



**Ashtabula Downtown Development Association**

**Master Plan**

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**i. Executive Summary**  
Master Plan  
**Ashtabula Downtown Development Association**

**What is the purpose of this plan?**

The purpose of this document is to illustrate an overall vision for Downtown Ashtabula and **set forth the role that the Ashtabula Downtown Development Association (ADDA) will play in helping to achieve that vision.**

**What is the ADDA?**

The Ashtabula Downtown Development Association (ADDA) is a seventy plus-member nonprofit organization formed in 2006 to combine the efforts of business owners and concerned citizens to facilitate the growth and revitalization of Ashtabula's downtown.



The Main Street Four-Point structure, which the ADDA employs, will serve as the framework for the Master Plan, and goals will be presented in this context. The Main Street philosophy calls for four standing committees - Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring and Promotions.

**What studies have been done previously?**

There are a number of plans and studies that were revisited to see what remains relevant, including the 2002 Charrette by the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio & Cobalt Group; the Ohio State University 2004 Retail Analysis; the 2008 Downtown Assessment by the Heritage Ohio Downtown Assessment Resource Team; 2011 Brainmapping session; 2011 SWOT analysis by Kent State University; 2012 Community Survey; and 2013 Action Plan. The 2013 Streetscape Plan by McKnight and Associates plays a major role in the ADDA's Master Plan.

**What is the role of placemaking?**

A stroll through the downtown revitalization research illustrates that placemaking is a central concept. A Michigan State University study concluded that keeping and attracting people is the most important strategy in the new economic landscape.<sup>1</sup> People are attracted to Main Streets where there are lots of things to do. It is important to make a place more than the sum of its parts. For example, a park should not only be a park, but a park with a fountain, playground, food vendor, nearby library, etc.<sup>2</sup> Small town revitalization expert Kent Robertson identifies eight key elements that are pivotal to a Main Street's sense of place:

1. Downtown is distinct from other commercial settings.
2. The downtown, and its sense of place, has evolved over time. A downtown's sense of place was not created at a single point in time. It has evolved to represent multiple generations.
3. Downtown represents the unique heritage of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> How Your Community Can Thrive — Even in Tough Times. Project for Public Spaces, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Porada. "Ten Ways to Transform Cities through Placemaking & Public Spaces" 21 Apr 2013. [ArchDaily](#).

4. Downtown is multifunctional.
5. Downtown is pedestrian friendly.
6. Human activity is vital to a sense of place.
7. Downtown encourages people to linger.
8. The end result should be the idea that *“Downtown is everybody's neighborhood!”*

**What is the vision for Downtown Ashtabula?**

**VISION: DOWNTOWN ASHTABULA**

The vision for Downtown Ashtabula is: A thriving mixed-use central business and activity center that is attractive, safe, pedestrian-friendly, and economically vibrant. It will feature:

- The center for civic activity.
- Entertainment, cultural, and arts attractions.
- Restaurants/pubs.
- Assorted retail establishments.
- Social gathering spots.
- Health care, personal care, legal, financial and other professional services.

Downtown will have a distinctive identity; an identity built from the best aspects of its past, but that clearly conveys its vision for the future.

**Placemaking as Overarching Theme**

**ORGANIZATION**

Short-Term Goals	Long-Term Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify at least two additional, simple fundraising activities.</li> <li>2. Obtain administrative/clerical assistance.</li> <li>3. Involve more merchants and other downtown stakeholders in the ADDA and its committees.</li> <li>4. Continue to communicate the ADDA's work to the ADDA membership and to the community.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a permanent funding plan to sustain the work of the organization.</li> <li>2. Increase the ADDA's membership.</li> <li>3. Recruit and organize volunteers.</li> <li>4. Seek partners and collaborative relationships that will strengthen the organization and its mission.</li> <li>5. Continue to develop an effective communications strategy via website, newspaper, newsletters, and social media.</li> </ol>

**ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING**

Short-Term Goals	Long-Term Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reinvigorate the ER Committee with new members.</li> <li>2. Continue to oversee the Security Program and recruit new participants.</li> <li>3. Complete the property inventory for the Community Development Block Grant.</li> <li>4. Revisit the idea of starting a business incubator.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a business incubator.</li> <li>2. Develop a business retention plan.</li> <li>3. Incorporate the concept of placemaking into economic restructuring activities. (A downtown Farmers Market is one idea)</li> <li>4. Work with Ashtabula Cultural Trust on mutually beneficial projects.</li> <li>5. Together with other partners, sponsor educational seminars for downtown merchants.</li> <li>6. Identify and work to eliminate barriers to business start-ups.</li> <li>7. Collect and summarize available economic/market data.</li> </ol>

**DESIGN**

Short-Term Goals	Long-Term Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Select the CDC-funded planters and benches. Pinpoint their placement.</li> <li>2. Work with the City of Ashtabula to submit a Community Development Block Grant.</li> <li>3. Install the "River of Many Fish" whirligigs and ground cover.</li> <li>4. Complete the "Welcome to Ashtabula" mural.</li> <li>5. Print autumn street banners.</li> <li>6. Continue "Shower Main Ave. with Flowers" program.</li> <li>7. Make sure that Main Ave. is well-tended and well-groomed.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue the phased implementation of the Main Avenue McKnight Streetscape Plan.</li> <li>2. Implement Public Art Program.</li> <li>3. Complete restoration of the Cornelius Park Fountain.</li> <li>4. Partner with the City of Ashtabula to restore the Historic Downtown Clock.</li> <li>5. Work with City Council to develop Façade Improvement Guidelines.</li> <li>6. Establish recreational connections to the River and Gulf.</li> </ol>

**PROMOTIONS**

Short-Term Goals	Long-Term Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluate all special events. Decide which should continue.</li> <li>2. Promote and support the Downtown Ashtabula Court.</li> <li>3. Involve more merchants in staging downtown events.</li> <li>4. Encourage community groups to use the downtown as a staging ground for their events. Especially make better use of Cornelius and South Parks.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish a positive downtown image and identity that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence.</li> <li>2. Strengthen successful events and create new events.</li> <li>3. Develop a databank of event volunteers.</li> <li>4. Develop a plan for better informing the community about the ADDA, its activities, and events.</li> </ol>

# I. Introduction

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to illustrate an overall vision for Downtown Ashtabula and set forth the role that the Ashtabula Downtown Development Association (ADDA) will play in helping to achieve that vision.

This plan builds on previous plans and studies, resurrecting recommendations that are still feasible, while incorporating new priorities that have been identified in the past several years. It provides a vision of what a revitalized Downtown Ashtabula could be, and a roadmap to achieve that vision.



## **Scope: Downtown Area**

The area for this planning and prioritization process is the Ashtabula Downtown District. The boundaries of the district, as determined by a vote of the ADDA membership, are roughly, State Route 20 on the north and west, the Ashtabula River on the east, and West 58<sup>th</sup> St. on the south. Contained within this target area are:

- The Downtown District's commercial center.
- Ashtabula City government center.
- Ashtabula Police Department.
- The Ashtabula County District Library.
- Cornelius and South parks.
- Several churches.
- Residential neighborhoods.

There is one National Register of Historic Places designation in the target area: the Hotel Ashtabula (now Signature Health).

## **Plan Framework**

The Main Street Four-Point Approach, which the ADDA employs, will serve as the framework for the Master Plan, and goals will be presented in this context. Developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980, Main Street now works in over 1,700 communities located throughout 46 states. The Main Street philosophy divides the workload among a minimum of four standing committees (Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring and Promotions), and in this way balances revitalization efforts by concurrently improving all aspects of what makes the downtown environment attractive and valuable, while at the same time dividing up the workload. The ADDA added a fifth committee, Imagine Ashtabula, which was actually the predecessor organization to the ADDA. Imagine Ashtabula primarily focuses on projects and events in the downtown residential areas.

## **Guiding Principles**

The National Trust Main Street Center's experience in helping communities bring their commercial corridors back to life has shown repeatedly that the Main Street Four Point Approach succeeds. That success is guided by the following eight principles, which set the Main Street methodology apart from other redevelopment strategies. For a Main Street program to be successful, it must whole-heartedly embrace the following time-tested eight principles.

1. **Comprehensive**: No single focus — lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events — can revitalize the Downtown District. For successful, sustainable, long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach, including activity in each of Main Street's Four Points, is essential.
2. **Incremental**: Baby steps come before walking. Successful revitalization programs begin with basic, simple activities that demonstrate that "new things are happening" in the commercial district. As public confidence in the district grows and participants' understanding of the revitalization process becomes more sophisticated, the Downtown District is able to tackle increasingly complex problems and projects that are more ambitious. This incremental change leads to much longer-lasting and dramatic positive change in the Downtown District.
3. **Self-help**: No one else will preserve the Downtown District. Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources and talent. That means convincing residents and business owners of the rewards they will reap by investing time and money in the downtown area. Only local leadership and involvement can produce long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.
4. **Partnerships**: Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the downtown and the commercial area and must work together to achieve common goals of revitalization. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations in order to forge an effective partnership.
5. **Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets**: Asset Based Community Development builds on the assets that are already found in the community. Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities, like distinctive buildings and a human rather than a vehicular scale, that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.
6. **Quality**: Quality should be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies to all elements of the process — from storefront designs to promotional campaigns to educational programs. Shoestring budgets and "cut and paste" efforts reinforce a negative image of the commercial district. Instead, concentrate on quality projects over quantity.

7. Change: Skeptics turn into believers and attitudes in the Downtown District will turn around. At first, almost no one believes the downtown area can really rebound. Changes in attitude and practice are slow but definite — public support for change will build as goals are consistently met. Change also means engaging in better business practices, altering ways of thinking, and improving the physical appearance of the commercial district.
8. Implementation: To succeed, the Downtown District must show visible results that can only come from completing projects. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is underway and succeeding. Small, quality projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger ones as the revitalization effort matures, and that constant, successful revitalization activity creates confidence in the Downtown Plan and engenders ever-greater levels of participation.

The ADDA has added the following guiding principles of its own:

9. Research: Pay attention to the research. There has been a great deal of research on successful revitalization in smaller cities. This research should be accessed and studied.
10. Placemaking: Placemaking should be an overarching theme in the revitalization process. “Placemaking is the process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in.”<sup>1</sup> A strong sense of place is vital to the health and prosperity of a downtown, especially in smaller cities. It is a characteristic rarely associated with regional malls, big-box retailers, or suburban commercial corridors. The old idea of the downtown as simply the central business district is being replaced with the idea of the downtown as a gathering place for the community.
11. Heritage: The unique heritage and historic character of the Downtown District should be preserved to the extent possible.

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<sup>1</sup> The emphasis is on “places that people care about and want to be in.” That is because those places have a strong sense of place. Most people feel that way about their homes. These are places where people and businesses want to be. They are active, unique locations, interesting, visually attractive, often with public art and creative activities. They are people-friendly, safe, and walkable with mixed uses; they have good building dimensions relative to the street, and quality façades; they are often alluring with pizzazz. Placemaking creates experiences that connect people to place—providing a strong sense of “you are here” by differentiating a place or space from others. (Definition of Placemaking. Mark A. Wyckoff, FAICP, Professor, MSU Land Policy Institute).

## II. History of Downtown Ashtabula<sup>1</sup> And Vision for the Future

The history of Ashtabula is the story of a port and a village, the harbor and uptown. The city we know today actually developed from two distinctly different settlements. The Ashtabula River's outlet into Lake Erie was blocked by a large sandbar when George Beckwith settled on the "flats" in 1803. In 1819, the harbor on the east side of the river became the northern terminus of the Ashtabula-Trumbull County Turnpike. Private efforts kept the sandbar clear, and in 1826 the government started making improvements that would lead to a thriving port.

Uptown, the first settlers established farms and mercantile establishments on opposite sides of the gulf. In 1895 the first high level bridge was built uptown at Spring Street. A high level viaduct, which realigned Route 20, was constructed in 1928.

The village of Ashtabula and the harbor joined together in 1877, but there was little practical connection between them until the trolleys were developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The trolleys were taken over by the City in 1922, but they soon faced competition from bus services.

Trolley service ended for good in 1938.



Main Street became Main Avenue in 1930, and its cross streets, which until then had been named, were given numbers instead. Only Center Street officially retains its name, although W. 46<sup>th</sup> St. is still sometimes referred to as Spring Street. The landmark buildings that were lost to the urban renewal movement of the 1960s and 1970s were often replacements of

landmarks built by previous generations. The original frame buildings put up by the earliest settlers and merchants on Main Street replaced log structures, and they were almost completely replaced with multistory brick blocks and arcades in the post-Civil War building boom. Many of these were ravaged by fire and were rebuilt or replaced by more modern buildings of the 1890s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Main Street expanded and modernized in the Roaring Twenties and the post-World War II era, and more structures were replaced.

Other milestones in the City's history include:

- The first City Hall building was used from 1885 to 1965 before being demolished.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from *Ashtabula: People and Places*, Evelyn Schaeffer with the photography of Richard E. Stoner, 2005, Arcadia Publishing



- In 1965 the City refurbished the old Post Office for use as City Hall. This building dates back to 1910 and is a Beau Arts style building, one of over 25 nationwide designed by James Knox Taylor, supervising architect of the US Treasury.

- In 1920 the Hotel Ashtabula was built. The Hotel, now occupied by Signature Health, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

- In 1925 Carlisle's built a three-story department store on Main Ave. In 1941 two more floors were added. The building sits empty today.

- In 1949 Shea's Theater opened. It closed in 1973 and later housed the Ashtabula Senior Center until the Senior Center moved in 2014.

- Urban renewal came to downtown Ashtabula in the 1970s, closed down Main Ave. to traffic, and made it in to a pedestrian mall – called “the Arrowhead Mall.” These “downtown malls” were unsuccessful in most cities, including Ashtabula, and Main Ave. was eventually opened back up to traffic.



## Factors Leading to Economic Decline

The downtown area gradually declined economically and more retail establishments closed their doors. Among the factors contributing to this decline:

- Interstate 90 allowed easier access to malls and shopping in Cleveland.
- Several major fires on Main Ave. destroyed some major businesses.
- Urban renewal came to Ashtabula in the 70s with much fanfare. This project closed Main Ave. off to traffic and added a parking deck. The decision to close the street off the traffic was eventually reconsidered and the street was opened back up.
- The Ashtabula Towne Square Mall opened in 1992.
- The rise of large chain discount and “big box” stores made it more difficult for small, independent stores to compete.
- The local economy was negatively impacted by plant and dock closures.

## Going Forward

Looking ahead, we know that:

- Downtown will not be what it “used to be” nor should it be.
- Downtown must be multi-use and multi-functional.
- Placemaking must be an important concept in downtown revitalization.

Going forward, the ADDA sets forth the following vision for Downtown Ashtabula:

### **VISION: DOWNTOWN ASHTABULA**

The vision for Downtown Ashtabula is: A thriving mixed-use central business and activity center that is attractive, safe, pedestrian-friendly, and economically vibrant. It will feature:

- The center for civic activity.
- Entertainment, cultural, and arts attractions.
- Restaurants/pubs.
- Assorted retail establishments.
- Social gathering spots.
- Health care, personal care legal, financial and other professional services.

Downtown will have a distinctive identity; an identity built from the best aspects of its past, but that clearly conveys its vision for the future.

## Demographics

### Population

- As of the 2010 census, the city had a total population of 19,124, a decrease of 1,838 (8.8%) from the 20,962 residents recorded in the 2000 census. It has lost population due to the decline in industrial jobs. (Source: Star- Beacon)
- Between 2010 and 2014, the city's population declined another 3.2%. (Source: Quick Facts, U.S. Census).

### Economic Health

- The number of persons living below poverty level in 2013 in the City of Ashtabula was 33% (Source: [www.city-data.com/city/Ashtabula-Ohio](http://www.city-data.com/city/Ashtabula-Ohio)).
- Other income indicators can be seen in the table below.

<b>Median Household Income</b>			
<b>Ashtabula City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>USA</b>	
\$29,605	\$47,358	\$51,914	
<b>Income Type</b>	<b>Ashtabula City</b>	<b>State Average</b>	<b>National Average</b>
Retirement Income	\$15,986 Near Average (compared to all Ohio cities)	\$19,743	\$21,489
Social Security Income	\$14,649 Near Average (compared to all Ohio cities)	\$15,240	\$15,495
Interest, Dividends, or Net Rental Income	\$5,261 Low (compared to all Ohio cities)	\$11,429	\$15,308
Public Assistance Income	\$3,577 High (compared to all Ohio cities)	\$3,016	\$3,016

Source: 2015 UsaCityFacts.com [www.usacityfacts.com/oh/ashtabula/ashtabula/economy/](http://www.usacityfacts.com/oh/ashtabula/ashtabula/economy/)  
Data is from the 2010 US Census

<b>Ashtabula County Jobs, Businesses, and Wages</b>			
<b>Jobs, Businesses and Wages</b>	<b>Establishments</b>	<b>Jobs</b>	<b>Average Wage</b>
2013	2,086	30,175	\$33,395
2004	2,334	33,703	\$34,451
2004-2013 % Change	-11%	-10%	-3%
2004-2013 Loss	-248	-3,528	-\$1,056
Annual Loss	-25	-353	-\$106

Source: Forward Ashtabula County Strategic Action Plan 2015 – 2018.  
Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County.

Businesses, jobs, and wages have been on the decline in the county for at least the past two decades.

### **III. About the ADDA**

The Ashtabula Downtown Development Association (ADDA) is a non-profit organization formed in 2006 to combine the efforts of business owners and concerned citizens to facilitate the growth and revitalization of Ashtabula's downtown.

#### **Vision Statement**

The Ashtabula Downtown Development Association envisions a robust, active, and vibrant downtown that preserves Ashtabula's historic character, fosters community pride, and encourages new and continuing opportunities for growth, economically, socially and culturally.

#### **Mission**

The Ashtabula Downtown Development Association's mission is to lead, assist, and support activities that enhance the quality of life in the downtown community.

#### **History**

In 2001, the ADDA's predecessor organization, Imagine Ashtabula, was created. In 2006, the ADDA was organized for the purpose of revitalizing the downtown area. Imagine Ashtabula and the ADDA merged in June of 2010. Imagine Ashtabula was the surviving entity, but changed its name to the Ashtabula Downtown Development Association.

The ADDA has been a member of Heritage Ohio since 2008. Heritage Ohio fosters economic development and sustainability through preservation of historic buildings, revitalization of downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, and promotion of cultural tourism. In October of 2008, Heritage Ohio's Downtown Assessment Resource Team spent one and a half days in the City of Ashtabula to assess the district's revitalization needs and opportunities. The team's 30-page report contained a variety of recommendations for achieving revitalization through use of the Heritage Ohio Main Street approach.

#### **Structure**

The ADDA employs the "four point" approach set forth by Heritage Ohio and Main Street America, a strategy driven framework that guides community based revitalization efforts. Work on these strategies is accomplished within four committees representing the four key areas Main Streets have been using as a guiding framework for over 35 years: Economic Restructuring (recently changed by Main Street America to "Economic Vitality"), Promotion, Design, and Organization.

### **Economic Restructuring (Economic Vitality)**

Revitalizing a downtown or neighborhood commercial district requires focusing on the underlying economic vitality of the district. This work is rooted in a commitment to making the most of a community's unique sense of place and existing assets, harnessing local economic opportunity and creating a supportive business environment for the local business owners.

### **Design**

A focus on design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical elements of downtown while capitalizing on the unique assets that set the commercial district apart. Main Streets enhance their appeal to residents and visitors alike with attention to public space through the creation of pedestrian friendly streets, inviting streetscapes, inclusion of public art, and attention to cleanliness.

### **Promotion**

Promoting Main Street takes many forms, but the ultimate goal is to position the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and the hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics. This can be done through highlighting an area's culture and heritage, and hosting special events aimed at changing perceptions of the district and communicating to residents, investors, businesses, and property-owners that this place is special.

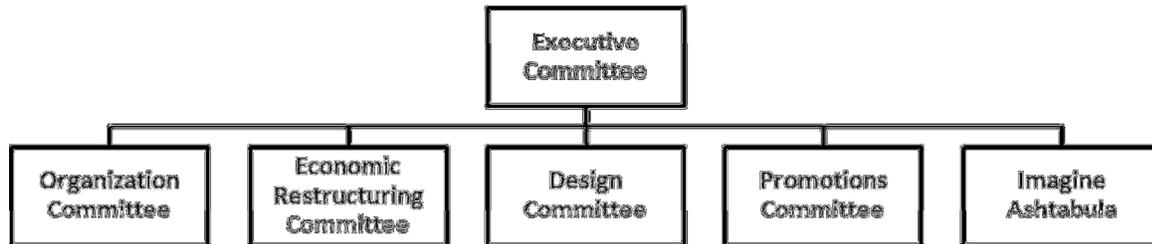
### **Organization**

A strong organizational foundation is key for a sustainable Main Street revitalization effort. The focus is on ensuring that all organizational resources (partners, funding, volunteers, etc.) are mobilized to effectively implement the Community Transformative Strategies. (As referenced in the Main Street Approach by Main Street America)

The ADDA has two additional committees: The Executive Committee and Imagine Ashtabula. Imagine Ashtabula, which was actually the ADDA's predecessor, focuses on the neighborhood and residential aspects of the downtown area. The Executive Committee is responsible for:

- Overseeing the other committees and approving an annual work plan.
- Overseeing financial decisions, including authorizing expenditures and preparing an annual budget.
- Appointing ad hoc committees.
- Nominating officers.

## The ADDA's Organizational Structure



ADDA: MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS			
Organization	Design	Promotion	Economic Restructuring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized the ADDA Committees using the Main Street Approach as presented by Heritage Ohio</li> <li>• Communications to members and the community through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Annual Downtown Ashtabula Business Directory</li> <li>b. Newsletters and e-newsletters</li> <li>c. Website - <a href="http://www.downtownashtabula.com">www.downtownashtabula.com</a></li> <li>d. Facebook</li> <li>e. Membership meetings</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Membership recruitment</li> <li>• Volunteer recruitment</li> <li>• Fundraising ideas</li> <li>• Annual budget and nomination of officers</li> <li>• Developed - "How to Make Events Work for your Business" brochure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown Streetscape</li> <li>• Dressing vacant windows program</li> <li>• Make-Over Paint Program</li> <li>• Flowers on Main Avenue</li> <li>• Main Ave. street banners</li> <li>• Take it to the Curb Campaign to encourage downtown business owners to clean up in front of their businesses</li> <li>• Public art program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsors regular events:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Downtown Laughs</li> <li>b. Easter Eggstravaganza</li> <li>c. Chocolate Walk</li> <li>d. Harvest Festival</li> <li>e. Christmas Tree Competition</li> <li>f. Christmas Parade</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Downtown Ashtabula Pageant and Court</li> <li>• Newspaper articles</li> <li>• Maintains Events' Calendar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection for buildings on Main Avenue</li> <li>• Business Start-Up Guide – Partnered with Ashtabula County District Library</li> <li>• Worked with Kent State Business Dept. – Coupon Book and SWOT Analysis</li> <li>• Security Manual – Partnered with Ashtabula Police Dept.</li> <li>• Task Force to Re-Purpose High School Building</li> <li>• Downtown Safety and Security Program</li> <li>• Spearheaded initiative to restore Shea's Theater</li> <li>• Organized informational meeting on Certified Local Governments</li> </ul>

## IV. Past Plans and Studies

There are a number of plans that were completed in the recent past that should be revisited to see if they are still relevant to the activities of the Ashtabula Downtown Development Association (ADDA) and the scope of this revitalization implementation effort. The past plans that have addressed the ADDA and the Downtown District are identified and summarized in the chart below.

PLANNING ACTIVITY	CONDUCTED BY	FINDINGS
<i><b>Charrette</b></i>  <i><b>2002</b></i>	Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio & Cobalt Group	The study recommended: “A new economic base will be established for the Main Avenue commercial area by creating a new civic core defined by an educational campus and town center. The city’s capital investments and the existing Ashtabula city schools in the downtown area will be leveraged to attract additional assets. Downtown re-development will be linked with recreation enhancements in the Gulf and potential Kent State University investments to create the educational campus. New housing will be brought into the civic core to build a vibrant downtown neighborhood. Downtown will be divided into three target areas: Civic District, North Park, and South Park.” Much of this did not come to fruition.
<i><b>Retail Market Analysis</b></i>  <i><b>2004</b></i>	Ohio State University Extension	Analyzed the surplus and leakage of retail sales in both the Ashtabula market region and the market area. The estimated retail leakage of the Ashtabula market region was \$61.3 million, or \$1,737 per person in the market area. Local retail strategies were recommended as a result of this effort and included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plug leakages in sales of non-specialized goods, especially convenience goods, which include groceries, drugstore items, and hardware.</li> <li>• Build on existing surpluses.</li> <li>• Identify underserved segments of the population.</li> <li>• Identify market niches.</li> <li>• Capitalize on other “attractive” aspects of the local community, such as Lake Erie or the wineries.</li> </ul>
<i><b>Downtown Assessment</b></i>  <i><b>2008</b></i>	Heritage Ohio’s Downtown Assessment Resource Team (DART)	The DART team assessed the district’s revitalization needs and opportunities. Heritage Ohio is the state-coordinating program for the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Main Street” program in the State of Ohio. Following their visit, the ADDA decided to base its structure on Heritage Ohio’s “Four Point approach,” which involves Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring. Committees were formed to address the needs of the downtown in each of these areas.
<i><b>Brainmapping</b></i>  <i><b>2011</b></i>	ADDA Executive Committee	The brainmapping session was held to determine what progress had been made on previous recommendations and what still needed to be done. Recommendations centered around the need for education about historic preservation, the need to develop more partnerships, and ideas for fundraising events.

PLANNING ACTIVITY	CONDUCTED BY	FINDINGS
<i>SWOT Analysis  2011</i>	ADDA in conjunction with Kent State business students	KSU students interviewed downtown merchants about what they perceive to be the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the downtown area. Strengths were seen as location, ease of access, historical buildings, and park areas. Weaknesses were overall appearance of buildings, government, safety and security, and parking.
<i>Community Survey  2012</i>	ADDA	<p>From October to December of 2012, a survey appeared on the ADDA website and in the Star-Beacon asking the public to weigh in with their opinions on what is most important to the revitalization of Downtown Ashtabula. The survey generated close to 800 responses, and the ADDA paid very close attention to the results in setting its priorities for 2013. The five things Ashtabulans viewed as most important are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More retail businesses.</li> <li>2. Improved appearance/beautification of Main Ave.</li> <li>3. Improved safety.</li> <li>4. More entertainment, including restoration of Shea's Theater.</li> <li>5. Preservation of historical buildings and sites.</li> </ol> <p>The top five types of retail establishments they would like to see are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Movie theater offering discount movies, other live entertainment, as well as local talent.</li> <li>2. More restaurants.</li> <li>3. Specialty grocery store.</li> <li>4. Bakery.</li> <li>5. Micro-brewery.</li> </ol>
<i>Priority Setting and Development of Action Plan 2013</i>	ADDA Executive Committee	Feeling the need to become more action-oriented, the Executive Committee voted for their top priorities for 2013, and then developed an Action Plan surrounding these priorities. The top priorities were improving the appearance/beautification of Main Ave., business recruitment and retention, downtown safety and security, and more entertainment options downtown, including the possible restoration of Shea's Theater.
<i>McKnight Streetscape Plan 2013</i>	The Cleveland-based landscape architect firm of McKnight and Associates	The project, which was funded by the City of Ashtabula, made a variety of recommendations for improvements related to intersections, sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, street amenities, and public art.



selling her own creations in the shop, a local artist teaches art classes at the back of the shop. Participants can learn to tie dye, make mosaic art pieces, and more, and she is seeking other artists to offer classes. Small, specialized shops like Rare Earth are the key to Ishpeming's future. "You can't look back and make it what it used to be," leaders say. "You have to make it what it needs to be."<sup>3</sup>

What characteristics or attributes are shared by outstanding small and mid-sized downtowns? Research by Gary Ferguson of the Ithaca (NY) Downtown Partnership addressed this question in a recent study of successful downtowns.

1. No single organizational model exists. The variety of organizational models among the “great downtown” communities suggests that the type of downtown organization is less important than the overall ability of the community to deliver needed services.
2. Successful downtowns tend to have multiple traffic generators that supplemented the presence of a larger institution(s), all within short walking distance. Most of the sample communities have a university or college.
3. Successful downtowns are beloved by citizenry. Community leaders in the sample cities recognize and appreciate the value and significance of downtown to their communities.
4. Successful downtowns have been and are continuing to overcome challenges and obstacles. These cities share an innate ability to respond to and overcome challenges.
5. Successful downtowns are walkable. They possess street level pedestrian scale and are well used.
6. Successful downtowns, by and large, had a commitment to mixed-use development. Uses are generally not geographically separated in these downtowns. The various uses tend to be integrated into the downtown fabric.
7. There is broad public/private investment in the future of downtown. All of the “great downtowns” surveyed in the study are actively planning for the future. All exhibit broad public/private investment in their future growth and development.
8. The nature of downtown retail appears to be in flux. As clothing or other traditional retailers close or choose to relocate, these cities report that the resulting vacant storefronts are being filled with restaurants, bars or other food & beverage oriented

**Paducah Spotlights Quilts!**  
Paducah, Kentucky, developed a cohesive identity around its core assets of artistic and cultural offerings, the Ohio River, and its rich history. The city provides financial and marketing support for cultural institutions, such as a quilt museum and a performing arts center, that draw activity and tourists downtown

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<sup>3</sup> How to revitalize a small downtown: Ishpeming has some ideas. Second Wave. August 28, 2013.

businesses able to pay higher rents. Local, independent retailers continue to be the dominant form of retailing in most of the sample downtowns.

9. Entertainment is a driving market segment. While retail appears to be shifting, nearly all of the sample cities report growth in the area of entertainment. According to downtown and city leaders, entertainment is a driving market segment in these downtowns.<sup>4</sup>

In a literature review completed to determine what constitutes “success” in small city downtowns, the following indicators were identified:

<i>Multi-functionality Indicators</i>	<i>Design Indicators</i>	<i>Branding and Promotion Indicators</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed use development</li> <li>• Office development</li> <li>• Conference/meeting space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of place</li> <li>• Clear boundary</li> <li>• Clear entrance</li> <li>• Design guidelines</li> <li>• Bike/pedestrian friendliness</li> <li>• Public space</li> <li>• Streetscape and façade improvement programs</li> <li>• Accessibility and connectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special events</li> <li>• Marketing initiatives</li> </ul>

Source: Edwards, Mary, Manish Singh, and Kathleen Brown. "Downtown Success Indicators: A Review of the Literature." August 2014. Produced by the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in cooperation with University of Illinois Extension.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Gary Ferguson, Executive Director, Ithaca (NY) Downtown Partnership. gary@downtownithaca.com, (607) 277-8679. Research findings conducted for the Cornell University Civic Fellows Programs. This summary was drawn from the full report which is available at: [http://www.cardi.cornell.edu/main\\_street\\_revitalization/index.php](http://www.cardi.cornell.edu/main_street_revitalization/index.php)

## VI. Placemaking: An Overarching Theme

The concept of placemaking should be a major force in the revitalization of Downtown Ashtabula.



A stroll through the downtown revitalization research illustrates that placemaking is central to many of the powerful trends shaping the world today. New economic theories point out that our city and regional economies may no longer function as they once did, but have been turned upside-down. According to Soji Adelaja, Director of the Land Policy Institute (LPI) at Michigan State University, keeping and attracting people is the most important strategy in this new economic landscape.<sup>1</sup> People are attracted to Main Streets where there are lots of things to do. It is important to make a place more than the sum of its parts. For example, a park should not only be a park, but a park with a fountain, playground, food vendor, nearby library, etc.<sup>2</sup>

In his article “What is a sense of place?” for *Main Street America*, small town revitalization expert Kent Robertson identifies eight key elements that are pivotal to a Main Street's sense of place:

1. Downtown is distinct from other commercial settings. A distinctive place embodies a character, look, flavor, and heritage that are not found in other locations, especially within the surrounding region. By being distinctive, a downtown or neighborhood business district can provide a viable alternative to its competition. To best enhance its

<sup>1</sup> How Your Community Can Thrive — Even in Tough Times. Project for Public Spaces, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Porada. "Ten Ways to Transform Cities through Placemaking & Public Spaces" 21 Apr 2013. [ArchDaily](#).

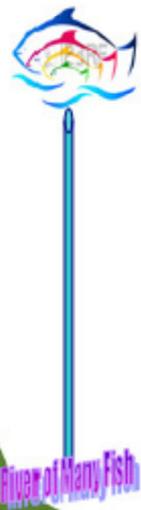
distinct qualities, a downtown should build upon its intrinsic historic, economic, natural, and cultural amenities.

2. The downtown, and its sense of place, has evolved over time. A downtown's sense of place was not created at a single point in time. It has evolved to represent multiple generations. Communities change over time economically, socially, and culturally, and downtowns are better able than most places to reflect that in their built environment. Conversely, most suburban places, including newly developed town centers, have not evolved; rather, they are snapshots that reflect the values, tastes, trends, and priorities of the time in which they were built.
3. Downtown represents the unique heritage of the community. The downtown, more than any other place in most cities, reflects much of the heritage and experiences of a broad spectrum of people. Citizens have connections to the downtown environment. Even structures no longer used for their original function evoke strong memories and a sense of community history. Over the years, Main Streets have been the site of countless community events, including parades, festivals, and celebrations. The fact that downtown has touched the lives of more residents than any other location creates a strong collective bond to that place.
4. Downtown is multifunctional. A single downtown may serve as a place for employment, shopping, worship, tourism, housing, government services, dining, entertainment, lodging, and cultural attractions. Moreover, in a small-city downtown, all of these activities are usually situated within a compact area that is easily walkable.
5. Downtown is pedestrian friendly. A sense of place is best experienced on foot. A commercial district with a strong sense of place has made strides to tame the automobile and to make pedestrian needs a high priority. People will choose to walk if distances between destinations are deemed walkable; if pathways and sidewalks are sufficiently wide, well lit, and perceived as safe and comfortable; and if the routes offer interesting, attractive amenities, such as building facades, window displays, landscaping, and open spaces.
6. Human activity is vital to a sense of place. Regardless of its aesthetic qualities, a built environment requires the presence of people to produce a desirable, appealing place.
7. Downtown encourages people to linger. A sense of place invites people to stay longer than is necessary to conduct their business. People will be tempted to linger if a place is comfortable, safe, attractive, and interesting. The longer people choose to stay downtown, the more establishments they will visit, thereby providing an economic benefit as well. Linger, by increasing the level of human activity in a place, will help enhance the image of downtown.
8. The end result should be the idea that "Downtown is everybody's neighborhood!"

# Some Elements of Placemaking in Downtown Ashtabula



**Main Avenue Streetscape**



**Ashtabula's Culture and Heritage Translated Into Public Art**



**Restoration of Fountain and Clock**



**Special Events**



## VII. Organization

*“Organization establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in the commercial district. Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program. (National Main Street Center definition)*



According to the National Main Street Center, the Organization Committee members promote the downtown organization’s message of revitalization, and they typically are the front-line ambassadors that keep the critical public-private partnerships in good health with regular conversation and coordination. They are also charged with raising funds and building a budget to accomplish the organization’s tasks, as well as coordinating with local political leadership. The main functions of the Organization Committee are:

- Recruiting and organizing volunteers, supporters, and members;
- Creating and nurturing partnerships;
- Communication and consensus-building;
- Fundraising;
- Budget development;
- Pursuing the sustainability of the organization; and
- Addressing multi-jurisdictional issues.

### **Recent Activities and Current Priorities**

The Organization Committee has primarily focused on fundraising, budget development, membership recruitment, publication of the annual Business Directory, the ADDA website, the e-newsletter and other ways of getting the word out to the public about the ADDA and its projects.

The projects and tasks that this Committee should concentrate on completing within the next year are:

- Identify at least two additional fundraising activities that are relatively simple to carry out.
- Obtain assistance with the organization’s administrative and clerical tasks.
- Identify ways to involve more merchants and other downtown stakeholders in the ADDA and its committees.
- Continue to communicate the ADDA’s work to the ADDA membership and to the community. Methods for doing this include regular newspaper columns/articles;

maintaining a website with timely information; a regular quarterly newsletter; and updates on social media.

## **Long-Term Goals**

The Organization Committee of the ADDA should plan for longer-term projects, and begin working on the following goals:

### **1. Develop a permanent funding plan to sustain the work of the organization.**

A solid financial foundation is essential for accomplishing the goals of the organization. The Organization Committee should explore multiple options in developing a funding plan that will sustain the ADDA over the long term.



#### **Objectives:**

- A. Explore creation of a Business Improvement District (BID). A business improvement district (BID) is a defined area within which businesses are required to pay an additional tax (or levy) in order to fund projects within the district's boundaries. [BIDs may go by other names, such as business improvement area (BIA), business revitalization zone (BRZ), community improvement district (CID), special services area (SSA), or special improvement district (SID)]. In Chippewa Falls, WI, a BID provides about 36% of the Main Street program's revenues.
- B. Develop relationships with all local foundations and request funds on a regular basis for specific projects.
- C. Develop and submit projects to the Civic Development Corporation (CDC) for its five-year campaigns.
- D. Develop fundraisers that can be held on a regular basis.
- E. Devise strategies to garner corporate support. The DART report recommended identifying corporate donors and assigning teams to visit and present the fundraising package. The DART report further stated: "Ask for multi-year financial support. These entities need to be involved both financially and as board members/committee members to ensure stability, partnership opportunities and cooperation/collaboration."
- F. Create GoFundMe or CrowdRise campaigns for specific projects, such as the seasonal flower program and fountain restoration.
- G. Institute an annual fundraising campaign.

## 2. Increase the ADDA's membership.

The ADDA's membership provides a strong foundation for the organization to be able to achieve its mission.

### Objectives:

- A. Organize and conduct a yearly membership drive.
- B. Create a Downtown Welcome Team to visit new businesses in downtown and invite them to become involved with the ADDA. A new business welcome package should be part of this task.
- C. Improve and update membership materials. Determine if there are additional member benefits that could be provided. But keep in mind this piece of advice from a nonprofit magazine:



Except for a zoo or museum where people join to get discounted admission, most people don't join community-based membership organizations for discounts to Disneyland or a local boutique. Every organization is different, but most people join because:

- They appreciate what you do (a neighborhood center, a cause).
- Out of guilt (I know I should write a letter to my congressperson, but I'll send this group money instead.)
- They're glad you're speaking out and they're willing to pay for you to do it. (They do want to know what their money has been doing.)
- Joining is a way for them to feel part of a specific community.

So when you ask people to join, focus on these reasons as benefits, not on key chains, magnets and other gewgaws.<sup>1</sup>

- D. Respond promptly and appropriately to inquiries from current and prospective members.
- E. Follow up on those who do not renew their memberships to find out why they did not renew and what we could do to encourage them to renew.
- F. Promote more individual memberships.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Eight Strategic Mistakes with Memberships* by Ellis Robinson. In *Blue Avocado*, a nonprofit online magazine for community nonprofits, April 2010.

### **3. Recruit and organize volunteers.**

A reliable team of volunteers is essential for the ADDA to be able to accomplish its goals.

#### **Objectives:**

- A. Appoint a volunteer coordinator to develop a volunteer databank
- B. Use personal contact with current volunteers and staff. (This is the primary way people become involved in volunteer activities).
- C. Ask current volunteers to participate in presentations to other groups that they are involved with (e.g., the Rotary Club, a church group, etc.).
- D. Ask for help from existing volunteer agencies, local scout groups, the National Honor Society, or other bodies at least part of whose mission is community service.



### **4. Seek partners and collaborative relationships that will strengthen the organization and its mission.**

Through collaboration with partners representing a broad cross section of the community, the ADDA would be able to incorporate a wide range of perspectives and expertise into our revitalization efforts.

#### **Objectives:**

- A. Continue to seek ways to partner with our educators, including Kent State University, After School Discovery, Ashtabula City Schools, Buckeye Local Schools, A-TEC Vocational School and the Ashtabula County District Library.
- B. Cultivate a partnership with the Arts Center, especially as the Public Art Plan moves forward.
- C. Partner with the Lift Bridge Community Association on projects that are of mutual benefit and interest.
- D. Collaborate with local service organizations, such as Rotary and Kiwanis, who could provide expertise in the area of economic restructuring.
- E. Regularly communicate with local foundations, such as the Ashtabula Foundation, the Civic Development Corporation of Ashtabula County, the Richard S. Morrison Foundation, and the Robert S. Morrison Foundation to keep them informed about our plans and to seek their involvement.



- F. Partner with local governments and government agencies, including the City of Ashtabula, the Ashtabula County Commissioners, and Community Action Agency to implement the goals that will result in revitalization of the downtown district.
- G. Find ways to work with other entities who are involved with Economic Development and tourism including the Greater Ashtabula Chamber of Commerce, Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Growth Partnership and the NEO Fund.
- H. Promote health & wellness through partnerships with Ashtabula County Medical Center, the Ashtabula County YMCA, Signature Health, and other local service providers.

**5. Continue to develop an effective communications strategy.**



It is important to let the community know about the ADDA and its projects. This will lead to more volunteer support, more financial support, and more community cooperation.

**Objectives:**

- A. Regularly update the ADDA website. Make sure information is current and correct.
- B. Make sure ADDA projects and activities are publicized on social media.
- C. Send out e-newsletter quarterly.
- D. Publicize all major projects and events in the local newspapers.
- E. Develop a communications strategy with regional partners.
- F. Hold an annual meeting to recognize progress and accomplishments. Write an annual report.

## VIII. Economic Restructuring

*Economic Restructuring involves strengthening the existing economic base of the downtown while diversifying it. Business enhancement activities include helping existing downtown businesses, recruiting new businesses, providing a balanced mix, converting unused space into productive property, and sharpening the competitiveness of downtown merchants (From Heritage Ohio)*



Typical activities of ER committees can include:

- Promoting business retention;
- Assisting with recruitment of new businesses;
- Maintaining market data;
- Providing information on the commercial district and its market opportunities;
- Maintaining building and business inventories;
- Finding new economic uses for Main Street buildings.

The ADDA's ER Committee has also been involved in historic preservation activities, as well as enhanced downtown safety and security.

### **Recent Activities and Current Priorities**

The committee's very first project was development of a Small Business Start-Up Guide. Assembled in partnership with the Ashtabula County District Library, the brochure is a guide for entrepreneurs who are opening, expanding or relocating a business in the City of Ashtabula. The guide includes information on business resources for opening a business, as well as license, tax, permit, and utility information. The Guide is available at the ADDA website.

The ER Committee has spent a great deal of time and effort over the past couple years on preservation projects, including efforts to preserve the old Ashtabula High School and Shea's Theater. The Committee formed a community task force to try to preserve the high school. Although many investors came to look at the building, a final deal could not be reached before the demolition deadline. The Committee also spearheaded an initiative to preserve and restore Shea's Theater and engaged a Columbus-based theater restoration expert to complete several preliminary reports on the feasibility of restoring the theater.

The ER Committee has also been responsible for developing a Safety and Security Program for the Downtown District, which uses off-duty city police officers to provide more extensive and targeted patrolling in the downtown area. Research shows that the presence of law enforcement officers makes the public feel safer, no matter what the level of crime actually is. Signature Health provided the ADDA with seed money to implement the enhanced security program. Another feature of the ER Committee's safety initiative was development of a Safety and Security Manual, which is given out to local businesses.

The projects and tasks that this Committee should concentrate on completing within the next year are:

- Reinvigorate the ER Committee with new members.
- Continue to oversee the Security Program and recruit new participants to the program.
- Complete the property inventory for the Community Development Block Grant, which the City will apply for in 2016.
- Revisit the idea of starting a business incubator.

## **Long-Term Goals**

The Economic Restructuring Committee of the ADDA should plan for longer-term projects, and begin working on the following goals:

### **1. Continue to explore options for starting a business incubator.**



A business incubator is an economic development tool intended to foster successful start-up ventures by eliminating some of the barriers that often lead to the demise of new businesses. The presence of an incubator is important to the start-up business climate of a region because new businesses have a 51 percent failure rate within the first five years of opening<sup>1</sup>. To help improve the rate of success, incubators often offer commercial space at reduced rates, shared equipment and some form of business

mentorship. However, the equipment and services offered to tenants can vary significantly depending upon the focus of the incubator. Business incubators are typically either general in nature with highly flexible space and no criteria for start-up business entry, or targeted at specific industry sectors. General incubators are often the most appropriate choice for smaller communities.

### **Objectives:**

- A. Conduct a feasibility study for proposed incubator.
- B. Identify the type of incubator that would best suit the local needs.
- C. Select a location for the incubator.
- D. Identify the services that would be provided.

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<sup>1</sup> US Census. Longitudinal Study.

- E. Specify how the incubator would be funded.
- F. Visit nearby incubators. The Youngstown Business Incubator was rated the No. 1 university-associated incubator in the world.

## 2. Develop a business retention plan

For years, it was assumed that the primary strategy for growing a local economy was to attract or recruit new businesses to the community. Yet it has been proven that the primary way to grow jobs and investments is by working with businesses already located in a community. These are the same businesses that are usually ignored as communities work to attract new businesses. Studies have consistently demonstrated that eighty percent of growth results from expansions of existing local businesses rather than the attraction of new businesses.<sup>2</sup>



### **Objectives:**

- A. The cornerstone of a strong business retention program is the information collected from periodic business retention surveys, which would query local merchants about their concerns and what type of assistance the ADDA could provide. These surveys are often administered face-to-face by volunteers. Note: The City of Geneva, IL did an excellent business retention survey via Survey Monkey.  
[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/COG\\_retail\\_survey](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/COG_retail_survey)
- B. Study business retention strategies employed by other communities.
- C. Use resources of the Downtown Research & Development Center<sup>3</sup>, which has publications on business retention.
- D. Use university resources. The University of Wisconsin and the University of Florida Extensions both have resources on business retention.

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<sup>2</sup> Blane, Canada, Ltd. “Beyond the Basics – Advanced Business Retention.” Eric P. Canada is a leading authority on existing business strategies and business retention. He is a partner in Blane, Canada, Ltd. Wheaton, IL

<sup>3</sup> For over 50 years, the Downtown Research & Development Center has acted as the information clearinghouse on practical strategies and tactics for revitalizing the hearts of our cities and towns.

**3. Incorporate the concept of placemaking into economic restructuring activities.**

Although there is always nostalgia for what used to be, downtown revitalization cannot be guided strictly by retail resurgence. There must be diverse strategies. Cities are increasingly employing the concept of placemaking into their revitalization strategies. Place-making is an important component of urban economic development. Increasingly, downtowns are seen not as simply a retail center, but as places where people come to congregate for a variety of reasons – cultural, recreational, social, educational, entertainment. According to Michael A. Burayidi, in his book *Resilient Downtowns*: Resilient downtowns have a public gathering place. This gathering place may be open or enclosed, but for the gathering place to function well, it must invoke both formal and spontaneous use. It should be a place where people of all ages, and from all backgrounds, feel comfortable. It should provide an opportunity for both active and passive engagement and relaxation.”<sup>4</sup>

**Objectives:**

- A. Generate ideas for incorporating placemaking into economic restructuring activities (such ideas are often based on an area’s unique heritage and assets, and could include a unique type of museum, working with the Design Committee on a public art program, recreational opportunities, etc.)
- B. Introduce a Farmers Market downtown. Markets are great catalysts for the creation of and organic growth of such places. The growth of farmers markets in the U.S. (now more than 7,000) offer the raw material for a broader rebirth of local economies and places.<sup>5</sup>
- C. Work with Ashtabula Cultural Trust on mutually beneficial projects. Even though the Shea’s Theater restoration project did not come to fruition, the Ashtabula Cultural Trust still exists as an entity and intends to pursue other initiatives. Establishing cultural venues downtown remains a viable objective, and the ER Committee should partner with the Trust to carry this objective forward.

**4. Together, with other partners, sponsor educational seminars for downtown merchants**

One factor found to predict business success has been education and training of the small business owner. Much of that training has come from continuing education programs.

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<sup>4</sup> Resilient Downtowns: A New Approach to Revitalizing Small- and Medium-City Downtowns, Michael A. Burayidi 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Placemaking Main Street into a Destination Downtown. *By Project for Public Spaces on Dec 4, 2014*

## **Objectives:**

- A. Contact the Greater Ashtabula Chamber of Commerce to see if we can partner with them on this goal.
- B. Educational programs can help existing businesses sharpen their skills and become more profitable. Instruction can be offered on business planning, financial management, inventory management, advertising/marketing, employee training/hiring, customer service, window displays/interior store design, using social media, website design, business market analysis and Internet/E-Commerce. Workshops on co-existing with the retail giants are especially popular in many communities. Such seminars could be provided in partnership with groups such as the Greater Ashtabula Chamber of Commerce, Growth Partnership, SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), Kent State University, the Ohio Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Youngstown State University, which serves clients in Ashtabula, Mahoning, and Trumbull counties, with offices in Youngstown, Warren, Jefferson, and Ashtabula.
- C. Compile a manual on financial assistance and incentives that would be available to downtown merchants, such as the Community Reinvestment Area Tax Incentive<sup>6</sup> and City Revolving Loan Fund (RLF).<sup>7</sup>



## **5. Identify and work to eliminate barriers to business start-ups**



Over the years, there have been anecdotal accounts that regulatory processes hinder small business start-ups. It would be helpful to determine if this is truly a problem and what its magnitude is.

Business owners tend to seek locations that allow them to open their businesses as quickly and profitably as possible. Downtown consultants Dolores Palma and Doyle Hyett<sup>8</sup> suggest a number of ways in which these issues can be addressed:

<sup>6</sup> A tax exemption for certain construction or remodeling projects. In the case of remodeling that qualifies for exemption, a percentage of the amount by which the remodeling increased the structure's assessed value shall be exempt from real property taxation.

<sup>7</sup> The City of Ashtabula's Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program has been established to achieve the expansion and diversification of the Ashtabula economic base and to create increased employment opportunities.

<sup>8</sup> Nationally acclaimed advisors, consultants, speakers, trainers, and authors, Doyle Hyett and Dolores Palma are co-founders of HyettPalma, Inc., the only national consulting firm specializing in the economic enhancement of Downtowns and older commercial districts.

- One-stop shops. One-stop shops refer to single locations where business owners can file for and obtain all required approvals for opening their business without having to go to visit various town agencies. It should be located in the town hall and is best staffed by a single person, such as the town clerk, who can help applicants with all the paperwork.
- Streamlined processes. Municipal governments can streamline their review processes in order to reduce the loops and time constraints usually involved, thereby making downtown locations more enticing. For instance, officials can meet with owners to explain local code requirements and walk them through the development process.

**Objectives:**

- A. Review current regulations. Identify those that may create impediments for prospective business owners and see what can be done to simplify them.
- B. Assist prospective business owners with the regulatory processes. Create a "play book" that lays out the process for a prospective business owner to work with governmental agencies, existing business owners, real estate agents, and other professionals.

**6. Collect, review and summarize available economic and market data.**

Data profiles on population, housing, income and labor are easily accessible at the state, county, and metro levels. For example, *STATS America* is an easy to use resource for a wide variety of data from many different sources (i.e. U.S. Census, Bureau of Economic Analysis, and Bureau of Labor Statistics). Such data can be very helpful in compiling an economic profile of the downtown area.



**Objectives:**

- A. Identify local economic data that is easily accessible.
- B. Appoint a “data collector” who would routinely review and summarize this data.

## IX. Design

*Design involves improving the downtown's image by improving its physical appearance – not just the appearance of buildings, but also of street lights, window displays, parking areas, signs, sidewalks, streetscapes, landscaping, promotional materials and all other elements that convey a visual message about what the downtown is and what it has to offer (from Heritage Ohio)*

The Design Committee deals with the appearance and attractiveness of the downtown district. This includes landscaping, lighting, sidewalks, street furnishings, storefront façades, banners, murals, and public art. It also includes the overall cleanliness of the streets, together with removal of weeds and snow. These elements, along with a pedestrian friendly environment, create a quality place to shop, work, walk, and live.

No one denies that Main Avenue needs a facelift, and this was clear in the 2012 ADDA Community Survey. Among the responses:



- “If I could have, I would have checked improved appearance several times.”
- “You will never attract customers or new businesses until the street is cleaned up. Negligent landlords and owners of buildings who are permitted to allow their buildings to rot are ruining the street.”
- “Windows should be clean; there should be no weeds, no chipped paint, no leaky buildings, etc. Until the city enforces codes or the county - nothing will change. Attractive buildings attract interest.”
- “Until vacant buildings are improved or torn down, in my opinion, it will be difficult to have a successful endeavor. Especially the Carlisle building, which at one time was the centerpiece of downtown.”
- “Make downtown a clean and inviting environment. Not fancy, but clean. Fill vacant windows with well-done displays with signs directing visitors to businesses up and down the street.”
- “The appearance of Main Ave. is CRITICAL. There is absolutely no reason for Main Ave. to look like it currently does.”
- “Plant flowering ornamental trees on each side of street.”

## Recent Activities and Current Priorities

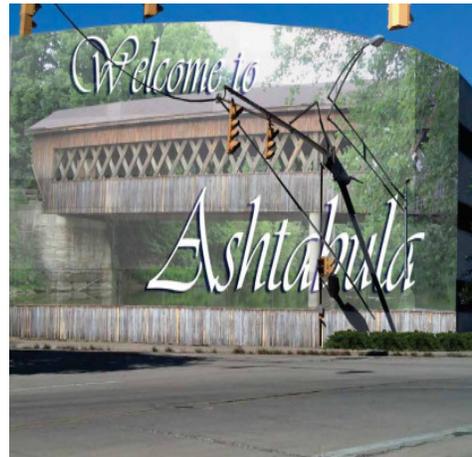
Although there is a lot more that needs to be done, the ADDA Design Committee has taken the following steps toward beautifying Main Avenue:

- Flowers: Flower pots and hanging baskets with an array of colorful blooming flowers have graced Main Avenue for the past several years.
- Vacant windows: The Design Committee is taking steps to install interesting displays in vacant storefront windows. Most recently panels painted with colorful fish were installed in some vacant windows. This project, led by local artist Ralph Bacon, was intended to depict that Ashtabula means “river of many fish.”



- Street banners: The Design Committee has implemented a street banners program, changing the banners with each season. The banners are being designed by local artist Julene Schwarz.

- Streetscape Implementation: The first steps toward implementation of the streetscape have been taken. The ADDA received a grant from the Civic Development Corporation (CDC) for purchase of streetscape amenities, including new, self-watering planters and benches. This grant will also allow for funding of the first piece of public art. The Robert S. Morrison Foundation provided funding for the landscaping that will surround the public art. The ADDA also received a grant from the Ashtabula Foundation for the mural which will be affixed to the parking deck welcoming people to Ashtabula. Finally, a significant contribution was received from Richard Morrison, CEO of Molded FiberGlass Co., to be put toward the streetscape.
- Street “Grooming”: Periodically the ADDA holds street clean-up events, and in 2015 the organization assumed responsibility for weed control on Main Ave.

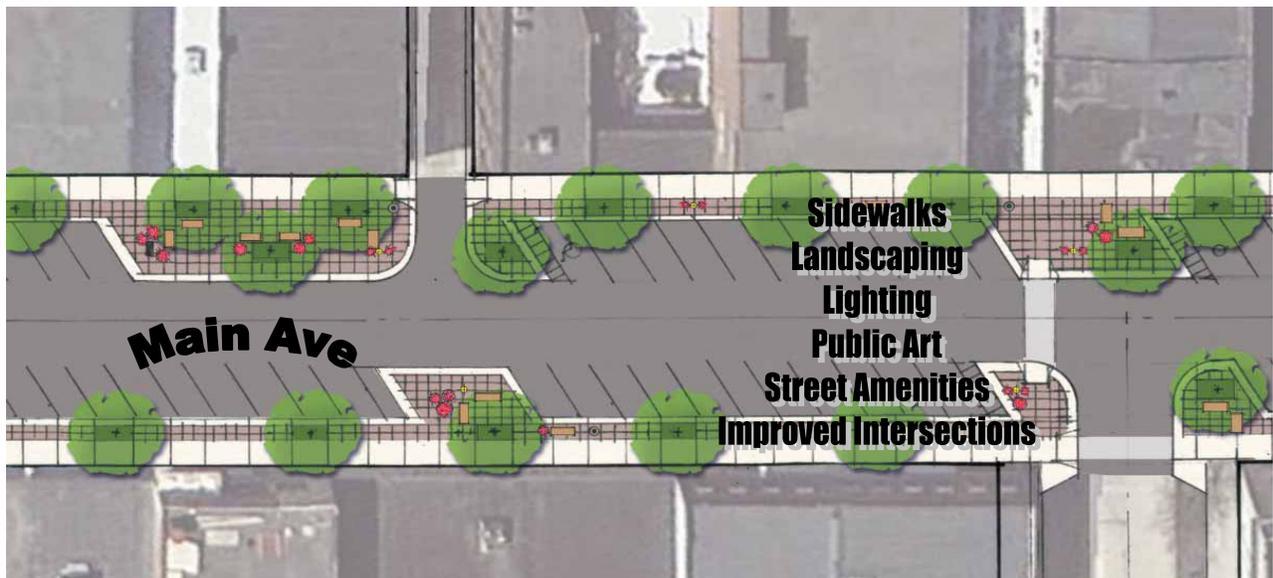


The projects and tasks that this Committee should concentrate on completing within the next year are:

- Select the CDC-funded planters and benches and pinpoint the locations where they will be placed.
- Work with the City of Ashtabula to submit a Community Development Block Grant application for intersection improvements, as well as funding for merchants to improve their businesses.
- Install the first piece of public art, which will be a series of three whirligigs with a “River of Many Fish” theme.
- Design and affix the “Welcome to Ashtabula” mural to the parking deck.
- Have the autumn street banners printed and hung.
- Continue the “Shower Main Ave. with Flowers” seasonal flower display program.
- Continue to make sure that Main Ave. is well-tended and well-groomed.

## **Long-Term Goals**

### **1. Continue the phased implementation of the Main Avenue Streetscape**



Streetscaping provides many benefits to a downtown area:

- Well-designed streetscapes look good and enliven shopping districts and neighborhoods.
- They provide a welcoming environment and draw people back downtown.
- They make it easier to recruit new businesses.
- They provide enhanced design and engineering, which contributes toward an improved quality of life. When the quality of life improves, more residents and visitors come to

the neighborhoods. This increased pedestrian traffic can result in enhanced business opportunities and economic development.

- They add to property values and provide a catalyst to strengthen the economy.
- They have a positive environmental effect. Trees and plantings increase storm water retention, and help mitigate the urban heat island. Trees and plantings also improve air quality by producing oxygen and removing carbon dioxide and particulate matter.

In 2013, the ADDA retained the Cleveland-based landscape architect firm of McKnight and Associates to design a streetscape for Main Avenue. The project was funded by the City of Ashtabula and had the following goals:

- Improve resident and visitor perception.
- Improve visitor experience from car to storefront.
- Provide environment that encourages people to explore once they are out of their car.
- Clarify vehicular traffic pattern and parking configurations.
- Create well defined pedestrian zones and street crossings.
- Improve connection between North and South Parks.
- Develop unique district identity.
- Maintain commercial focus of street – provide amenities in ROW that support marketability of retail spaces.
- Respect historic character.

Due to the magnitude of the project, the streetscape will have to be implemented in phases. The following table depicts the components of the proposed streetscape, along with estimated costs, and some potential options for funding.

<b>Main Avenue Streetscape Components</b>		
<b>Streetscape Element</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Possible Funding Sources</b>
1. Lighting	\$108,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Local foundations</li> <li>○ Civic Development Corporation (CDC)</li> <li>○ Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)</li> <li>○ Federal Small City Program (Ashtabula is on the list of eligible cities)</li> <li>○ Ohio Dept. of Transportation, Transportation Alternatives Program</li> <li>○ Northeast Ohio Area wide Coordinating Agency</li> <li>○ Federal Railroad Adm</li> <li>○ Federal Highway Administration - Railroad Crossings Section 103 Program</li> <li>○ Ohio's Rail Grade Crossing Program</li> <li>○ Norfolk Southern Foundation</li> <li>○ Ohio EPA – SWIF Grants for innovative Storm water management (utilize for pervious paving or bio-filtration aspects of project)</li> <li>○ TIF (Tax Increment Financing) Funding tied to substantial renovation/improvements to property values are utilized by pro-rating property tax assessments to back bond sales with proceeds utilized for public infrastructure improvements.</li> <li>○ Utility foundations</li> <li>○ Corporations</li> <li>○ Banks</li> <li>○ Real estate companies</li> <li>○ Public Appeal: “Buy a Bench” “Friends of Main Avenue” (recognize with name on plaque).</li> <li>○ State of Ohio Department of Natural Resources – Natureworks Program for Trailheads to Riverwalk</li> </ul>
2. Trees, plantings	\$71,450	
3. Furnishings, benches, etc.	\$36,000	
4. Gulf overlook	\$80,000	
5. Murals	TBD	
6. District Identify signs	\$20,000	
7. Site prep/pavement removal	\$185,000	
8. Hardscape - sidewalks, curbs, decorative brick paving	\$1,241,900	
9. Railroad crossing improvements	\$50,000	
10. Utility adjustments	\$110,000	
11. Incidentals, bonds, mobilization	\$65,000	
<u>Total Project Cost</u>	\$1,962,450	

**Objectives:**

- A. Work with city engineers to determine the order of implementation for components of the streetscape.
- B. Work with the City to apply for a Community Development Block Grant, which, based on the results of a community survey, would be used for improvements to intersections and the railroad crossing.

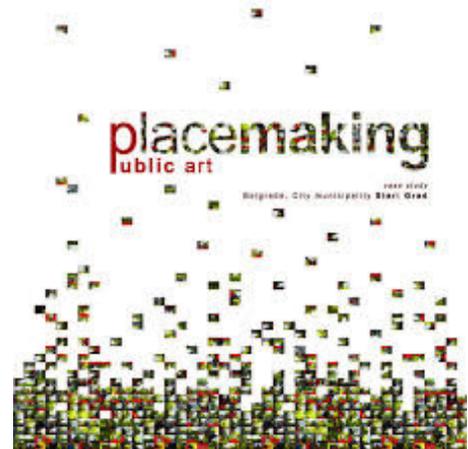
- C. Identify funding sources for redoing curbs and sidewalks. Many communities have used the Ohio Department of Transportation’s Transportation Alternatives program for projects such as this.
- D. Obtain consultation on lighting and identify funding sources for installation of new lighting.
- E. Obtain recommendations and identify funding sources for landscaping.

**2. Implement Public Art Program**

The arts are a highly cost-effective way of driving economic revitalization in urban areas. The first piece of public art, funded by a grant from the Civic Development Corporation, will be a series of whirligigs, representing “River of Many Fish.”

**Objectives:**

- A. Appoint an entity to oversee public art program. The public art program will be a major undertaking and requires a separate group to guide the necessary tasks. This group could be a subcommittee of the Design Committee.
- B. Determine subjects for the public art pieces. The Design Committee has already recommended that the public art depict items that represent Ashtabula’s heritage and culture. For example, the first piece of public art will be a series of three whirligigs that will represent the meaning of the word “Ashtabula,” which is said to be “river of many fish.” Other possibilities for future artwork include covered bridges, trains, the Corvette automobile, and the Flying Saucer gas station.
- C. Determine the locations for public art pieces, and what it will take to bring people to the area. If you have a work of public art, but the site is not well maintained, people do not feel safe there. If there are no design amenities or elements like seating or shade, if there’s nowhere to eat or nothing to do once you get there, if you can’t walk to the site or park your car, people will not take time out to visit the work of art, and the artwork will have failed as a place maker and a community enhancement. A good public space is not only inviting, but builds a place for the community around the artwork by attracting activities that make it a multi-use destination.
- D. Identify funding sources for public art program. One source may be ArtPlace. ArtPlace, along with organizations such as the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), the National



Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Artspace, have been working with cities, planning groups, developers, arts organizations and other stakeholders on placemaking initiatives for several years. Their collective impact is beginning to show. "It is really about how arts and culture can play a role in changing and advancing places," says Bridget Marquis, ArtPlace America's program director.

### 3. Complete Restoration of the North Park Fountain



The Fountain in Cornelius Park was originally donated to the City of Ashtabula by businessman Oliver Topky. In recent years, the Fountain had become inoperable. Larry Fargo, owner of Fargo Machine Co., is leading a group to restore the Fountain back to its original glory. The restoration project is being spearheaded by the ADDA, which is the fiscal agent responsible for collecting donations. New spray pipes were installed in August of 2015 and are working well. While the new spray

pipes seem to make the Fountain look totally restored, their installation was actually the first step of many to completely restore the Fountain, and much more work remains to be done. The total estimated cost for all of this work is \$30,000. Major donors thus far include the Robert S. Morrison Foundation and Ducro Funeral Services. There have also been a number of donations from private individuals.

#### Objectives:

- A. Secure remaining funding to complete the Fountain restoration.
- B. Install new water and electric lines. The latter will be used to power LED lights which will be placed under the water to illuminate the Fountain at night.
- C. Clean the bricks and sandstone.
- D. Sandblast and seal the interior of the Fountain.
- E. Surround the Fountain with ground cover and a decorative fence. The fence will have decorative panels depicting local landmarks and cultural entities such as covered bridge, lift bridge, river of many fish, rail and shipping, etc.

**4. Partner with the City of Ashtabula to Restore the Historic Downtown Clock**



In December of 2015, Ashtabula City Council officially accepted the donation of the Main Avenue clock by Bruce and Debra Anderson of Anderson Jewelers - ensuring that this city landmark remains in Downtown. A campaign is planned to raise money to refurbish the 111-year-old clock. The tall clock was originally installed as a feature of Cederquist’s Jewelry. A number of its working parts were wood, and it was “wound” by pulling sash weights down.

**Objectives:**

A. Work with the City to initiate a campaign to secure funding for the clock restoration. Possible funding sources include local foundations, area businesses, local corporations, and individual contributions.

**5. Work with the City and City Council to develop a Façade Improvement Program**

The outward appearance of downtown buildings is very important and has an effect not only on the overall aesthetic of the area, but also on the ability to attract new businesses. Many vacant storefronts suffer from poor upkeep and neglect. Revitalization demands that this problem be addressed. A report in the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s *Dollar & Sense* series found that:

- Commercial building improvements resulted in an increase in sales in the year after the improvements were made,
- Sales improvements were sustained for several years,
- Sales increases exceeded increases in local taxes,
- The improvements attracted new businesses and shoppers to the target area,
- Participants were often motivated to make additional improvements (such as to interior spaces or product lines), and
- Owners/tenants of properties and businesses in surrounding areas were motivated to make improvements.

**Façade Improvement Program, Atchison, KS**

The 2014 Downtown Façade Improvement Revolving Loan Fund is designed to improve the overall appearance of Downtown Atchison and the Riverfront area by providing an incentive for small businesses to invest in their property. The program provides zero interest loans up to \$20,000 per property for façade improvements for those who qualify. Loans are amortized over five and ten years based on the amount borrowed. To qualify for consideration, the project must result in visible improvement of the overall façade (e.g. not just sign replacement or minor roof repair).

Many cities and towns have façade improvement programs – and many different ways of financing them.

**Objectives:**

- A. Discuss the feasibility of the idea with City administrators and City Council.
- B. Research how other cities have set up their façade improvement programs, how they function, and how they are financed.
- C. Consider establishing guidelines for vacant storefronts. Some cities have “Guidelines for Vacant and Closed Stores.”
- D. Continue to seek cost-effective and creative ways to decorate empty storefront windows. A growing number of landlords of vacant storefronts are allowing artists to display their creations in vacant windows. The displays are preferable to papered-over or blacked-out windows.
- E. Consider holding a “vacant window competition” as was done in Elizabeth City, NC. Elizabeth City’s Design Committee held an Extreme Makeover Clean-Up Day in Downtown Elizabeth City, which also included the “Extreme Makeover Vacant Storefront Window Display Competition.” The Design Committee partnered with several owners of vacant storefront buildings downtown for the project. They agreed to allow several local organizations to decorate their empty storefront windows with decorative and informative displays, bringing a fresh look to downtown. The displays were unveiled during “First Friday ArtWalk.” Volunteers handed out ballots asking for First Friday attendees to look at each window display and then vote for their favorite.

In Dunsmuir, CA the Chamber of Commerce Revitalization Committee, local building owners and regional artists are working together to revitalize a charming but empty downtown by filling the windows with art.

## X. Promotions

*Promotion involves marketing the downtown's unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, new businesses, tourists, and others. Effective promotion creates a positive image of the downtown through retail promotional activity and special events utilizing the downtown as a stage area of community activities. (From Heritage Ohio)*

Promotion takes many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that will rekindle community pride and improve community confidence in the downtown area. Special events and social activities all serve to bring people back into local commercial areas to have fun. Promotions in commercial districts bring back the sense of community, and the opportunity to simply relax and have a good time that many people are craving in today's fast-paced, internet-driven society. The main functions of the Promotions Committee are:

- To promote a positive image for the downtown area.
- To stage special events that bring people to the downtown area.
- To market the downtown area's unique assets.
- To position downtown as a center of community activity and to identify downtown as a gathering place.
- To establish a downtown identity.



### **Recent Activities and Current Priorities**

Over the years, the Promotions Committee has taken the lead in organizing a variety of downtown special events, such as the Christmas parade and festivities, Downtown Laughs, Easter Eggstravaganza, and Trick or Treat on Main (which evolved into the Harvest Festival in 2015). For several years, a Multicultural Festival was held in the downtown area, but this was discontinued when it was determined that the funds raised did not warrant the time and effort required to stage it. In 2015 a new event, the Chocolate Walk, was put in place.

The Promotions Committee has also been actively involved in downtown publicity and in fashioning an “image/identity” for the downtown area.

The projects and tasks that this Committee should concentrate on completing within the next year are:



- Evaluate all special events and decide which ones should continue. These decisions should be based on which events produce the greatest benefits for the downtown area, its merchants, the ADDA, and the community.
- Continue to promote and support the Downtown Ashtabula Court.
- Involve more merchants in staging downtown events. As stated in the DART report: "The ADDA does not need to run ALL special events. Rather, it encourages the downtown as the center of community events."
- Encourage community groups of all types to use the downtown as a staging ground for their events. Downtown should be regarded as a priority location for major activities and events.

- Promote the ADDA's events and accomplishments through a variety of media, so that the community becomes more familiar with the ADDA and its work.

## Long-Term Goals

### 1. Establish a positive downtown image and identity



Over the past few years, there have been attempts to create a slogan or tagline for the downtown area. Two that have been employed on a limited basis are:

- "Downtown Ashtabula: More Than You Realize"
- "Downtown Ashtabula: We've Got You Covered" (a reference to covered bridges)

The ADDA needs to settle on one slogan/tagline/logo that can be consistently employed in all of its public messages and advertising. The ADDA logo/identity should be publicized heavily and used in all marketing materials, signs and way finding, banners, and



event materials. Business owners should be encouraged to use the downtown logo in all of their advertising to promote a unique and cohesive district.

**Objectives:**

- A. Use online resources to help with this process, such as [www.taglineguru.com](http://www.taglineguru.com) The University of Wisconsin Extension has some excellent materials, including guidance on “Branding for Downtown Success.” (Can be accessed at <http://fyi.uwex.edu/downtowneconomics/files/2012/07/branding-for-downtown-success.pdf>)
- B. Consider employing a “visioning process,” as has been done in some communities, where core words are identified that represent the community’s core values, culture, and heritage.

**2. Continue to strengthen successful events and create new events**

Events that are of significant benefit to the ADDA, merchants, and the community should be strengthened and continued. New events should be considered, especially those that can also serve as fundraisers for the ADDA.



**Objectives:**

- A. Consider holding more “Walks.” The Chocolate Walk, held for the first time in 2015, was a successful event. Other types of “Walks” could be held. In Farmington, NM, the downtown association has taken its Art Walk to a whole new level by adding an annual ART FUNraiser. Partnering with community artists of all ages and experience, the city has created a very successful art walk with great business, artist, and community participation. This quarterly event now includes an annual ART-centered FUNraiser; and, earlier this year, they incorporated the art produced for the show into a custom deck of cards. The city has raised thousands of dollars through the sale of the original art pieces and card decks.
- B. Make the downtown area relevant year-round. Consider holding a “Winterfest,” as is done by some other communities. Some set up ice skating rinks in the winter.
- C. Create more events that can serve as fundraisers for the ADDA. There are many ideas on the Internet for fundraisers that are simple and easy. Make a list of these events.
- D. Geocaching has become a very popular activity. Consider holding a geocaching event in the downtown area.
- E. Search the Internet to see what types of events other downtown associations are staging.

### 3. Develop a databank of event volunteers

More than any other committee, this committee needs volunteers who can help with the special events.

#### **Objectives:**

- A. Together with the Organization Committee, build a strong network of volunteers to help implement special programs and events.
- B. Use Internet resources. For instance, the Chippewa Falls, WI Main Street program maintains a roster of 300 volunteers. It uses VolunteerMatch.org to recruit and mobilize volunteers for Earth Day Cleanup events as well as festivals and there is a great response.



### 4. Together with the Organization Committee, develop a plan for better informing the community about the ADDA, its activities and events

The more the community knows about the ADDA and its activities, the more community support will be available. The ADDA needs the support of the community to be able to stage successful events and bring people downtown.

#### **Objectives:**

- A. Regularly compose and send articles to local newspapers and magazines about the ADDA, its projects and events.
- B. Regularly post items about the ADDA and its activities on social media.
- C. Share information about the ADDA and its activities with other organizations, such as service organizations, religious organizations, and educational institutions.

## **XI. Conclusion**

A city's downtown is a special place, filled with history, memories, and a future that has yet to be shaped. Traditionally, it has been a place to work, recreate, shop, gather for civic activities, or, simply, to hang out. But like many downtowns around the nation, Downtown Ashtabula has suffered the effects of a declining local economy and changes in the way people shop. The particular challenge for Downtown Ashtabula is to strengthen what remains, build on its rich heritage, capitalize on existing assets, and create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century "destination."

The ADDA has accomplished a great deal since it was founded. Because of the ADDA, the community is treated to a variety of fun-filled events, including Christmas festivities, Easter Eggstravaganza, Chocolate Walk, Harvest Festival, Comedy Night, and Downtown Ashtabula Pageant. Flowers adorn Main Ave. during warm weather months, seasonal street banners line Main Ave., and the street is well-groomed. The planned Streetscape, Public Art Program, and restoration of the historic Topky Fountain will go even further toward improving the appearance of Main Ave. The Downtown area also benefits from the ADDA's Safety/Security Program, and efforts to preserve structures that have historical significance.

The ADDA is fortunate to have the participation of many enthusiastic and dedicated people who donate their time and expertise to ADDA projects. We are always looking for new volunteers to come on board.

Major change takes time. But the ADDA has been "thinking big" and major decisions about the revitalization of Downtown Ashtabula have been made. There is excitement for what lies ahead. This Plan has outlined the ADDA's vision, goals, and objectives. It is an ambitious Plan, but with the community's support, we can achieve it. As we always say:

***"We believe in Ashtabula!"***



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