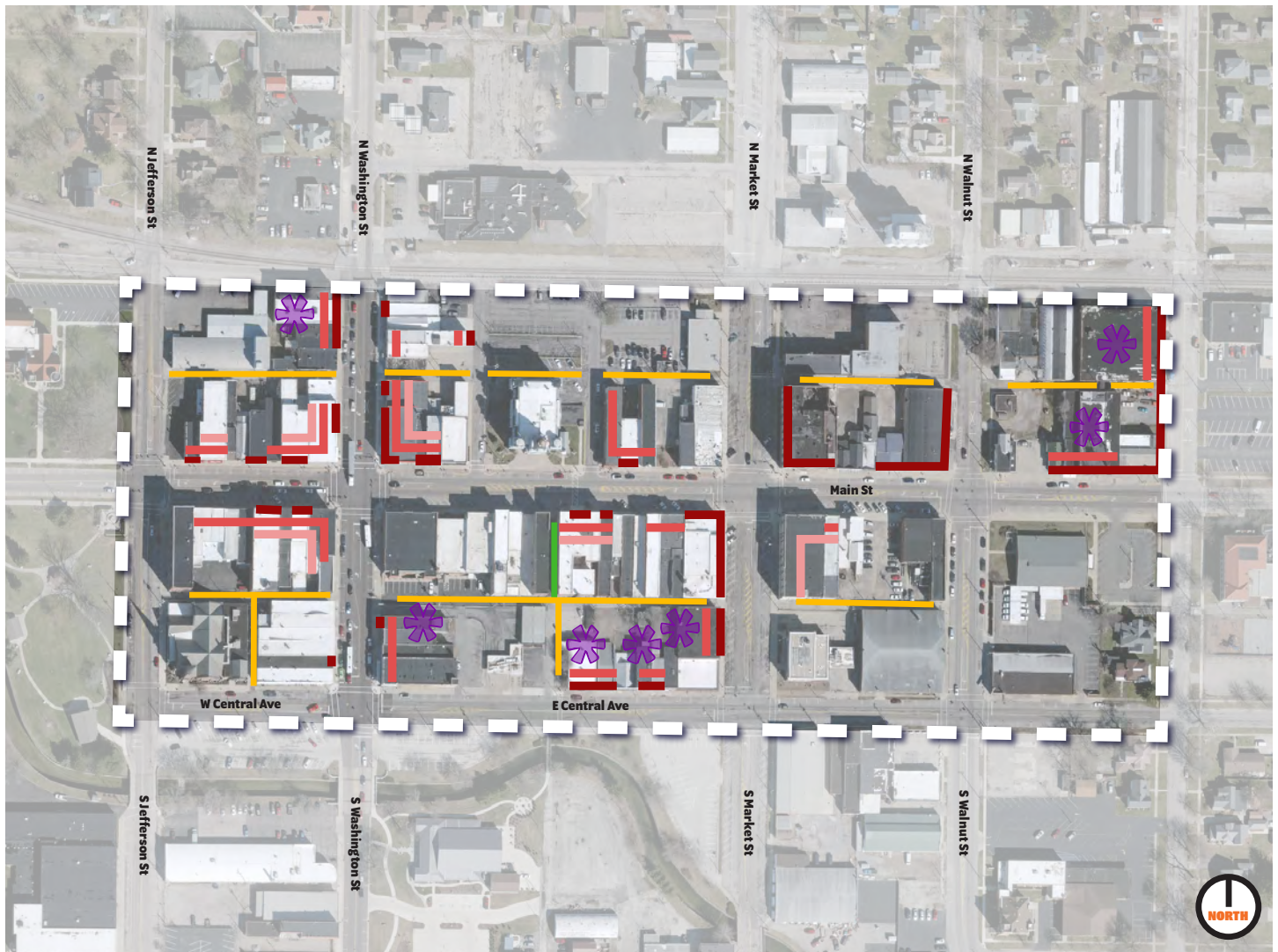
*Greenspace like the space like Fountain Park above is important to provide comfort and texture to the downtown fabric.*



### Public Parking

- Public Lots
- Parallel Parking
- Diagonal Parking





## Walkability

A walkability analysis was conducted as part of the existing conditions analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to evaluate the accessibility and comfort of the pedestrian experience in the downtown. The map above shows that even though there are strong connections throughout downtown, plenty of places to park, and a great mixture of buildings, the pedestrian experience shows room for improvement. The inactive frontages that are vacant or don't have high activity shape the walkable environment. Vacancies and at-risk properties also create challenges for fostering walkability downtown.

### Urban Environment

- First Floor Vacancy
- Second Floor Vacancy
- Third Floor Vacancy
- Pedestrian Alley
- Alley
- ✱ Severe Risk Property

*Note the above graphic was based on current conditions when it was created during the planning process. This condition will change over time, but the image and the outcomes did inform a need to activate the street and downtown at the time the plan was created.*



## Business Mix

As part of the planning process, the consultant team analyzed the existing business mix in the downtown. This included cornerstone industries that are essential to a vibrant downtown: restaurants and dining, coffee shops, gyms and workout facilities, and co-working and incubator and accelerator spaces. While the downtown does have a mix of businesses, its fragmentation and lack of complementary and integrated public spaces hamper its success.

In the restaurant sector, downtown Van Wert features around half a dozen full-service or carryout dining establishments within the downtown core. More so than any other industry in a typical historic downtown, the restaurant industry has been the most challenged by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this, we observed few establishments in the downtown had a robust online presence, between dedicated websites, engagement on social media, or good reviews on popular aggregators like Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Google. Even fewer featured online options for consumers to order their food online or for delivery service, which is crucial to bottom-line success in the pandemic. For dine-in service, few if any establishments had or featured outdoor dining as an option for their patrons. Consumer research through the pandemic has shown customers feel safer and actually prefer outside dining when presented with those options. As such, the dining aesthetic and environment for success was and remains challenged.

Our experience and market research has shown that two coffee shops provide the right level of market differentiation and capacity to attract more consumers to a downtown district. A single coffee shop currently operates in the downtown, that currently offers online ordering and has a robust presence on the web and in the community. It also features a drive-thru location on the south side of town. The introduction of greater market capacity for coffee and coffee products can be a strategy for growth in the downtown.

Gym and workout facilities are sparse in the downtown district, with the most notable available option being the 24-hour YMCA, just outside the limits of the historic district. Gyms, particularly ones that offer 24-hour operations, have the ability to bring a vast number of consumers into a downtown area that can feed businesses within the district and also provide a reliable customer base for health-based businesses opening in the downtown. While the building specifications for a gym or workout facility can be more rigorous than other uses, there are identified building stock that would be applicable for that use.

Co-working spaces present a unique opportunity, particularly in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently, there is limited flexible office space within the downtown. The public library is in close proximity to the district and would offer a usable space to perform work, as well as the existing coffee shop. However, consumer trends during COVID are now leaning toward private, lockable offices in conjunction with shared workspace, which presently is unavailable in the downtown.

All of these factors partnered with the vacancy map below, shows that with a limited tenant mix, a fragmented downtown comes to light.

# Community Engagement

## OVERVIEW

One of the key elements that informs the development of the plan are the ideas and aspirations of the public. An extensive public engagement effort was conducted by the planning team to solicit ideas and develop the vision for future growth in the downtown. These ideas, values, and aspirations provided the foundation from which the plan framework was formed.

Through the engagement process approximately 600 community members contributed their ideas for how the downtown should be planned in the future.

The following section encompasses the insight from various committees, stakeholders, community engagement sessions, and public surveys. In a more digital time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, various types of engagement were used to keep the project team, client team, and residents safe, while soliciting input through multiple online and virtual channels.

## 633 ENGAGED PARTICIPANTS

- 18 STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS
- 45 STAKEHOLDER MEETING ATTENDEES
- 75 COMMUNITY OUTREACH SESSION PARTICIPANTS
- 415 ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS
- 25 VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE ATTENDEES
- 55 PRIORITY PROJECT ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

## Initial Steering Committee & Stakeholder Perspectives

Comprised of eighteen individuals, the Steering Committee met regularly throughout the planning process. The role of the Steering Committee was to guide the development of the final Plan by providing firsthand insight on the community and vetting recommendations and concepts presented by the planning team. Additionally, the Steering Committee members were asked to act as stewards of the Plan, passing along information to their friends, family, and neighbors.

At the first Steering Committee meeting, the planning team engaged the committee in several activities and exercises to begin to identify key projects in the downtown area. The first exercise was a discussion of the issues and opportunities with the downtown. Committee members wrote down what they believed to be the most critical issues facing the future of downtown Van Wert and what the greatest opportunities are for the future of the downtown. Additionally, committee members were tasked with sharing their big ideas that they felt could help usher downtown Van Wert into a new era of excitement and intrigue.

Similarly, community stakeholders from many private and public sectors and interest groups were asked to share their ideas on the issues, opportunities, and dreams for downtown Van Wert. Like the steering committee, the stakeholder groups were united in their ideas and desires for the district, and further solidified the need to help guide the downtown forward.

The following are key takeaways from the steering committee and community stakeholders:



## Key Issues

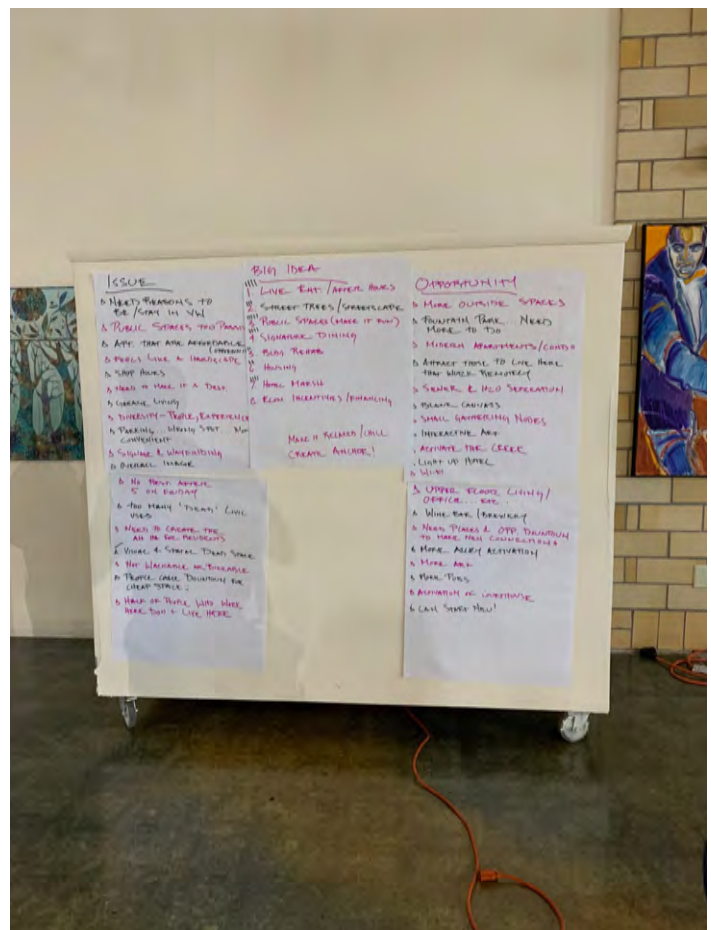
- » No real reason to visit and stay in downtown
- » Shop hours are very limited
- » Not much signage or wayfinding
- » Dominated by hardscape, dead space, and poor building condition
- » Parking – not convenient
- » Not walkable or bikeable
- » Half the people who work downtown don't live in Van Wert

## Key Opportunities

- » Blank canvas, generally with a low cost to acquire buildings
- » Utilize Fountain Park more
- » Good building stock for apartments and condos
- » Hotel Marsh
- » Vacant upper floors for office and living
- » Alleys could be activated
- » Common community aspirations and pride

## Big Ideas

- » Public spaces - *make it fun, interactive, and for everyone - more events!*
- » Entertainment – *need a bar/brewery to make downtown after hours - live music!*
- » Signature Dining – *a destination restaurant for the region - a flagship eatery!*
- » Hotel Marsh – *bring it back to life again - excitement around courthouse!*
- » Streetscape improvements – *less hardscape, more green space and trees - pedestrian amenities!*
- » Housing – *getting people to buy into “urban” Van Wert living - grow our population!*
- » Economic incentives and financing – *how do we get tenants to downtown? - diverse mixture of services!*



Results from Steering Committee Meeting 1, where community members expressed their issues, opportunities, and dreams for downtown Van Wert.

## Mobile Community Meetings

Public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic was a new challenge for everyone. Though more traditional methods, such as setting up at large community events or holding a large open house, were not possible during this time, other engagement methods that resulted in meaningful dialogue and feedback were discovered.

A series of large boards were placed around downtown Van Wert, mainly unsupervised, where residents were able to provide feedback. Whether at a coffee shop, the Farmer's Market, or at Fountain Park, residents were able to weigh in with their thoughts. Visual preference questions were asked to help the project team get a feel of what was desired in terms of art, public spaces, various business, a number of services, housing options, and events.

The primary outcomes of the exercise revealed residents desired public space where you could gather, eat, play, and host events. Streetscape amenities such as sidewalk dining and public art along with street and building art were also highly desired. Respondents also felt strongly about exploring various housing options in the district such as larger apartments/condos with balcony or patio spaces. A desire for a taco/tequila bar or a brewery also received very positive feedback.

## Online Survey Feedback

As the in-person outreach was launched, residents had the opportunity to complete a nineteen question survey regarding their views on the future of the downtown. A total of 415 residents completed the online survey. The responses gathered from the survey, along with the other outreach, have been analyzed and compared with existing conditions data to shape the key findings and pillars of this plan.



*Community engagement during a public event where residents were able to leave notes and place dots on desired scenarios and character images.*



The primary findings from the survey reinforced the findings from the existing conditions analysis and other community impressions. Van Wert residents visit downtown very often, but likewise leave the community frequently for services they can't get downtown, such as shopping, eating, events, recreation, and entertainment. Thus, a strong support for additional public and commercial spaces as well as streetscape improvements came to light from the responses.

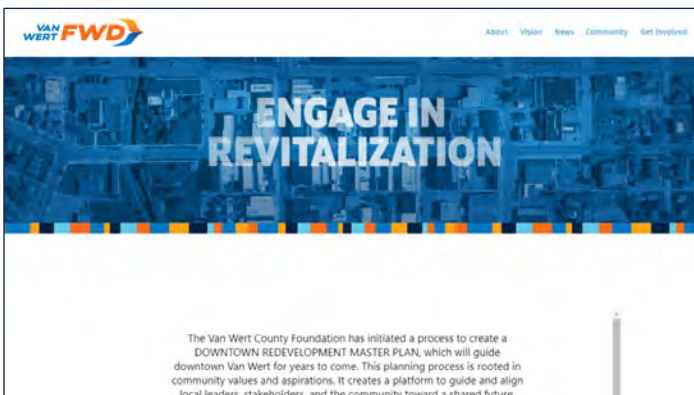
Residents also felt if their housing choice was available downtown or closer to it, they would consider living in the district, which further solidified the narrative that a mixture of housing along with additional public and commercial spaces could help downtown Van Wert thrive.

The survey provided invaluable feedback for the direction community members would like to see for the future of the downtown.

## Project Priorities, Objectives, and Actions

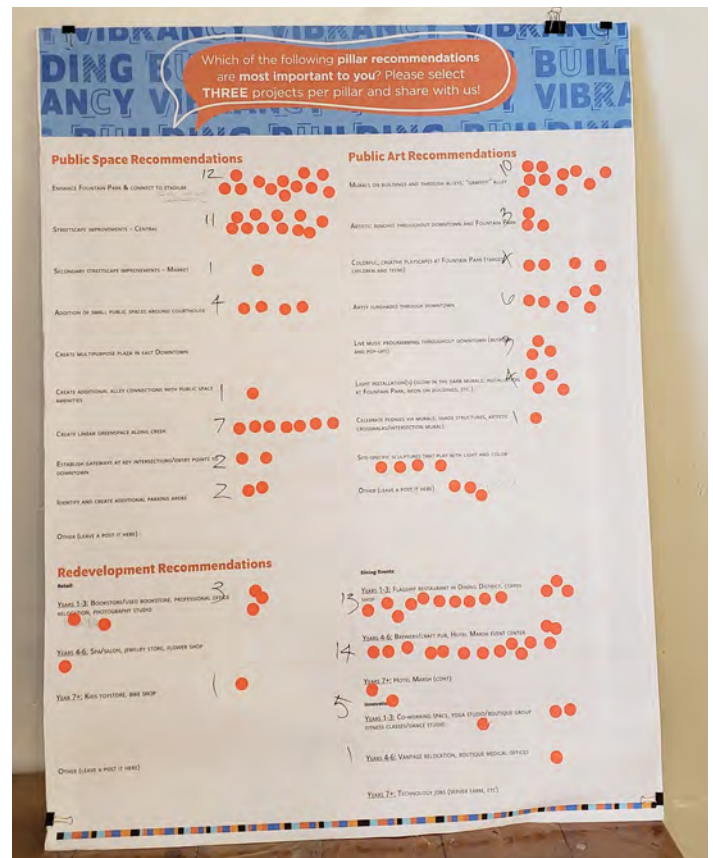
In order to create an implementable plan, objectives were formulated with actions identifying how to accomplish each objective. The Steering Committee, along with The Van Wert County Foundation and Main Street staff, was able to assist the project team in the prioritization of these strategies. The committee was given an overview of the complete existing conditions analysis and the community engagement outcomes to help make informed decisions about plan priorities. In total, there were twenty eight recommendations the committee was to discuss and evaluate. Each participant was asked to identify their top three priority projects, along with input on their overarching objectives.

As a result of this prioritization activity, the project team was able to use the feedback to create the plan framework and plan priorities. Three project goals, four plan pillars, nine overarching objectives, and thirty-three action items, thirteen of which are priorities, were developed by the steering committee.



Above: Residents were encouraged to participate in an eighteen question survey that The Van Wert County Foundation through Van Wert Forward helped promote and market. Over 400 residents gave their feedback to help shape the future of their community.

Right: The Steering Committee prioritization exercise helped the project team craft the project framework and highlight key plan outcomes.

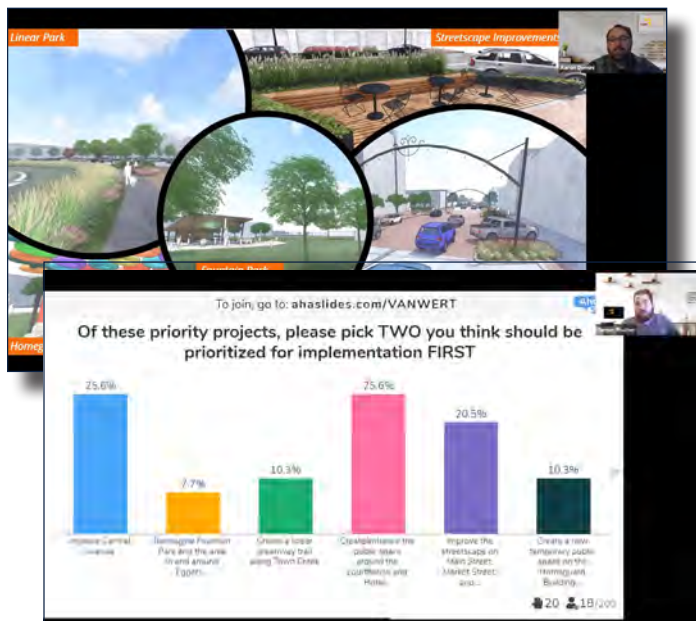


## Virtual Open House

A virtual open house was conducted as the final public engagement session. The consultant team presented the plan framework and priority projects. The community was able to see how the analysis and public input turned into the plan framework and priority projects to continue to move the downtown forward.

Through a presentation, followed by discussion and commenting in the chat room, the project team was able to gauge the general public reactions to these projects and framework. Participants were also able to give input through live polling which provided real time and valuable feedback.

For those who weren't able to attend, the recording from the presentation along with the PowerPoint for was made available online for residents to review, and provide feedback. Approximately fifty residents gave input online.



*Screenshots from the Virtual Open House where residents were able to weigh in on priority projects and participate in live polling. Valuable feedback was received from those able to make the meeting in person and those making it up themselves with the presentation recording.*

# Market Trends and Best Practices

The insight in this section is based on national and regional trends in development and demographics. On a general scale, these trends complement the wants and needs of current Van Wert residents; but also, these trends refer to the future population of new residents that Van Wert should aim to attract.

## Millennials, Baby Boomers, and beyond

Millennials, born 1980-1999, and Baby Boomers, born 1945-1964, make up the largest share of the nation's population at 53%. As a result, the trends for each of these generation groups have a large impact on the development and housing markets. Baby Boomers value housing that is close to entertainment, retail, and medical services while Millennials look for locations that are diverse and offer plentiful entertainment and employment opportunities. Both generations tend to prefer housing that is lower maintenance and will sacrifice large living spaces for better access to amenities.

In short, Millennials and Boomers are looking to relocate to more walkable communities. Generally, this entails the ability to walk to basic grocery and pharmacy needs, various restaurants and entertainment, ample jobs, and recreation opportunities. Walkable neighborhoods are not only popular, but also stable. During the recent national recession, homes in walkable communities resisted the damaging effects of the housing market collapse and largely retained their property values. With the percentage of Baby Boomers and Millennials shaping the market it is imperative to plan for their needs at the local level and as part of community development plans and strategies.

Those in the Gen Z cohort closely share the values of Millennials. Proximity and access to amenities and entertainment, along with the desire for lower maintenance housing options, indicate that what was true for Millennials will likely also be true for Gen Z'ers. Though much is still unknown about the economic nuances this new generation will bring to the market, the Gen Z cohort will likely mirror the Millennials closely in opinions that effects planning for cities and towns across the globe.



## Place First

Current national trends indicate a swing in how individuals choose where to live. A growing number of Millennials and Gen Z'ers choose where they want to live first and then resolve the logistics of finding employment and housing in their desired location. The younger generations seek destinations that offer a superior quality of life and ample amenities.

This quality of life, or satisfaction with one's health, community, employment, and environment, should be considered as part of the development and function of downtown spaces. They have a preference for in-town areas that feature diversity and walkability in close proximity to jobs and entertainment. This is drastically different from past generations who first sought jobs and then moved to the location of their job.

The result of this change is more competition for jobs and housing in areas that have a high quality of life with a diverse array of amenities. A subsequent decrease in the desire to live in suburban areas with limited amenities has resulted for some within the Boomer, Millennial, and Gen Z cohorts.

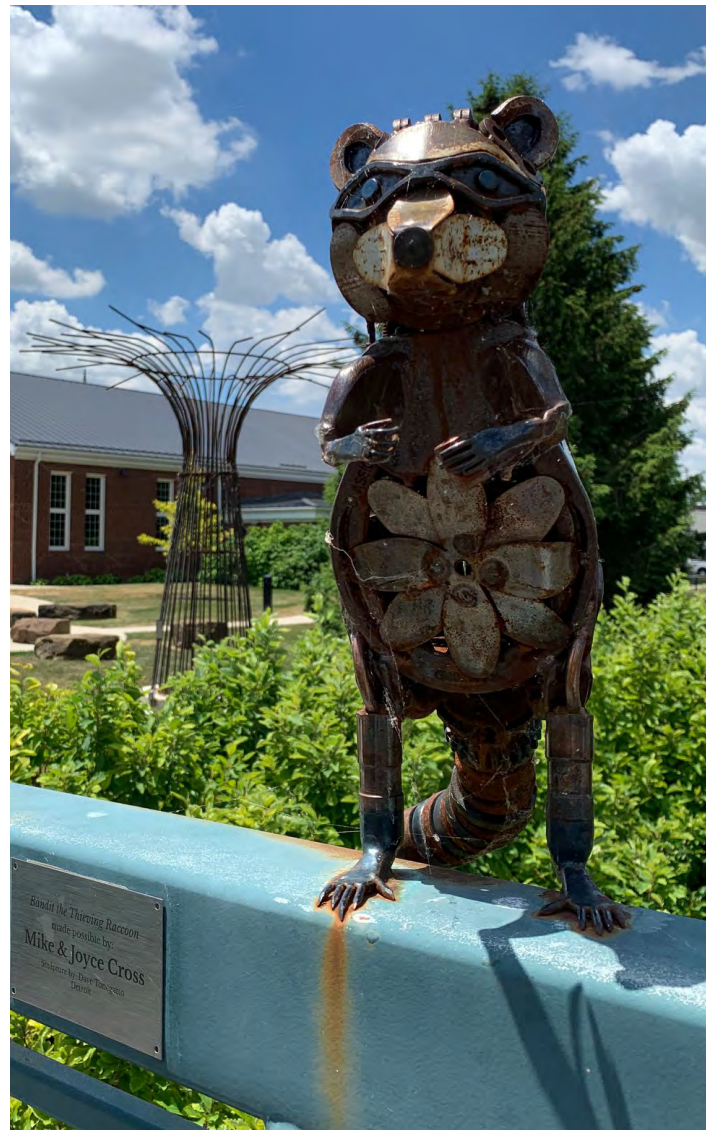
## Buying vs. Renting

While owning a home may be desired by some, current trends indicate that many individuals are more inclined to rent instead. Buying can offer a greater return on investment over time, but carries a significant amount of financial risk as well as maintenance over time. Renting often does not carry the financial risk or maintenance of owning property. Longevity is also an important factor in determining whether to buy or rent. While owning typically involves a long-term commitment from the buyer, renting can offer short or long term living solutions and allows tenants the flexibility to move when desired or needed.

## Household Structure

As household population and structure evolve over time, subsequent changes in housing needs become apparent. The average family size in the United States in 2010 was 2.39 individuals per household. This number has steadily decreased from 3.33 in 1960 due to the Baby Boomer population living longer and Millennials having smaller families than past generations and the Gen Z cohort is likely to continue on this trajectory as well.

Many Baby Boomers no longer have dependents living with them, many Millennials are delaying marriage and have not yet established families, and the Gen Z'ers are now becoming adults and are continuing the trend that Millennials pioneered with smaller and more diverse housing choices. This decrease in family size subsequently decreases the desire for large single-family homes, prevalent in suburbs where an abundance of land is available. There is a need now for a variety of housing sizes and types to accommodate the new trends in household structure. Downtowns provide ideal locations to achieve the necessary amount of this nontraditional housing stock.



*Creative placemaking small art installation outside of the Wassenberg Art Center. The figure rests on a bridge that connects the art center to Main Street.*

## Healthy and Sustainable

Healthy and sustainable initiatives can enhance the overall quality of life in a community, attract talented individuals, and encourage high-quality development. Investments in park space, trails, and other community amenities promote a healthy lifestyle for residents and draw regional visitors. Downtown can increase its sustainability by incorporating these initiatives as well as supporting the long term financial health of its businesses and increasing residential density. Compact, walkable environments like downtown Van Wert have the greatest potential for sustainability.

## Walkability and Connectivity

An emphasis on a complete transportation system allows people to easily travel by foot, bicycle, or car. Factors that influence walkability include pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks, cross walks, wayfinding, and signage. Bicycle connectivity is influenced by bike lanes, multi-use paths, and bicycle storage facilities like bike racks. Communities that are easily navigated on foot are desired as more Millennials want to live in close proximity to employment and entertainment options and the ease and convenience of walkable and well-connected communities is preferred.



*Re-imagining a streetscape through permanent or semi permanent amenities offers valuable pedestrian comforts and needs.*

The downtown provides an excellent opportunity for an increase in non-motorized transportation. Not only does the dense urban framework promote walkability, but also offers an ideal location for a trailhead on a regional bike trail system.

The following themes and best practices are what make downtowns of all shapes and sizes successful and sustainable today. Focusing on the pedestrian experience and finding creative ways to utilize funding and partnerships is what has been helping downtown all across the country revitalize.

## Streetscape Design

The success of a downtown core depends on the vibrancy of its streets. Streets that are safe and pleasant for pedestrians will make Downtown Van Wert a more attractive place to live, work, and visit. Even residents who drive to Downtown Van Wert still walk from their car to local shops and businesses. Streets that encourage patrons to linger and enjoy themselves are important to the success of Downtown Van Wert.

Streetscape design and improvements can be achieved through a range of strategies. A prevalence of street trees in urban environments is important as they provide shade and a buffer between pedestrians and automobile traffic. Some communities in recent years have resisted the addition of trees to their downtowns due to the cost and time involved in their maintenance and the ever-present possibility of disease and storm damage. However, there are few other additions a city can make to its urban environment that equal the positive effects of trees, whether by increased walkability, stormwater mitigation, improved street character, or reduced flooding events.

The wider sidewalks proposed in many streetscape designs inherently lead to narrower traffic lanes. This is a popular trend among cities as narrower travel lanes reduce traffic speeds, increasing the safety for all road users. Other physical improvements - such as sidewalk bump-outs that reduce the distance pedestrians have to cross the street or raised crosswalks that make pedestrians more visible to vehicles - can make downtown streets safer, and thus, more attractive to pedestrians.



Finally, streetscape design that incorporates green infrastructure can help advance downtown environmental strategies. In addition to being visually appealing, green infrastructure such as rain gardens or bioswales can redirect stormwater away from Van Wert's sewer system and reduce the strain on existing infrastructure. Investing in Van Wert's streetscape designs can have a myriad of positive effects on the Downtown.

## Alleyways

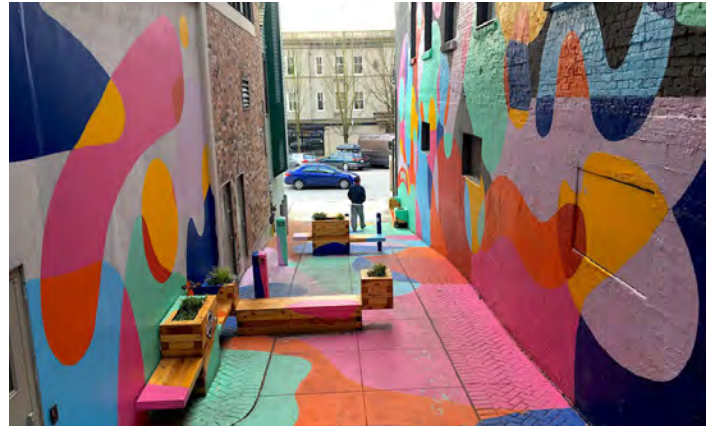
Often viewed as an afterthought to the urban core, alleyways should be considered an important asset in improving the quantity and quality of public space in downtown Van Wert. Much more than access ways for trash collection, alleyways make important physical connections in downtowns, connecting parking lots to businesses, and thereby increasing pedestrian access. Currently, one alleyway in downtown Van Wert has temporary improvements in lighting, art, and other pedestrian amenities, and several other alleys have been identified in this Plan for similar improvements. Transforming the pedestrian experience within the existing alleyway network is important for improving the overall experience for those who visit downtown.

Alleyway aesthetics can be improved through the use of planters and benches, allowing residents and shoppers a change of pace from the busier main streets. Restaurants can utilize alleys to offer a quieter place to eat and visit. Finally, alleys can be activated with programming, including movie screenings or spaces to display public art. Alleys are an important existing asset to downtown Van Wert, and should be leveraged to help raise the overall quality of life.

## Public Art

Improving the bones of downtown infrastructure, whether the street grid or alleyways, is important to creating a safe and pleasant experience downtown. Equally important is incorporating public art throughout downtown as a strong and popular strategy to strengthen the appearance and uniqueness of a place.

Public art can provide a method to showcase local artistic talent while strengthening community ties. Local residents can get together to paint a mural on the side of a blank building or the ground of an alley, activating an otherwise empty space. Sculptors can help design benches, planters, and bike racks. Public art and local artists can play an active role in creating and reinforcing the identity of downtown.



*Alley transformation not only help the aesthetic of a downtown but they also add public space and moments of artistic intrigue.*



*Murals and other forms of art on buildings can show off culture, heritage, color, creativity, and anything else a community values.*

## Public Funding (Best Practices)

Successful streetscape design recognizes that a balance between all modes of transportation - pedestrians, cyclists and automobiles - is crucial for downtown economic success and strengthened quality of life. Also important is the balanced use of tax payer dollars and public funding to successfully implement these initiatives. Public funding can come from state or federal programs and should be heavily leveraged with grants and matching funds to ensure the City's capital improvement budget is used to its full potential.

# Key Outcomes

From the robust existing conditions analysis, community engagement, market trends, and best practices, the planning team was able to identify the key issues, opportunities, and primary outcomes for Van Wert which began to translate into the identification of the priority projects for downtown. The following is the summary of those key findings from the process that were used to inform the recommendations and the plan framework.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

- » Although downtown is dense and intuitive to navigate, the streets are uncomfortable because they lack pedestrian amenities such as shade, light, and shelter
- » The existing connections and gateways are strong throughout the districts, such as pedestrian alleys and large intersections with high potential. Today, there aren't many reasons to walk around downtown, with an overall lack of area identity and no true sense of arrival.
- » There is a great architectural mix of buildings and storefront designs in the district, which results in a very manageable building and block scale.
- » The limited downtown destinations today, coupled with some vacant first floors and many vacant upper floors, leave a lot of room for tenant recruitment and optimization.
- » Hardscape dominates downtown Van Wert. The abundance of sidewalk width, large right of ways, and an abundance of parking spaces, leaves a lot of space to address the lack of areas for gathering and green spaces.
- » Fountain Park is generally loved by the community, but the desire for increased and diverse programming at the park could help downtown thrive.

- » In regard to the existing businesses in the district, there is ample opportunity for coaching, improved partnerships, and increased collaboration.
- » The demand for various types of office space, events and entertainment venues, and flagship eateries are high in the district.
- » Other uses such as fitness facilities, salons, coffee shops, antique stores, book stores, and other similar tenants are sectors which should continue to be fostered or attracted to the downtown.

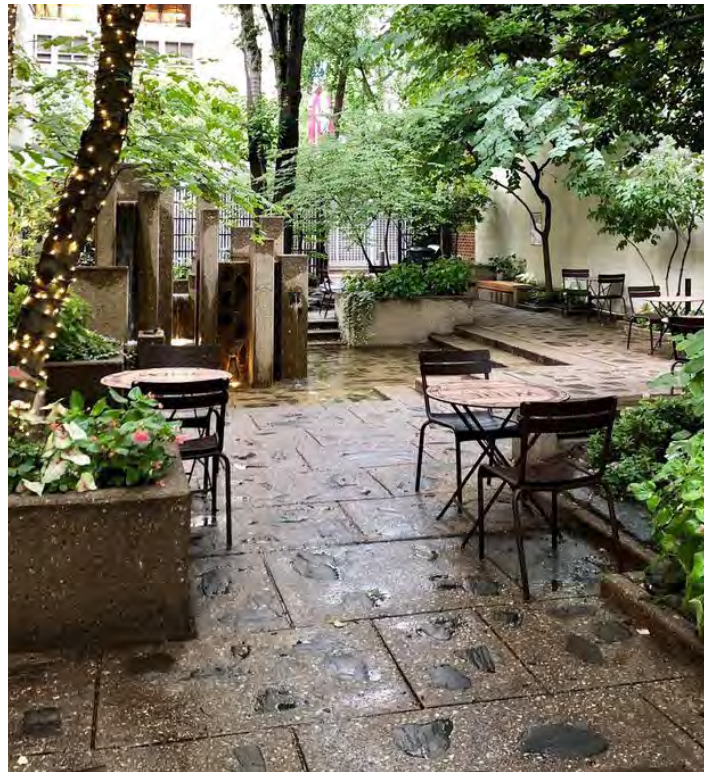
## COMMUNITY INPUT

- » More shopping, restaurants, parks and recreation, and entertainment would encourage residents to visit downtown more often.
- » There is strong support for additional public space, especially areas for play and events/ gathering.
- » Fountain Park is cherished by many, with a desire to continue to improve the space and its events.
- » Many residents are leaving Van Wert at least once per week for basic services or activities such as dining, recreation, shopping, events, etc.
- » Residents rather strongly supported the fact that if their housing choice was available downtown, they would consider living downtown.
- » Existing streets, blocks, and alleys offer huge potential. Added and improved streetscape amenities such as street trees, additional seating, added shade and light elements, and public art have very strong support.
- » Residents enjoy and support the transformation of alleys, and would like improvements similar to that of Bagley Alley to implemented in the district
- » There is a split within the community on whether parking is an issue or not. The consensus is that it needs to be optimized and have wayfinding.

*Images to the Right: Public space and entertainment were identified as important elements to consider as part of the Plan. These elements were integrated into the Plan Framework and Priority Projects which are detailed in the following chapter.*



- » Currently, office space is difficult to find, but the demand for it is high. Co-working space also has strong support, especially in the eastern portion of downtown
- » There currently is not a true business anchor in the district, and the tenant mix has the ability to be improved and there is support for downtown dining and retail variety
- » A flagship restaurant is the most popular answer for downtown development, which could be a brewery/craft pub that would drive energy all day to the district.
- » Overwhelming support for murals in the downtown area, along with other forms of public art and expression.
- » Desire for more live events and spaces to view those events are high. Adding more art and/or music type events have strong support in the community.
- » Grocery was a common written request, something that is currently only available on the edge of town.











# 03

## Framework

## Plan Structure

This section is the foundation of the Plan and includes the plan pillars, objectives, actions, and priority recommendations. The four plan pillars serve as the foundation for the Downtown Van Wert Redevelopment Master Plan. They are derived from the existing conditions analysis and community feedback gathered throughout the planning process. The plan pillars express overarching goals that are valued and desired by the community.

### PROJECT PURPOSE LENS

The Purpose Lens (the WHY) was developed to help you articulate the project purpose, and give focus to the desired outcome. The image on the opposite page is the project purpose lens.

The purpose is the value proposition to the residents, stakeholders, and visitors, regarding the type of experience and opportunities they can expect from visiting Van Wert and its downtown.

It is a powerful tool that can stand as the foundation for the vision, as well as a decision making tool for projects, programming initiatives, and physical changes to the built environment and future programming and policies.

The Purpose Lens informed the development of the project recommendations (the WHAT) found in this Plan. As the recommendations outlined in this document are implemented, it will be important over time to ensure how they are implemented stays in alignment with the purpose lens to stay true to the purpose lens.

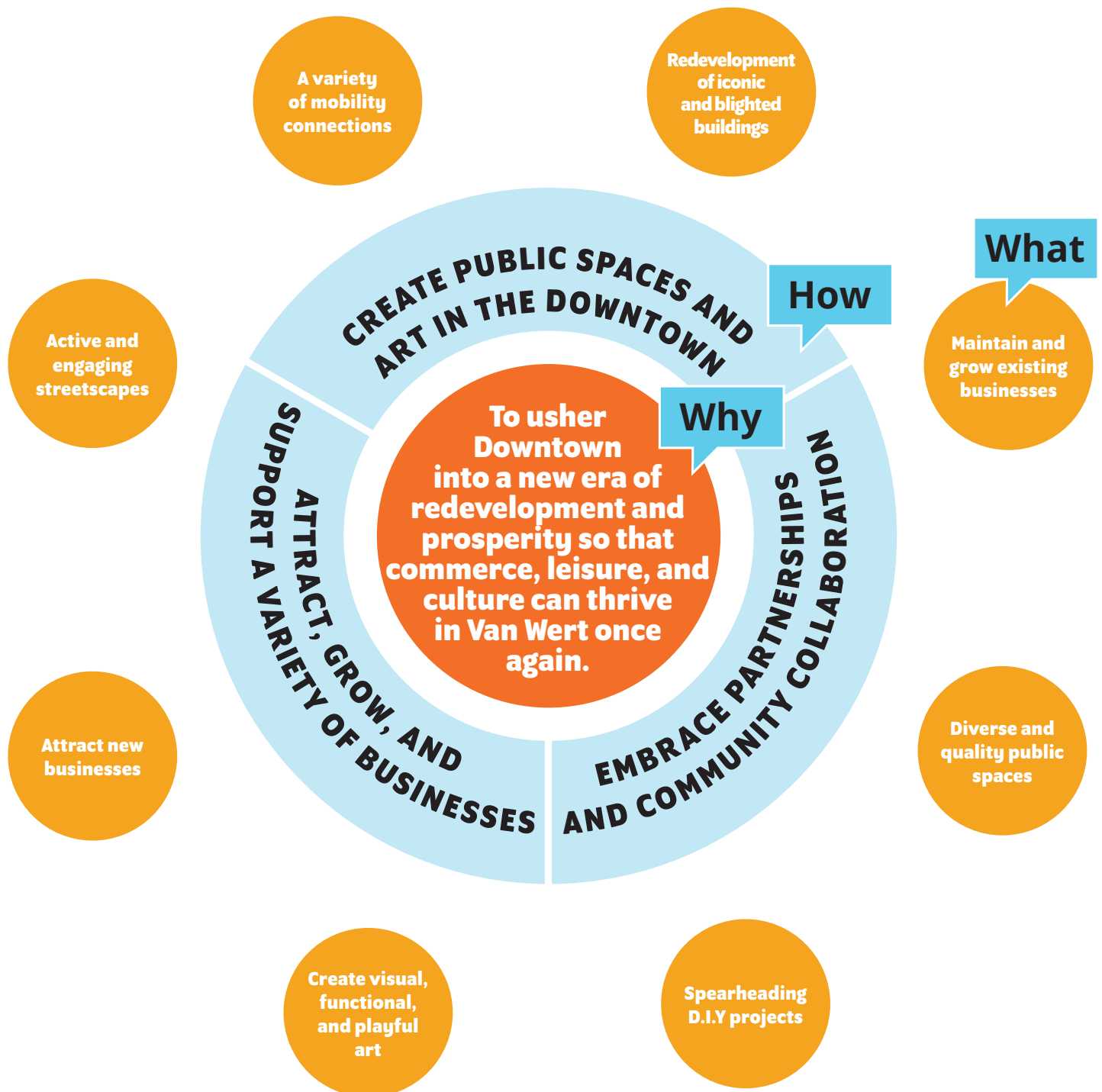
### DECISION MAKING TOOL: TAKING ACTION

When determining reasons to take action (or not) on specific recommendations, the purpose lens can be an important tool to identify several pro and con statements by asking yourself:

1. Does the project support your Purpose/WHY?
2. Does the project/initiative fit within the 3 HOW's (statements surrounding the core purpose statement)?
3. How long do you think it will take you to see a Return On Investment (ROI), financial or social?
4. How long do you think it will take you to see a Return On your Purpose (ROP)?



# Purpose Lens



# Plan Pillars

The plan pillars are the core areas of focus of the Plan. This includes Public Space, Business and Buildings, Public Art, and Quick and Lite. The pillars are presented here with brief descriptions of each. The following section presents the individual objectives and actions for each pillar serving as the platform for implementation.

## Pillar 1: Public Space

The first pillar aims to restore the quintessential image of a downtown as a dense urban environment with bustling public spaces and busy sidewalks. Many successful downtowns share these characteristics and more. A focus on public space in Van Wert needs to be fostered to encourage an engaging walkable environment and the improvement of public gathering and green space downtown. Building on existing amenities, this environment may be attained through initiatives such as enhancing and creating public spaces, improving the existing streetscape, and enhancing pedestrian connections downtown. The goal of these initiatives is to promote and enhance high-quality spaces and places to make downtown feel comfortable for residents and visitors, and to serve as a catalyst for activating downtown with places for events, gathering, and outdoor 'commerce'.

## Pillar 2: Business + Buildings

The second pillar outlines and evaluates downtown Van Wert's business landscape to recommend the building blocks of a successful downtown. Main Street business development does not happen overnight, and the recommendations forecast out at least 7-10 years with how Van Wert's downtown economy could develop over that time frame and beyond. There is a great opportunity to support and build a thriving economy in the downtown through the support from stakeholders across the city and county such as Main Street Van Wert, Van Wert Area Chamber of Commerce, Van Wert Forward, among others. Through the collaboration and support from local and county governments and organizations there is an opportunity to continue to build a thriving downtown economy that can serve as a catalyst for economic development, an attraction for new industries, and something for the residents of Van Wert County to consider a central place for gathering and regional identity.

## Pillar 3: Public Art

The third pillar recognizes that incorporating public art throughout downtown is an important strategy to strengthen the interactive and engaging qualities of a downtown. Public art can provide a method to showcase local artistic talent while strengthening community ties. Local residents can get together to paint a mural on the side of a blank building or the ground of an alley, activating an otherwise empty space. Sculptors can help design benches, planters, and bike racks. Public art, and local artists, can play an active role in creating and reinforcing the identity of the downtown and make it unique while building pride and ownership in the space.

## Pillar 4: Quick + Lite

The fourth and final pillar has been crafted to ignite change in the near future. Many cities have been utilizing incremental strategies such as tactical urbanism, temporary parks, and pop-up businesses to reinvigorate their downtowns. These small-scale initiatives have community-focused goals with short-term commitments and realistic expectations. Often these initiatives are championed and carried out entirely by community members, with or without government funding. The separation of these projects from the procedural delays and cost that can often consume and delay civic projects lends itself well to the low-risk and locally planned recommendations outlined in this pillar that are low cost and have a big impact.

*Image to the Right: Downtowns that combine all of these pillars create a layered and resilient experience and economy. This takes both public and private investment working together to define and promote a place like this image from Downtown Newark, Ohio.*





# Public Space

## OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

The following section introduces the objectives and actions for each of the four pillars. Projects that were identified by the steering as being a high priority ( \* ) are noted and go into further design and details in the following chapter. For details regarding responsible parties and expected timelines for each strategy, please refer to the Implementation matrix later in this chapter.

### OBJECTIVE 1 — CREATE AND ENHANCE PUBLIC SPACES DOWNTOWN FOSTERING A SENSE OF IDENTITY.

- \* ACTION 1.1 Create signature public space elements that complement the courthouse and Hotel Marsh.
- \* ACTION 1.2 Create a linear greenspace along Town Creek that integrates artistic light, shade, and shelter.
- \* ACTION 1.3 Enhance Fountain Park & connect to Eggerss Stadium.

### OBJECTIVE 2 — ENHANCE THE STREET NETWORK WITH PEDESTRIAN ELEMENTS THAT ADD TO THE DOWNTOWN CHARACTER.

- \* ACTION 2.1 Create new streetscape improvements along Central Avenue to optimize parking and improve the pedestrian experience.
- \* ACTION 2.2 Integrate low cost, low impact improvements along Main Street to enhance the streetscape and improve the pedestrian experience.
- \* ACTION 2.3 Integrate low cost, low impact improvements along Market Street to enhance the streetscape and improve the pedestrian experience, including a boulevard-style street section.
- \* ACTION 2.4 Integrate low cost, low impact improvements along Washington Street to enhance the streetscape and improve the pedestrian experience.

### OBJECTIVE 3 — CREATE AND ENHANCE CONNECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT.

- ACTION 3.1 Create additional alley connections with public space amenities.
- ACTION 3.2 Establish gateways at key intersections/entry points to the District.
- ACTION 3.3 Design and construct wayfinding signage the complements the gateways and streetscape improvements.
- ACTION 3.4 Identify and create additional parking areas in the southern portion of the District.
- ACTION 3.5 Integrate new public parking areas on the north side of the District as opportunities become available.



# Business + Buildings

## OBJECTIVE 4 — ATTRACT A DIVERSE MIX OF TENANTS TO THE DISTRICT.

- ACTION 4.1** Identify gaps in current business mix through quantitative and qualitative research.
- ACTION 4.2** Promote local businesses to locate and expand into the Downtown District.

## OBJECTIVE 5 — PROMOTE THE GROWTH OF EXISTING BUSINESSES.

- ACTION 5.1** Interview current leaseholders and create a retention plan based on the market/lease conditions.
- ACTION 5.2** Identify anchor businesses that spur further growth in the district.
- \* ACTION 5.3** Build and implement a business coaching/support program for businesses in the District.
- ACTION 5.4** Create a marketing and advertising support program for existing and new businesses as part of the business coaching/support program.
- \* ACTION 5.5** Utilize existing vacant storefronts to create business staging with the goal of attracting new businesses to the space (e.g. pop up flower shop, co-work space, etc.)
- ACTION 5.6** Work with local educational institutions to identify entrepreneurship and educational growth opportunities (e.g. STEM academy, satellite campus).
- ACTION 5.7** Create a private capital fund to support microbusiness development within the District.

# Public Art

## **OBJECTIVE 6 — INSTALL MURALS IN STRATEGIC LOCATIONS TO ENHANCE THE PUBLIC REALM.**

- \* **ACTION 6.1** Install temporary or permanent murals throughout the district in accordance with established guidelines.
- \* **ACTION 6.2** Identify a location for a Community Canvas within the downtown.

## **OBJECTIVE 7 — PROVIDE LIGHT, SHADE, AND SHELTER IN THE DISTRICT THROUGH AN ARTISTIC APPROACH.**

- \* **ACTION 7.1** Provide artistic public seating throughout the district.
- ACTION 7.2** Install shade in the District that integrates color and artistic forms.
- ACTION 7.3** Integrate/install lighting as a common element as part of both art installations, infrastructure projects, and private development, including multi-season tree lighting.

## **OBJECTIVE 8 — CREATE INTERACTIVE PUBLIC ART ELEMENTS FOR ALL AGES.**

- ACTION 8.1** Create/install a colorful and creative play feature at Fountain Park (target children and teens)
- ACTION 8.2** Create opportunities through planned public and private projects for performing arts in the District (e.g. live music, performances, Shakespeare in the park, etc.)



# Quick + Lite

## OBJECTIVE 9 — IMPLEMENT A VARIETY OF SHORT TERM AND COST-EFFECTIVE PROJECTS.

- \* **ACTION 9.1** Create/install a temporary pocket park space at the site of the Home Guards building.
- ACTION 9.2** Create/install temporary art displays around downtown as a short-term alternative to future public art plan.
- ACTION 9.3** Utilize re-purposed agricultural and industrial elements from around the county as temporary art installations.
- ACTION 9.4** Pilot a pop-up merchants program to provide downtown with a variety of options, especially during local events, festivals, etc.
- ACTION 9.5** Add bicycle and pedestrian amenities at hubs of activity such as proposed Home Guards Park, Fountain Park, Bagley Alley, Wassenberg Art Center, Courthouse Plaza, and proposed public parking lot along Central Avenue.
- ACTION 9.6** Apply for a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) for downtown.







04

---

## Priority Projects

# 04

## PRIORITY PROJECTS

### The Priorities

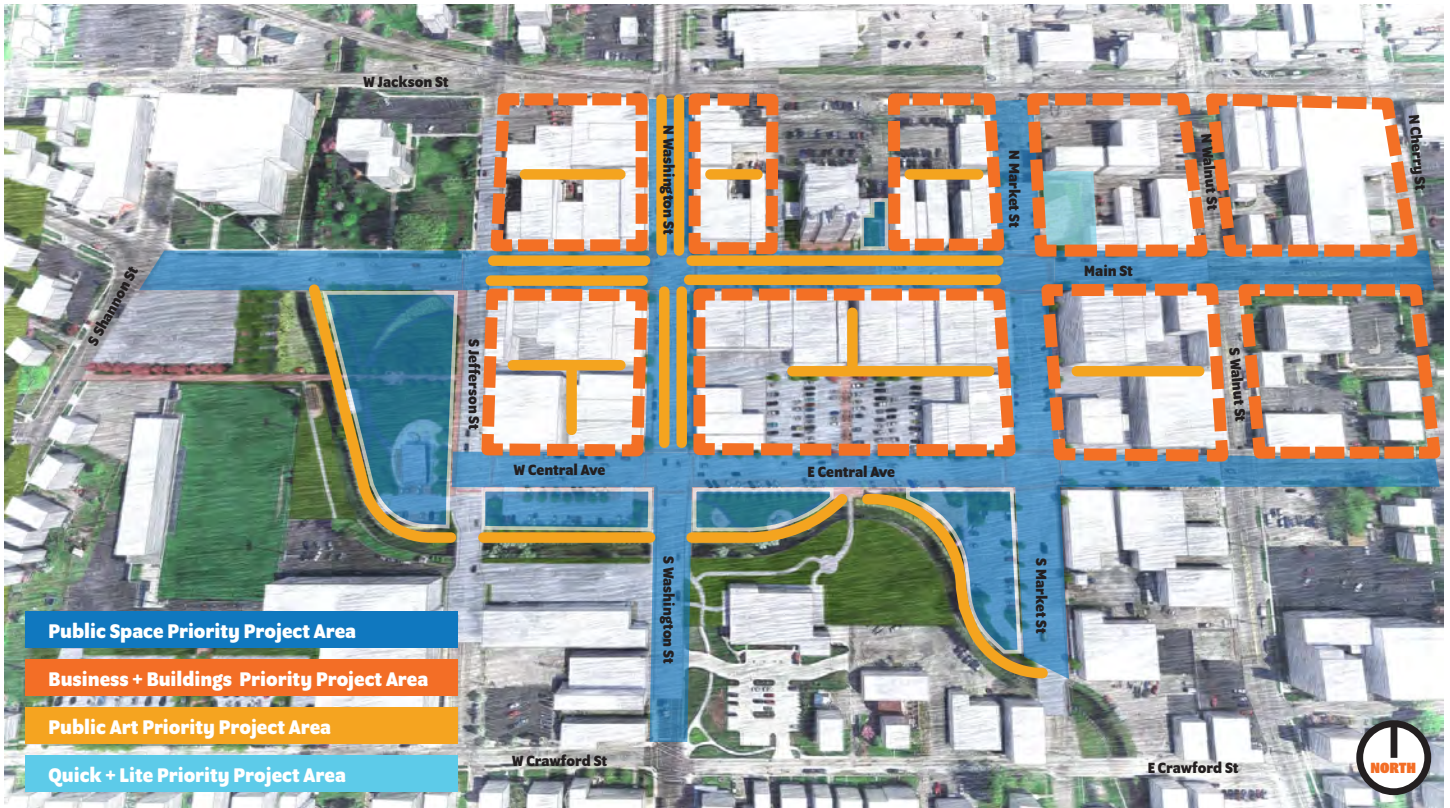
Priority projects are initiatives that enhance the physical character of downtown in ways that aim to generate further interest and development. Their importance lies in the transformative effect these changes could bring to the adjacent properties and the downtown as a whole. The projects in this section are meant to interest developers, inspire business owners, and instill community pride in residents.

Many of the priority projects are designed to be carried out by Van Wert as a community. Whether it is the City of Van Wert, Van Wert County, The Van Wert County Foundation, Main Street Van Wert, local business owners, local interest groups, or engaged residents, the community has a responsibility to come together and transform downtown. Wherever possible, responsibility for the completion of these projects should be shared by the public and private sectors.



*The above image is a snapshot of a priority project (Linear Park) that showcases a reimagined edge to Town Creek with landscaping, pedestrian connections, and place making elements.*





The above image illustrates the priority project locations, as they associate with their respective pillars. Detailed concepts follow within this chapter.



## Public Space

### Priority Projects

These initiatives happen in...

- the public realm
- existing parks
- new gathering spaces



## Business + Buildings

### Priority Projects

These initiatives happen with...

- existing businesses
- potential tenants
- vacant spaces
- owners



## Public Art

### Priority Projects

These initiatives happen on...

- buildings
- alleys
- sidewalks and crossings



## Quick + Lite

### Priority Projects

These initiatives happen with...

- engaged citizens
- local businesses
- community organizations

## Courthouse Plaza

### OVERVIEW

The Van Wert Courthouse is an iconic community destination and feature. Complementing the courthouse is the historic Hotel Marsh which is also a beautiful architectural building and landmark in the community.

Considering the current and future potential of these locations as destinations in the community it is important to examine how they complement and integrate within the downtown framework to ensure this is a first class space within the community. This priority project is about elevating the quality and potential of these spaces as community spaces and to support future private development of the hotel, and surrounding properties.

### PROJECT ELEMENTS

The major elements of this priority project focus on enhancing the public realm. This includes a new hardscape public space on the east side of the courthouse for entertainment and outdoor dining. This project also includes enhancing the streetscape on Main Street with new paving materials, arches, and trees/landscaping to identify this area in the downtown as a 'center'. Collectively the elements create a sense of place, comfort, and interest in this important part of the downtown.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this priority project. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and opinions of cost.

#### Opinion of Cost:

These improvements are estimated at \$350,000 - \$450,000 for the streetscape improvements, and approximately \$150,000 - \$200,000 for the proposed public space on the east side of the courthouse.

#### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation of this project:

- City of Van Wert
- Main Street Van Wert
- ODOT
- Van Wert County
- Adjacent businesses and property owners

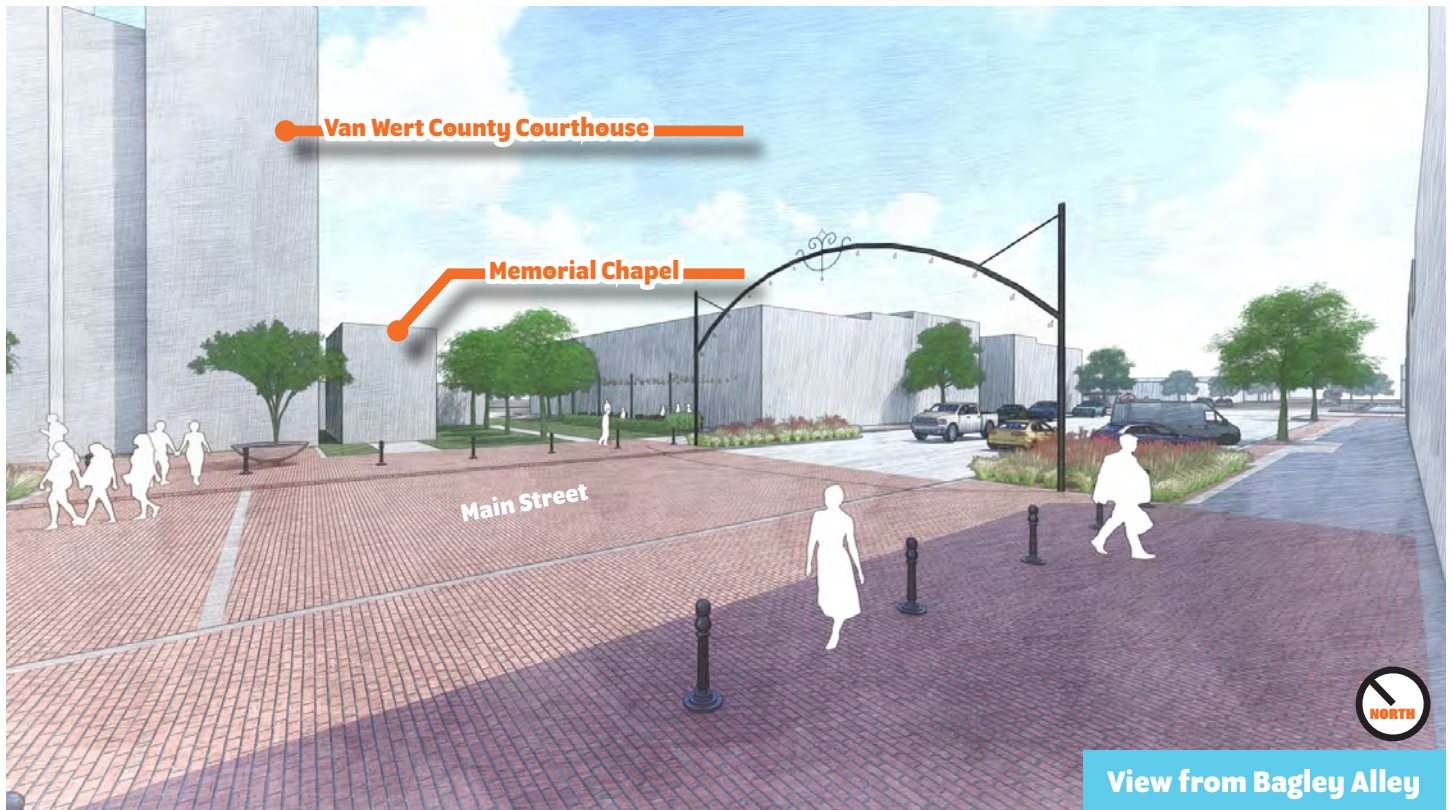
#### Time frame:

4-7 Years



### CHARACTER IMAGES







## Linear Park @ Town Creek

### OVERVIEW

Town Creek is a unique and unifying element in the downtown. It extends though and connects many destinations in the downtown, and also is a physical and mental barrier to areas in the downtown.

A vision and concept was created to address the creek and better connect it to the downtown. It also includes upgrading and integrating Central Avenue and surrounding parcels into a cohesive plan for this important part of downtown.

### PROJECT ELEMENTS

This priority project includes many layers to the conceptual design. This includes a public park (linear park) along Town Creek, integration into the Central Avenue streetscape, and new alley connections and public parking areas.

The Linear Park along Town Creek is a newly proposed green space that connects Fountain Park, Town Creek, the Wassenberg Art Center, the Downtown core, and eventually Franklin Park. The park enhances pedestrian travel through the downtown, beautifies Town Creek, and creates new nodes for play or public art.

The Linear Park system also interfaces with the proposed Central Avenue streetscape improvements. This specifically occurs along the edge of the right of way where new pavement materials define on-street parking, and street trees are integrated to soften the edge.

The park 'system' extends north and connects to a proposed public parking area on the north side of Central Avenue. This includes public parking, and an extension of the existing pedestrian alley. Collectively this creates a strong connection to the downtown core, Courthouse priority project, and creates parking for the businesses being redeveloped, and the future adaptive reuse of Hotel Marsh.





## IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this priority project. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and opinion of cost.

### Opinion of Cost:

The linear park project is estimated to cost between \$2,500,000 - \$3,000,000. This is contingent on many design elements and should only be used as an opinion of cost.

### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation of this project:

- City of Van Wert
- Maumee Valley Watershed Conservation District
- Main Street Van Wert
- Wassenberg Art Center (art elements)

### Time frame:

5 - 7 Years



CHARACTER IMAGES







CHARACTER IMAGES







## Streetscape Improvements

### OVERVIEW

One of the priority projects that stretches across the downtown are streetscape improvements. Streetscape improvements are improvements made to the public right of which may include upgrades to the roadway, sidewalks and paths, landscaping and shade, brand elements, as well as pedestrian features to improve safety and comfort.

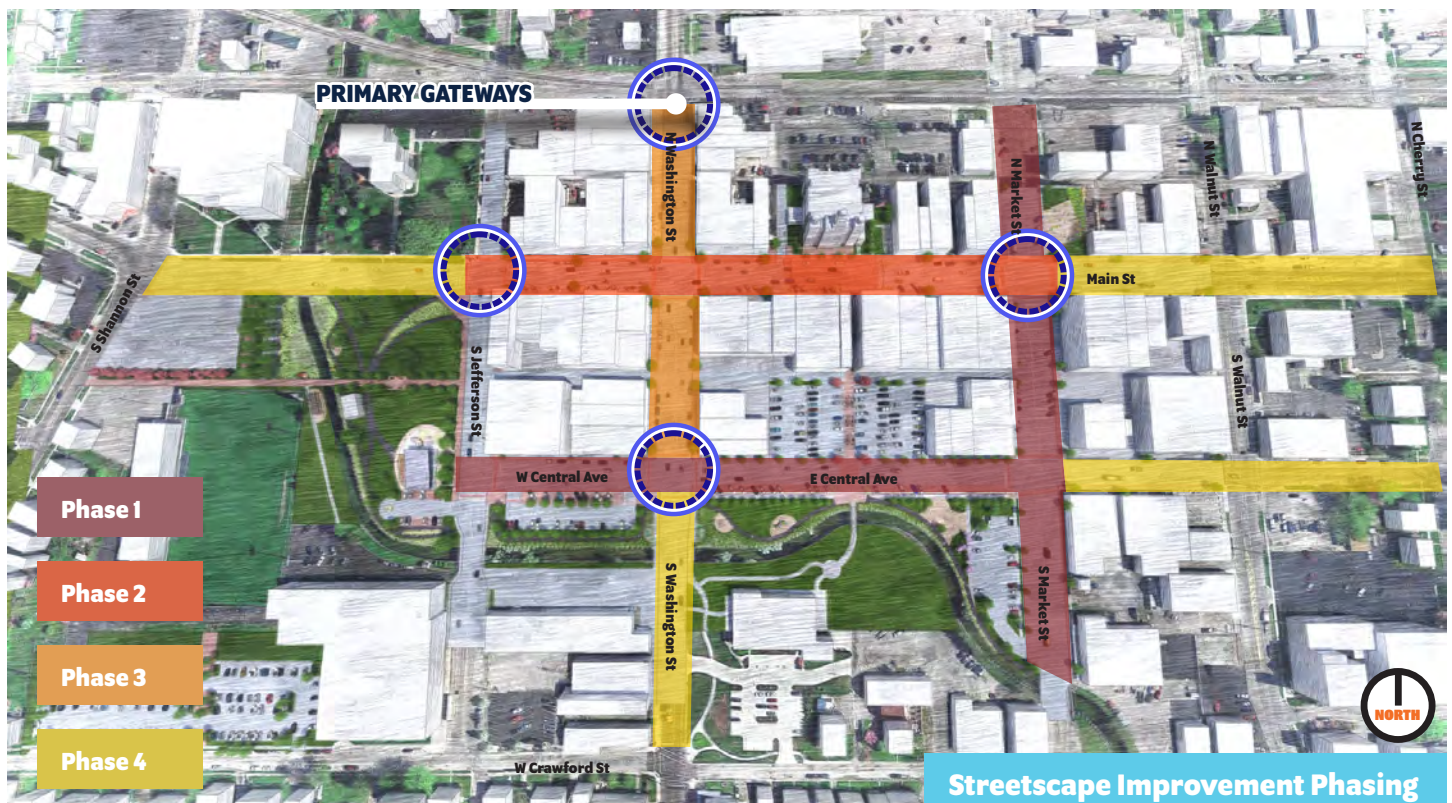
### Central Avenue

The streetscape improvements as outlined herein include schematic concepts for sections of the downtown, as well as typologies (see the following page) that can be applied systematically or as a kit of parts to specific blocks within the downtown.

A more schematic level design was done for Central Avenue. This concept includes a more detailed level design direction for this section of roadway. It includes enhanced sidewalk areas, pedestrian crossings, parking reconfigurations, alley connections, and a newly proposed public parking area north of the Wassenberg Art Center (see also the Linear Park Priority Project).

Specific design elements include street trees, on-street parking with modified materials to promote safety and encourage traffic calming, trash cans, bike racks, wayfinding and signage elements, and new curb and sidewalks with brick pavers or enhanced concrete treatment.

It is important to note that these improvements do not need to be implemented all at the same time, and could be implemented through a phased approach. This project can also be aligned with other planned capital improvements made by the City, and align with state funding sources such as OPWC and other ODOT programs.





## IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this priority project. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and opinions of cost.

### Opinion of Cost:

The proposed improvements to Central Avenue on average may cost approximately \$1,000 per linear foot per side, or \$2,000 per linear foot for both sides. This does not include street resurfacing.

### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation of this project:

- City of Van Wert
- ODOT
- Main Street Van Wert
- Adjacent property owners and businesses

### Time frame:

5-10 Years



Central Ave - Existing Condition



Central Ave - Proposed Streetscape

## Streetscape Typologies

Updating the streetscapes throughout the downtown was identified as a top priority. This priority was identified through both the technical analysis and public input, both of which revealed a need and desire to enhance the public realm, improve pedestrian safety, and support and complement private development initiatives by beautifying the downtown through strategic public investments.

In response to these findings a series of typologies were created that can be applied to a number of streets in the downtown (Main, Washington, and Market specifically) through a phased approach. It is important to note this approach was developed as a means to enhance these streets through a light, cost effective, and somewhat modular approach that is flexible and can mirror or complement other public and private investments in the downtown.



### SINGLE DIAGONAL SPACE - LANDSCAPED CONCEPT

This typology is for an individual angle parking space conversion. The concept integrates a tree, and some soft landscaping. This concept can be done with and without green infrastructure elements. If desired, underground storm water detention could be incorporated.

This typology could be applied in the following phases:

**Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3, Phase 4**

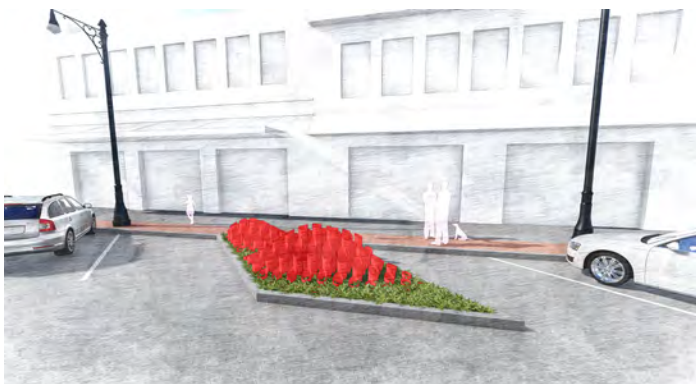


### SINGLE DIAGONAL SPACE - PARKLET CONCEPT

This typology is for an individual angle parking space conversion. The concept integrates some soft landscaping and seating. This concept can be done with and without green infrastructure elements. If desired underground storm water detention could be incorporated.

This typology could be applied in the following phases:

**Phase 2, Phase 3**



### SINGLE DIAGONAL SPACE - ART FEATURE CONCEPT

This typology is for an individual angle parking space conversion. The concept integrates public art as a n element. Note, the art feature shown is conceptual and only for planning purposes. Any art installation should be developed and vetted locally prior to installation.

This typology could be applied in the following phases:

**Phase 2, Phase 3**





#### DOUBLE DIAGONAL SPACE - LARGE PARKLET CONCEPT

This typology is for the removal of two parking spaces. The concept integrates a combination of landscaping and pocket park or outdoor dining/refreshment area. This concept is being adopted by many communities prior to, during, and post COVID. Combined with a DORA (Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area) this makes for a unique feature that can be programmed and used to activate the downtown.

This typology could be applied in the following phases:

**Phase 2**



#### SINGLE PARALLEL SPACE - LANDSCAPED CONCEPT

This typology is for a single parallel parking space. Similar to the landscape concept at the top of the alternate page, this is a simple concept that is traditional in form. It includes a single tree and low plantings. This concept can be done with and without green infrastructure elements. If desired underground storm water detention could be incorporated.

This typology could be applied in the following phases:

**Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3, Phase 4**



#### SINGLE PARALLEL SPACE - PARKLET CONCEPT

This concept is for a small parklet on a single parallel space. The concept includes plantings in a seat wall, seating, and some additional space for pedestrian movement and/or programming.

This typology could be applied in the following phases:

**Phase 2, Phase 3**



#### SINGLE PARALLEL SPACE - ART FEATURE CONCEPT

This typology is for an individual parallel parking space conversion. The concept integrates public art as a n element. Note, the art feature shown is conceptual and only for planning purposes. Any art installation should be developed and vetted locally prior to installation.

This typology could be applied in the following phases:

**Phase 2, Phase 3**

## Fountain Park Improvements

### OVERVIEW

Fountain Park is a landmark public space in the community. It has history, charm, and has served as a center for gathering and community events for decades. It also connects to historic Eggerss Stadium and Town Creek.

This priority project is about enhancing this space, better connecting it to Main Street, and integrating it into other priority projects including the Central Avenue Streetscape and the Linear Park. The goal is to create a place that continues to serve as a community hub/ gathering place for current and future generations and complements the current location of Eggerss Stadium.

### PROJECT ELEMENTS

The proposed park concept includes a number of new elements and some updates. The design is guided by new connections that cross the space and connect to Main Street, Eggerss Stadium, and the proposed linear park. It also includes a new east-west connection and proposed bridge over Town Creek. One of the main updates and new features is a proposed new multi-purpose performance area with abutting splash pad. To the rear of the structure is a small parking area, or loading area for special events.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this priority project. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and opinions of cost.

#### Opinion of Cost:

The proposed park concept is estimated to cost between \$2,000,000 - \$5,000,000. This cost will vary depending on materials, construction cost and materials at the time of construction, and final design. This cost is a general opinion of cost based on the schematic level concept.

#### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation of this project:

- City of Van Wert
- Van Wert Live
- Maumee Valley Watershed Conservation District
- Van Wert Schools (for adjoining uses)

#### Time frame:

4-7 Years



Fountain Park - Corner of Main & Jefferson





## Business Development + Business Programming

### INTRODUCTION

The success of a downtown revolves around every piece and component of development working together – public spaces, historic buildings, private business and enterprise, arts & culture, infrastructure – all seamlessly dancing to the same tune. These elements must complement, support, promote, and live with each other in a delicate balancing act. One of the most important components to develop of these is a thriving, successful business climate in a downtown district. Challenges of globalization, e-commerce, and economic and population demographics in rural communities make retail and service-oriented businesses in downtown districts particularly exposed to headwinds and difficulties.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented immense difficulties to Main Street businesses, and there is currently a shift and concentration of business activity and revenue in large national chains, at the expense of small independent businesses, particularly in the restaurant and retail sectors. These were some of the first industries closed during the initial phase of the pandemic, and recovery has been difficult for many.

Restaurants with robust online ordering options and digital footprints, comprehensive cleaning regimens and safety policies within their operations, and marketing that reinforces customer safety, can be successful through this pandemic. Independent retailers will have wide-open market share to capture as large malls and over-leveraged retail chains experience an extinction-level event with the pandemic – already, veritable brands like JCPenney, Lord & Taylor, Neiman Marcus, & J. Crew have filed for bankruptcy protection, and Simon Property Group, one of the largest holders of mall real estate, has seen its stock shrink 50%, all the while courting Amazon to turn some of its defunct mall space into distribution centers.

### BUILDING BLOCKS

The Covid-19 pandemic has reoriented the feasibility of many business sectors in Main Street economies. Rural communities like Van Wert with smaller barriers to entry and available building stock, should be incredibly attractive in a Covid and post-Covid environment.

Understanding this there are four basic building blocks for rural downtowns. This typically comes down to – how do you build the capacity for population growth and business development without subsidizing every entity who locates in the downtown? What business sectors are natural catalysts of that growth – plant the seed, and businesses will germinate around them.

Those four building blocks include:

1. Flagship restaurant with complementary event/outdoor space
2. Neighborhood coffee/tea/specialty coffee shop (ideally more than one)
3. Gym/yoga/workout and group training facilities
4. Co-working and flex office space

**The common thread that all of these entities have is a focus on customer volume. This is important as volume equals trips/traffic to the district, which in turn results in increased vibrancy and spending power.**



*The intersection of Washington and Central is a primary gateway into downtown Van Wert.*



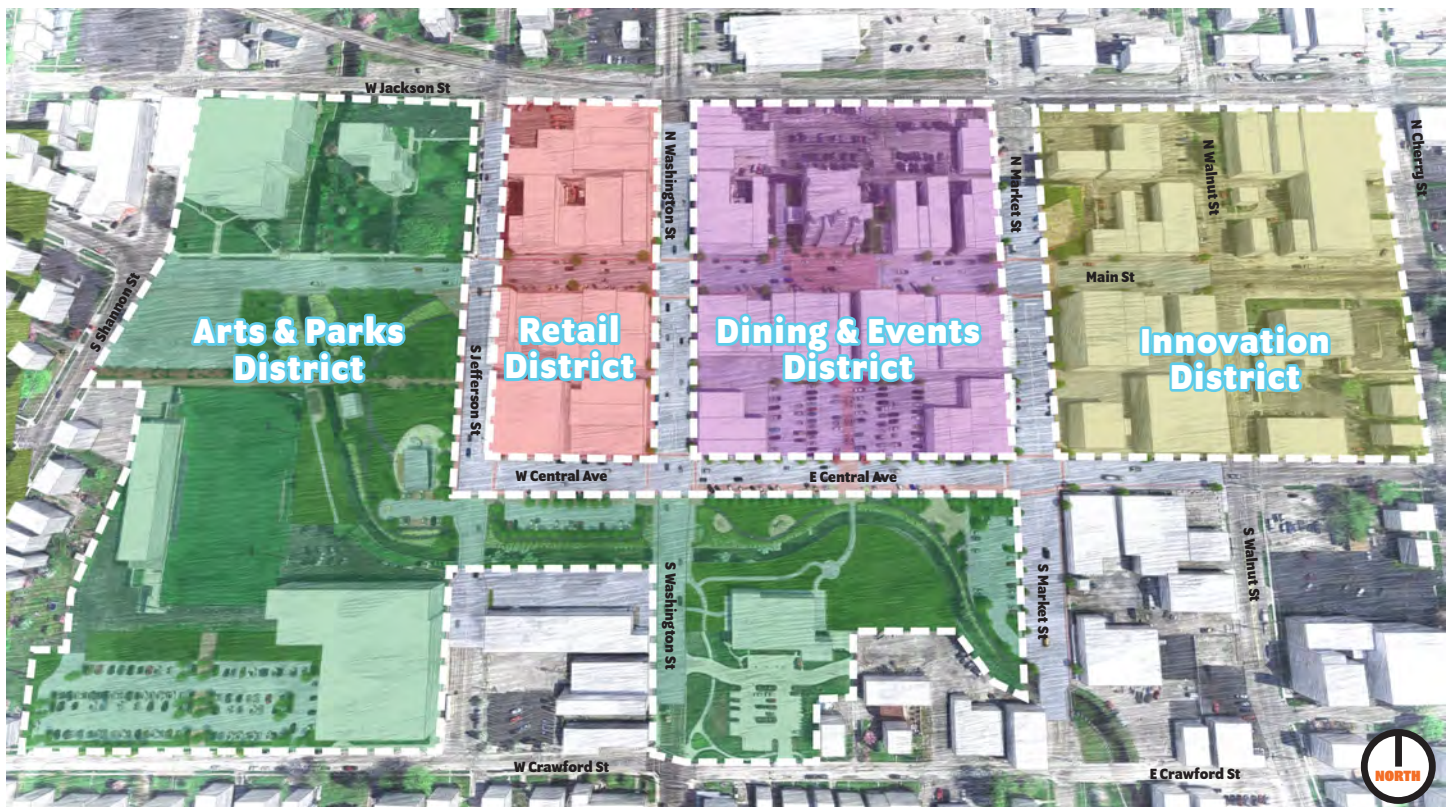
Restaurants have been uniquely challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic, and even with a vaccine available on the horizon, the devastation left in the wake of shutdowns, stay-at-home orders, and more have wreaked havoc on an entire industry. Even in the face of this, we continue to believe they are the primary drivers of foot traffic and energy in a historic downtown. The number of guests a restaurant serves in an average evening dwarfs any other type of industry as a magnet for consumers to experience a downtown district. Coffee shops embody a similar footprint in the downtown landscape, though on a smaller scale – coffee shops also drive capacity, but typically spaced out throughout the course of the day. They also can be a reliable feeder for retail foot traffic in an established downtown.

Gyms and workout facilities also provide reliable foot traffic at all hours of the day and night, and can be critical to supporting health and fashion retail in a downtown. Finally co-working and flexible office space is the newest and most exciting potential benefit from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many major corporations, including tech giants like Twitter and financial, and insurance and logistics corporations, have discovered through the pandemic that their workforce is just as productive at home as they are in an office setting. This potentially frees up massive amounts of capital for corporations who no longer need large commercial real estate footprints. It also frees up their employees – their human capital – to be more mobile and selective in where they choose to live. No longer are they beholden to a geographic proximity to their office – they are now free to choose where they would like to live based on the unique qualities and amenities of that community.

However, most of these employees will still be interested in a professional space where they can work independently, meet with clients, and network with other entrepreneurs, solopreneurs, or working professionals. Dedicated office and shared office space will be critical to attracting that talent to rural communities.

The following priority projects were selected to start the excitement and intrigue in the business landscape.



The above image illustrates districts that represent potential clusters of activity. Note, this is not intended to be a 'strict' districting where only these uses occur within the districts, but rather indicated the opportunity to cluster similar businesses to create synergy between them.

## Coaching/Support Program

### OVERVIEW

While the goal of attracting new business development to the downtown district should always be a priority, supporting and assisting existing businesses is vital to prevent churn and inject confidence into the downtown. Business stability of existing enterprises will be critical to continue momentum and maintain support for the overall project enhancements in the downtown district.

### PROJECT ELEMENTS

Upon existing business identification, the design of an individualized coaching plan for a business would begin, and may include, but are not limited to, assistance on:

- Product/service mix changes
- Exterior facade improvements/signage
- Daily management
- Marketing & promotion

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this program. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and cost estimates.

#### Responsible Parties:

- Van Wert Forward
- Main Street Van Wert
- Chamber of Commerce
- Van Wert Area Economic Development Corporation

#### Opinion of Cost:

Coaching and support services are estimated to cost between \$20,000-\$40,000, and would be dependent on the number of business, project scope, etc.

## Business Staging Program

### OVERVIEW

Often, business owners & entrepreneurs do not believe their idea is feasible in a small town until they see the outlines of their concept in that community. If you stage a vacant building like a coffee shop, an operator may be inspired to see that coffee shop that they have always dreamed of owning and become a new prospect for the downtown district.

### PROJECT ELEMENTS

Evaluation of vacant and/or renovated buildings would include the following:

- Staging plan report for each building
- Furnishing specs for each available storefront
- Window graphics produced to promote availability
- Social media marketing developed to promote availability

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this program. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and cost estimates.

#### Responsible Parties:

- Van Wert Forward
- Main Street Van Wert
- Downtown building owners
- Van Wert Area Economic Development Corporation

#### Opinion of Cost:

Building staging services is estimated to cost between \$30,000-\$40,000, in addition to the cost of furnishings

*Image to the right: Looking west down Main Street shows the diverse mixture of architecture and streetscape.*







## Mural Arts Program throughout the District

### OVERVIEW

The established murals in downtown Van Wert have added color, vibrancy, and character within the district. As the downtown continues to re-invent itself, a mural arts program that tells the community's story will help create a unique experience, engage citizens, and increase overall attractiveness of building facades and other streetscape surfaces.

### MURAL ARTS ELEMENTS

Mural Arts Van Wert can evolve into a program managed by a local organization, and will recruit artists through a "Call to Artists." Mural Arts Van Wert can consist of temporary murals placed on approved surfaces which can include but not be limited to: building facades, intersections, and utility boxes. Dependent upon budget, artwork can be updated every three to four years, and can be hand painted, or applied through environmental graphics that are applied/ temporary. The exact location of murals will need be explored and evaluated through a mural planning process to confirm which buildings are appropriate.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this priority project. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and opinions of cost.

#### Opinion of Cost:

Mural Arts Van Wert is estimated to cost between \$10,000 - \$20,000. The cost will vary depending on artist(s) selected, number of murals, dimensions of surface being painted, and type of surface.

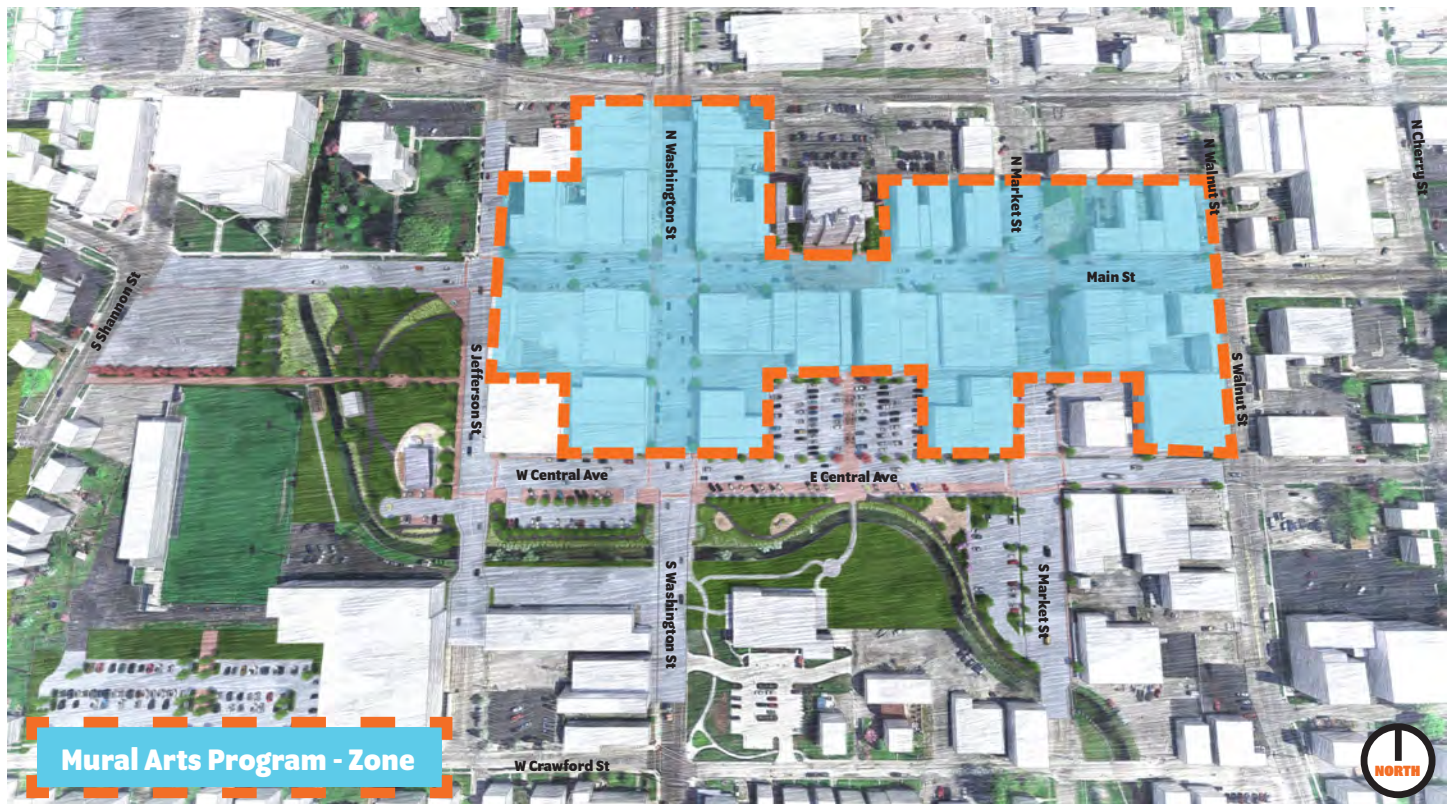
#### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation and sustainability of Mural Arts Van Wert:

- Property owners and businesses
- Main Street Van Wert
- Wassenberg Art Center

#### Time frame:

1 - 3 Years

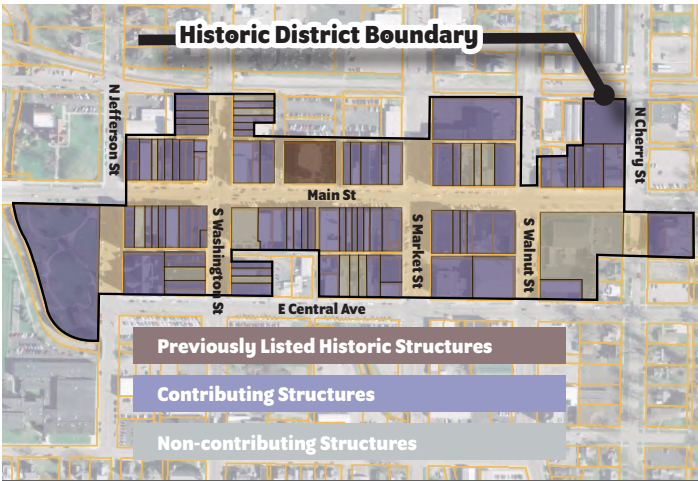




When planning for murals in the downtown it is important to consider the boundaries and restrictions for building improvements within the designated historic district (see figure to the right). The following considerations should be given to mural applications with this in mind.

Buildings within the designated historic district can be limited for the application of permanent murals as regulated by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). In scenarios where permanent murals should be avoided on historically contributing buildings within the district, temporary murals or art applications may be considered as a way to provide art and color as an alternative.

Buildings that are within the downtown study area but outside the historic district or are not historically contributing should be considered for more permanent mural applications.



CHARACTER IMAGES





## Community Canvas Project

### OVERVIEW

Alleys are slowly being transformed into high-quality pedestrian spaces, art galleries, and places for artistic expression. The Community Canvas will be a selected alley in downtown that will provide veteran, visiting, and developing artists a canvas of surfaces to collaborate and create individual pieces with the public. Community Canvas will be a new type of alley activation that builds upon the success of Eugene Bagley Alley to become another livelier link.

### COMMUNITY CANVAS ELEMENTS

Community Canvas will be covered in artistic expression from building facades to trash cans. The space is intended to be an evolving gallery of murals and graffiti art accessible to anyone... an "alley for the people." The primary mediums used will be paint and spray paint.

Depending on building owner participation this can be on buildings, or wood or similar canvases, or alternative features and materials that are placed in the alley and still maintain a safe path of travel.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this program. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and cost estimates.

#### Opinion of Cost:

Community Canvas would initially cost \$1000 to put together a weekend community event to begin painting the alley. Additionally, the event would inform the community that the alley will remain as an open canvas allowing creatives to express their artistic freedoms.

#### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation of Community Canvas:

- Property owners
- Main Street Van Wert
- Wassenberg Art Center

#### Time frame:

1-3 Years





## CHARACTER IMAGES





## Art Bench Project

### OVERVIEW

Places are made better by people being in them. Public seating provides an opportunity to rest as well as an opportunity for social connection. The Art Bench Project will consist of six benches placed throughout downtown and Fountain Park. Each bench will be artistically different and will encourage lingering, interaction, and the celebration of public art.

### ART BENCH PROJECT ELEMENTS

The Art Bench Project will be a beautification project where local artists are selected through a “Call to Artists.” Additionally, local businesses and organizations can sponsor benches and work with local artists where the design(s) can tie into the businesses near the bench location. For ease, benches could be pre-purchased and artists would paint the benches. The Art Bench Project could be an evolving project where new artwork would be applied every three years.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this program. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and cost estimates.

#### Opinion of Cost:

Art Bench Project is estimated to cost between \$4,800 - \$6,000. The cost may vary depending on type of benches purchased.

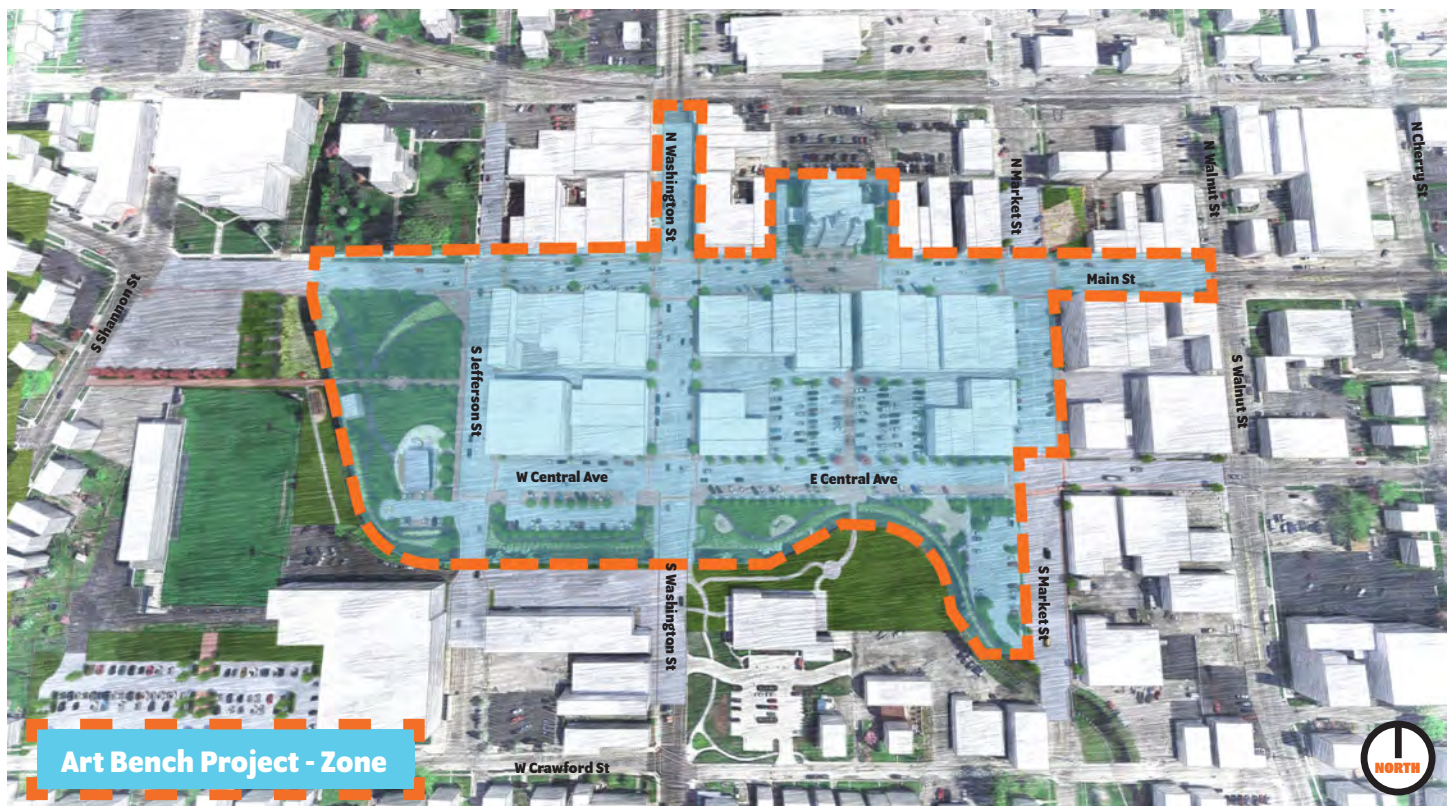
#### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation and sustainability of Art Bench Project:

- City of Van Wert
- Main Street Van Wert
- Wassenberg Art Center
- Local businesses and community organizations

#### Time frame:

1-3 Years





## CHARACTER IMAGES





## Home Guards Park

### OVERVIEW

The Home Guards site is an iconic location in Van Wert. During this project the building was razed due to structural issues and the outcome of a detailed architectural assessment. With the removal of the building it created a new opportunity to reimagine the site. The future use of the site is to be determined, but may include future redevelopment. With the uncertainty for how the site may be used in the long term, it was determined that a temporary public space is the highest and best use.

### PROJECT ELEMENTS

The Home Guards park should be designed as a temporary, low cost, public space that could be constructed through a combination of professional contractors and community build efforts. The intent should be to use as many locally sourced materials as possible and volunteer efforts.

The park could contain a number of elements, including new pervious surface with compacted gravel, a grassy area, and knoll to the rear of the site. The center of the site is defined by whimsical lighting overhead, with a variety of seating, shade and play elements within the space. The space should be very flexible to accommodate a variety of events.

### IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines some of the key steps needed to execute this priority project. It is important to note that these are preliminary recommendations and opinions of cost.

#### Opinion of Cost:

The temporary park concept is estimated to cost between \$40,000 - \$60,000. This cost will vary depending on materials and the level it is a 'community build' project.

#### Responsible Parties:

The following parties may be involved in the implementation of this project:

- The Van Wert County Foundation
- Main Street Van Wert

#### Time frame:

1-3 Years



### CHARACTER IMAGES









HISTORIC  
**MAIN STREET**  
WERT

Law  
can make  
vn.net





05

---

Implementation

# Objectives and Actions

## OVERVIEW

Bringing the Plan to fruition will require a concerted effort from City and County staff, The Van Wert County Foundation, Main Street Van Wert, stakeholders, engaged citizens, and others over the course of the next ten years. To assist and guide the implementation a implementation matrix was created. The matrix is intended to be a guide. Exact time frames and project partners may change over time. The matrix should be reviewed regularly, and as funding, roles, and passion change within the local landscape they should be updated within the matrix to support the implementation of the objectives and actions.

The purpose of the Implementation Plan is to lay out the steps and time frame associated with the specific objectives for each plan pillar in order to advance the vision. This plan is intended to be used as a road map to building a more a thriving downtown for businesses and residents. The plan pillars and individual objectives are broken down by action item, potential time frame and project partners.

## TIMEFRAMES

The projects were assigned a time frame based on a number of factors including level of priority, complexity of the project, funding, and local passion for specific projects that was noted during the planning process.

**Short Term** - 1 to 3 years

**Long Term** - 7+ years

**Mid Term** - 4 to 7 years

**Ongoing Projects**

## POTENTIAL PROJECT PARTNERS

This list, which updates and changes as projects are completed, contains potential partners that may be involved in various objectives and actions from this plan. The partners include, but are not limited to:

- Van Wert County
- City of Van Wert
- The Van Wert County Foundation
- Van Wert Forward
- Main Street Van Wert
- Ohio Department of Transportation
- Van Wert City Schools
- Maumee Watershed Conservancy District
- Wassenberg Art Association
- Van Wert Area Chamber of Commerce
- Van Wert Area Economic Development Corporation
- Van Wert Business Development Corporation
- Van Wert Live
- Van Wert Civic Theatre
- Adjacent owners and businesses



## Public Space

Goal Statement: *Quality public spaces that serve all areas, generations, and current and future businesses.*

### Objective 1 — Create and enhance public spaces downtown fostering a sense of identity.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 1.1:</b> Create signature public space elements that complements the courthouse and Hotel Marsh. <b>Priority Project</b>	Mid Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County</li> <li>• City</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• ODOT</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 1.2:</b> Create a linear greenspace along Town Creek that integrates artistic light, shade, and shelter. <b>Priority Project</b> (Concurrent with 2.1 and 3.4)	Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• Maumee Watershed Conservancy District</li> <li>• Wassenberg (public art elements)</li> </ul>
<b>Action 1.3:</b> Enhance Fountain Park & connect to Eggerss Stadium. <b>Priority Project</b>	Mid Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• VW Schools</li> <li>• VW Live</li> <li>• Maumee Watershed Conservancy District</li> </ul>

### Objective 2 — Enhance the street network with pedestrian elements that add to the downtown character.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 2.1:</b> Create new streetscape improvements along Central Avenue to optimize parking and improve the pedestrian experience. <b>Priority Project</b> (Concurrent with 1.2 and 3.4)	Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• ODOT</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 2.2:</b> Integrate low cost, low impact improvements along Main Street to enhance the streetscape and improve the pedestrian experience. <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• VWCF</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• ODOT</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 2.3:</b> Integrate low cost, low impact improvements along Market Street to enhance the streetscape and improve the pedestrian experience, including a boulevard-style street section. <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• VWCF</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 2.4:</b> Integrate low cost, low impact improvements along Washington Street to enhance the streetscape and improve the pedestrian experience. <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• VWCF</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> <li>• ODOT</li> </ul>

Objective 3 — Create and enhance connections throughout the District.		
Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 3.1:</b> Create additional alley connections with public space amenities.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• Wassenberg</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 3.2:</b> Establish gateways at key intersections/entry points to the District.	Mid Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• ODOT</li> </ul>
<b>Action 3.3:</b> Design and construct wayfinding signage the complements the gateways and streetscape improvements.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 3.4:</b> Identify and create additional parking areas in the southern portion of the District.	Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 3.5:</b> Integrate new public parking areas on the north side of the District as opportunities become available.	Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Adjacent owners and businesses</li> </ul>



## Business + Buildings

**Goal Statement:** A sustainable and profitable business environment that promotes vital and vibrant local businesses and retention and attraction of talent.

### Objective 4 — Attract a diverse mix of tenants to the District.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 4.1:</b> Identify gaps in current business mix through quantitative and qualitative research.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VWAEDC</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Chamber</li> </ul>
<b>Action 4.2:</b> Promote local businesses to locate and expand into the Downtown District.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VWAEDC</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Chamber</li> </ul>

### Objective 5 — Promote the growth of existing businesses.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 5.1:</b> Interview current leaseholders and create a retention plan based on the market/lease conditions.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VWAEDC</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Chamber</li> </ul>
<b>Action 5.2:</b> Identify anchor businesses that spur further growth in the district.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VWAEDC</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Chamber</li> </ul>
<b>Action 5.3:</b> Build and implement a business coaching/support program for businesses in the District. <b>Priority Project</b>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chamber</li> <li>• VWAEDC</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• MSVW</li> </ul>
<b>Action 5.4:</b> Create a marketing and advertising support program for existing and new businesses as part of the business coaching/support program.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chamber</li> <li>• MSVW</li> </ul>
<b>Action 5.5:</b> Utilize existing vacant storefronts to create business staging with the goal of attracting new businesses to the space (e.g. pop up flower shop, co-work space, etc.) <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• Property owners</li> </ul>
<b>Action 5.6:</b> Work with local educational institutions to identify entrepreneurship and educational growth opportunities (e.g. STEM academy, satellite campus).	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Van Wert Schools</li> <li>• Chamber</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VWAEDC</li> </ul>
<b>Action 5.7:</b> Create a private capital fund to support microbusiness development within the District.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VW Forward</li> <li>• VWAEDC</li> <li>• Chamber</li> <li>• BDC</li> </ul>

## Public Art

**Goal Statement:** *A District that embraces and showcases art in a variety forms, defining the character of the District and elevating the quality of the experience for residents, businesses, and visitors.*

### Objective 6 — Install murals in strategic locations to enhance the public realm.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 6.1:</b> Install temporary or permanent murals throughout the district in accordance with established guidelines. <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wassenberg Art Center</li> <li>MSVW</li> <li>Property owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 6.2:</b> Identify a location for a future Community Canvas within the downtown. <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wassenberg Art Center</li> <li>MSVW</li> </ul>

### Objective 7 — Provide light, shade, and shelter in the District through an artistic approach.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 7.1:</b> Provide artistic public seating throughout the district. <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MSVW</li> <li>City</li> <li>Wassenberg Art Center</li> </ul>
<b>Action 7.2:</b> Install shade in the District that integrates color and artistic forms.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MSVW</li> <li>City</li> <li>VW Forward</li> </ul>
<b>Action 7.3:</b> Integrate/install lighting as a common element as part of both art installations, infrastructure projects, and private development, including multi-season tree lighting.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City</li> <li>MSVW</li> <li>Property owners</li> </ul>

### Objective 8 — Create interactive public art elements for all ages.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 8.1:</b> Create/install a colorful and creative play feature at Fountain Park (target children and teens).	Mid Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City</li> <li>VWCF</li> <li>MSVW</li> </ul>
<b>Action 8.2:</b> Create opportunities through planned public and private projects for performing arts in the District (e.g. live music, performances, Shakespeare in the park, etc.)	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MSVW</li> <li>Wassenberg Art Center</li> <li>City</li> <li>VW Live</li> <li>VW Schools</li> <li>Civic Theater</li> </ul>



## Quick + Lite

**Goal Statement:** *Short term and cost-effective strategies to jump-start interest and excitement in downtown Van Wert.*

### Objective 9 — Implement a variety of short term and cost-effective projects.

Objectives and Action Items	Time frame	Project Partners
<b>Action 9.1:</b> Create/install a temporary pocket park space at the site of the Home Guard building. <b>Priority Project</b>	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VWCF</li> <li>• MSVW</li> </ul>
<b>Action 9.2:</b> Create/install temporary art displays around downtown as a short-term alternative to future public art plan.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wassenberg Art Center</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• Property owners and businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Action 9.3:</b> Utilize re-purposed agricultural and industrial elements from around the county as temporary art installations.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wassenberg Art Center</li> <li>• MSVW</li> </ul>
<b>Action 9.4:</b> Pilot a pop-up merchants program to provide downtown with a variety of options, especially during local events, festivals, etc.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VW Live</li> <li>• MSVW</li> <li>• VW Forward</li> </ul>
<b>Action 9.5:</b> Add bicycle and pedestrian amenities at hubs of activity such as proposed Home Guards Park, Fountain Park, Bagley Alley, Wassenberg Art Center, Courthouse Plaza, and proposed public parking lot along Central Avenue.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• MSVW</li> </ul>
<b>Action 9.6:</b> Apply for a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) for downtown.	Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City</li> <li>• MSVW</li> </ul>

