Report to the Downtown Partnership

czbLLC - April 2013
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Foreword

Downtown Canton was once a very special place. Provided specific actions are taken, it can be so again.

Downtown was once the vibrant economic center of the region. It was the center of community life. It was where the best restaurants and shops were located. It was where families went to do Christmas shopping, and to celebrate special events. It was the heart of where government and corporate activities existed. Parades and festivals were held downtown. The most important churches were downtown. It was a place everyone was rightly proud of. The history. The architecture. The stores. Community and civic life was vibrant in Canton and its center was downtown. When people were headed downtown, it was a place they were excited to go to, and getting there was pleasant. Downtown was a place where people felt comfortable and safe. When this was all the case, the area outside of the city which is now a vibrant and thriving suburban setting, was mostly farmland. People lived, worked, and did their shopping in Canton; downtown was woven in a positive way into the functional and emotional fabric of everyone’s life.

After a careful review of present and historic market and demographic data, and after discussions with a variety of stakeholders in Canton, our conclusion is that the downtown just described peaked in the late 1950s. That was the moment when city leaders, expecting that Canton would keep growing, continued to plan and build for additional growth that, as it turned out, would not materialize.

From that moment until the early 1970s when Belden Village was constructed, the mismatch between the aspirational size of the new Canton and the reality of a shrinking Canton was hard to see. This was largely because population loss was gradual, a good deal of downtown real estate at the time was shiny and new, and commercial and civic life in general was still oriented around downtown. In reality, the gradualness of these shifts masked the severity of what would become today’s core challenge: a symbolic as well as a literal sizing problem. Too many buildings. Too many big buildings designed in Brutalist and Postmodern styles so frequently anathema to civic life.

Downtown Canton would become, and remains in 2012, an area of 195 city blocks. Criticism of the architecture of the 1960s and 70s aside, our calculation is that downtown in 1965 was properly sized for a city of about 175,000 people. A city can only hope to support that amount of downtown space if it has a focused downtown orientation and is not facing direct competition from nearby suburban areas.

Of course, neither of these assumptions is true about present-day Canton. The Canton community today does not really have a downtown orientation, and has not had a genuine one since the mid 1970s. For at least 40 years, the community’s orientation has been increasingly suburban. Residents began looking outside of the city initially for shopping, then more and more for raising a family, and eventually for civic and community functions as well. Over time, the suburbs began to supplant downtown as the regional hub, and today do that job quite well.
As the suburbs became geographically central to people’s lives, other related sizing issues began to surface, creating additional challenges for downtown. Older housing stocks throughout the city, but particularly near downtown that were suitable for the Canton economy in 1910 were, by the mid 1960s, no longer marketable to families wanting newer, more spacious, and more modern homes. The parks, roads, and city infrastructure, sized for a city of 150,000 or more in the late 1950s, were by the 1980s suffering from deferred maintenance owing to the fiscal stress of having to square constant carrying costs with declining tax rolls.

For downtown Canton to again be special and vibrant, the first order of business is for the key entities in the City to come together and address the twin challenges of size and obsolescence, and to do so strategically and in partnership.

As noted, downtown is 195 city blocks, an area far too large for a city of 70,000 to support. At most, the region’s current population and habits can support about 40 such blocks. Over time, with positive change, perhaps as many as 65 blocks may be supportable. The point on sizing is that whether optimal efficiency proves to occur at 35, 55, or 75 blocks, it won’t be anywhere near the close to 195 blocks that downtown is now comprised of. Therefore, significant work on recalibrating expectations and deploying resources will be incumbent upon all involved.

Besides being too large - and thus needing to re-size - downtown’s potential for vibrancy is undermined by the dilapidated conditions of entryways and near downtown residential neighborhoods, each of which severely harms the image of downtown. In both cases, significant portions of the physical stocks - houses on the residential blocks, older commercial properties on the corridors - have suffered from being obsolete and unappealing to the market. As better stocks have been consistently available in the suburbs for more than 40 years, demand for “close-in” real estate has fallen, and with it, so have values and prices. As a consequence, the corridors host too many second and third tier quality businesses and the near downtown neighborhoods have become quite distressed. It is critical to note that any progress made on re-sizing and re-programming downtown will only have a limited impact so long as the entryways into downtown remain decrepit, and the near downtown neighborhoods remain in distress.

These hurdles aside, since 2003 the Downtown Partnership has done what can only be regarded as truly remarkable work. The City of Canton likewise has made tremendous progress in key areas. The Partnership’s work managing the Special Improvement District, mobilizing the arts and cultural community, marketing downtown, and polishing Market Street is truly exemplary. The City’s role in beautifying Tuscarawas and Market is equally impressive. These stabilizing and revitalizing activities are the basis on which downtown can now move forward with even more confidence.

Bright as these efforts have been, though, their full potential has not been nor will be reached without significant other work happening. The reason is that in spite of these significant accomplishments, the issues of size (downtown is too big), entryway blight (the roads leading people downtown are troubled and unsightly), and near downtown neighborhood distress (obsolete housing, crime) are major impediments to a downtown recovery.
This report details the work of right-sizing and reprogramming for the current and likely future markets, entryway improvement, and near downtown neighborhood stabilization.

It is divided into three parts, followed by a series of detailed maps and charts, and an extensive analysis of the region and market.

The first is titled “Getting There,” and it has two sections.

This report first covers the importance of entryways into downtown Canton. What they should look like. Which ones are most crucial. The impact that entryways have on downtown patrons, and how important it is that people feel good on their way towards downtown, and on their way home. Also addressed is the important issue of which blocks on which corridors are the most important and time sensitive. Whatever gains downtown might make are going to be held back to an important degree by the condition of the entryways.

Next, it briefly discusses the near downtown, mostly residential neighborhoods that flank the core, and that need to be stabilized. As long as the residential blocks in the immediate vicinity of downtown are troubled, downtown will have a difficult time becoming vibrant. Just as the corridors into town need to be visually appealing and convey pride and stability, the near downtown neighborhoods have to project the same.

Both of these sections deserve stand-alone treatment and their own fully developed strategies. However, since both topics hinge significantly on the City’s role and capacity, as well as the status of its own comprehensive planning effort, these sections are not developed fully within this report. Instead they are presented for the purpose of raising their visibility as critical issues, and to name the guiding principles that should govern the manner in which these issues are eventually addressed.

The second is titled “Being Downtown.” It has six discrete but highly interconnected sections.

This is the heart of this report. Right now, downtown “works” very well one night a month, for about a week’s worth of Hall of Fame events scattered from May to August each year, and then for a small portion of the time in between, or roughly 45 days in total, or about 12 percent of the time. This crudely equates to demand for about 20-25 city blocks full time. In others words, downtown is not thriving about 85-90 percent of the time, and of the 195 blocks that constitute downtown, fewer than a dozen are thriving, and because the successful blocks are not contiguous, downtown is operating at but a fraction of potential, there being virtually no multiplier effect.

The first “Being Downtown” section addresses the importance of downtown having a clearly identifiable, high functioning, marketable, and beautiful center on one hand, and boundaries or edges that are just as clearly identifiable and legible and which give definition to what it means to be inside these boundaries, on the other.
The second section discusses the complex challenge of *right-sizing* downtown. At 195 blocks in a market willing to support about 40 blocks *at most*, hard decisions will have to be made about where to focus, and what to focus on. These will be difficult decisions because everything is a justifiable candidate for top priority - parking, beautification, safety, marketing, infill - and none come into focus until they are funneled into a finite geography sized to match demand.

The third discusses the *programming* of downtown: what kinds of businesses with what kinds of target customers, which locations for what recommended uses. What is the sequencing the market might support? What is realistic and what is too ambitious?

The fourth area to receive attention in this part of the report has to do with *compatibility of uses*. Whereas section three discusses what kinds of uses will have complementarity, and where those uses might work in today’s market with today’s real estate realities downtown, section four section discusses the challenge of eliminating, or at least neutralizing incompatible uses.

The fifth section addresses *parking*, a major issue for downtown Canton, but also one of the most misunderstood challenges facing downtown.

The last section speaks to the issue of control and management and predictability and safety and how they are interrelated and form the basis of market functionality. It addresses security and more importantly, the essential ingredient of *feeling secure*. It discusses the issue of perception and the cues for making people feel safe downtown.

**The third is titled “How to Think About this Work.”**

The first two parts are about what to do, and why to do it.

In short, it is important on one’s way to downtown that the pathways taken are attractive, and that along the way one becomes confident that the decision to head downtown was a good one. Likewise it is important that if one gets sidetracked or lost heading to downtown, they neither wind up in Beirut nor fear they might. Once downtown, it is important that they know they are there, and that being there has clear benefits. Parts one and two describe the major steps that must be taken to achieve these goals.

The third part is a statement of principles. Data will always change. The future cannot be predicted. *What can be known and controlled is a set of guiding principles.* How to work, and how to prioritize, and what to evaluate. This part provides what might be called a set of “handrails” on which to lean when circumstances change as they invariably will.
Getting There

Downtown recovery is held back by five unaddressed challenges. The first is that downtown is too big and the efforts to rebuild the market are not as concentrated as they need to be. Right-sizing the focus area, and doubling down on a specific set of activities inside will yield very positive results. Because the work of the Downtown Partnership and the Chamber has been so successful so far, it is expected that the work of right-sizing and reprogramming will feel like a continuation of existing efforts, and a natural progression in the evolution of the Partnership’s focus and work. But no matter how closely the Partnership follows recommendations regarding size and programming, downtown will remain challenged without attention to two others issues: the entryways and the near downtown neighborhoods. In addition to the challenges of right-sizing, upgrading the entryways, and stabilizing the near downtown neighborhoods, the Partnership also faces the challenge posed by commercial development outside the downtown that has drained retail activity. The Partnership must now begin putting together a genuine retail development strategy along with financing tools and incentives specifically tailored for downtown.

Entryways

Entry towards downtown is generally unappealing. The main entrance corridors lack polish and consistent patterns of investment. Attention must be given to addressing this problem. On the north side, the main corridors are Fulton, Cleveland-McKinney, Market, 12th, and Mahoning. From the east and west it is 3rd as well as Tuscarawas. From the south it is Cleveland-McKinney, Cherry, and Market.

From the north the entry becomes increasingly troubled at 19th Street, and at 12th Street in particular, very strong and negative signals are sent to visitors. The properties along Cleveland suffer from years of deferred maintenance. The public right of way is poorly maintained. There is no attention to landscaping. These conditions worsen block by block through the 9th Street intersections. Fortunately, along McKinley there is greater stewardship and stability from 9th to 6th. Fulton becomes problematic at 12th and continues to send negative signals through 4th. Beginning at 9th, both Walnut and Market decreasingly signal stability, and Walnut especially becomes problematic because of the large open spaces on its eastern side from 9th N to 3rd S. The dominant net effect coming into downtown from the north is one of decay with few signs of investment, by either the public or private sector. The effect is to communicate to any visitor that what is up ahead may be worse, and that turning off the main thoroughfare would be a mistake. From the south, Cherry is significantly less problematic; coming into downtown by way of Cherry in fact is a very positive experience until it intersects with 2nd NE, owing to the significant vacant feeling that exists in the Walnut-Cherry strip east of downtown. Entry from the east is not a special concern at this point, but coming along Tuscarawas there are eight blocks of missed opportunities that merit attention. Many visitors to the Federal Building on 3rd will draw conclusions about Canton in general and downtown specifically based solely on the quality of the blocks they see from the view of a car as they get closer to their destination.

Responsibility for the corridors is the City’s. The City must reassert control over the right of way on these corridors, investing resources to mow and trim grass and hedges and bill or lien private property owners for those costs. In addition, new sidewalks, street lamps, and curbs should be installed along the most prominent stretches. The priority sections for these treatments should be 1) Fulton from 9th to 4th; 2) McKinley from 12th to 6th with significant attention to the intersection at 12th; 3) Market from 12th to 6th; and 3rd SW from Cecil to High.
In addition, and of high importance, is a project that will require a 3-way collaboration between the Chamber, the Partnership, and the City: the acquisition of all properties in the 12 blocks between 6th NE and 2nd SE and between Cherry and Walnut, and conversion of this land into an urban park. The reason for this is several fold, but it boils down to the fact that these are blocks that will never function at a high level. There is too much excess supply of land and buildings for this space to be valuable enough to redevelop. Additionally, removing these blocks from the list of potentially developable blocks will contribute, in a positive way, to overall scarcity in the downtown. This move will help to build a floor in the market where there currently isn’t one. Doing so contributes to the sense that opportunities in the downtown should be seized. Furthermore, the effort addresses the troublesome east side of the city by shoring up an edge from Piedmont east while simultaneously giving people a focal point that does not detract from downtown. Such a park also addresses the probability that additional unhealthy activity will occur in these blocks. And finally, it signals to those entering downtown a confirmation of hierarchically layered spaces of varying and increasing importance. It remakes the Walnut-Cherry entryways while adding an essential edge to the primary focus area.

Near Downtown Neighborhoods
The near downtown residential blocks are blighted in many cases, with several consequences. One result is that they are a visible signal to anyone coming into downtown that whatever downtown is like, it is influenced in some way by the people living and visiting these neighborhoods. This is a very destructive signal to send to the market. For those who come through these troubled areas, as opposed to going around them, the signals are worse. Shorb, Fulton, and 8th NW all show a significant level of disorder and decay. The challenges facing downtown by way of these troubled neighborhoods are of course beyond the reach of the Chamber and the Partnership and are ultimately the primary responsibility of the City. Under the auspices of the City, strategic demolitions must be connected to a comprehensive planning process, and within that, the details for what to do will emerge. But the basic outline of what must occur, in what sequence, follows:

**Near Downtown Residential Blocks and Neighborhoods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stabilize</td>
<td>Identify and demolish abandoned and obsolete residential structures, implement a vacant property management program; consolidate demolitions along key streets (such as Shorb) that are heavily traveled; impose a saturated code enforcement effort with a focus on rental property owners. Deploy police throughout with aggressive attention to loitering and nuisance behaviors on any street that is visible to downtown patrons and stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renew</td>
<td>Begin assembling key close-in parcels for future redevelopment as market-rate housing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Being Downtown

Right now downtown suffers from two related physical planning challenges that require attention. There is no center, and there are no edges. People generally know when they are downtown, but not with comforting specificity and certainty. There is no sense of arrival downtown, much less arrival at a special place worthy of excitement and celebration unless there is a specific event.

Arriving from 3rd Street Southwest takes one past the Federal Building and three large and poorly maintained parking lots towards a cluster of public office buildings at Cleveland that offer no visual appeal, and no sense of having arrived at an important place. One can pass through a dark tunnel, slip between two more nondescript public buildings, and then come upon two more parking lots and a parking garage. At the intersection of Cleveland and 3rd one sort of feels they are downtown. But only because the massing of the buildings is so strictly urban and contrary to the preceding blocks. There is a sense of being downtown as downtowns are partly understood - dense and officious - but no clarity about where one is in relation to anything else use or direction wise.

From Fulton Road, downtown slowly emerges at Timken High School. One travels along 5th Street where it is not until crossing McKinley that one senses they are no longer in a distressed and mostly abandoned residential area, but instead are in fact downtown. For the next six blocks until Walnut the positive presence of galleries and small shops emerges and one senses something appealing is nearby. This must be built upon. Yet at the very moment one begins to feel something special, one realizes something is terribly amiss. What's happening is that of the 12 blocks from McKinley to Walnut along 5th Street, 40% of the area is surface parking, 10% is dedicated to public housing, 8% is non-complimentary use, and at least one of the major historic buildings is underutilized as municipal offices.

Southbound from McKinley, the dominant feature is unsightly surface parking, Timken High School, a Federal Building, and a radio tower before what a visitor might have thought was downtown devolves into a struggling but mostly benign neighborhood in mild distress. Southbound it is not until Tuscarawas that one is lured into turning towards downtown. This is the second inviting opportunity, and results in an articulation of downtown in a legible and exciting way. Tuscarawas is an attractive street and exceedingly well maintained. The appealing nature of the street sets its blocks apart because it makes them prominent, more distinguishable, and showcases their importance. These blocks have been ranked higher, and this speaks to the issue of hierarchy downtown. Right now it is very difficult for anyone to get a sense of which blocks deserve their attention because while some blocks are clearly more important than others, there is no discernible pattern. The two blocks of Market on either side of Tuscarawas have been supremely improved, but these blocks nonetheless are places people pass through more than aim for and arrive at, and there is little to no indication from anywhere else downtown that these jewels exist, why to go there, and how to find them.

From the South along Cleveland, people have another example of significant infrastructure investment that suggest “this is an important place”, but here again, the investments have been squandered because they begin at 9th Street when they would be better started at 2nd. It is therefore hard to tell when downtown begins. Does it begin at Goodwill? When the roadbed is upgraded? At the Post Office? At the Carnegie Library, GSA? One knows they are downtown at the foot of the beautiful Onesta Hotel, but just as suddenly one confronts another surface
parking lot, dozens of smokers hanging out at the corner of 5th Street, another surface parking lot, and then for the next six blocks, an area where 58% of the immediate parcels to either side is still more surface parking. Cleveland Ave. offers a powerful glimpse of the downtown Canton was and could be, but does very little in the way of clearly signaling where downtown is now.

Coming in on Walnut or Cherry, the main signal one receives is that the downtown does not continue east of Walnut, perhaps not even east of Piedmont, given the topography. There is virtually no real estate along Walnut or Cherry between 9th and 3rd that has a special “downtown quality”. However, before taken as a negative sign, it is important to note that the large amount of unimproved real estate, surface parking, and marginal properties in this area provide an extremely important service for downtown. These blocks are sufficiently differentiated from what is happening architecturally along Market between 3rd S and 3rd N, so that, by comparison, a visitor can make an important and easy deduction: along Walnut and Cherry is to not be in downtown, but over there just a few blocks is. This is an invaluable service that needs to be leveraged.

Why is it worth paying special attention to the experience of arriving near downtown on a number of different corridors into the city?

Because these experiences illustrate the repeatedly amorphous nature of these city spaces, showing how it is difficult to know when the neighborhoods end and downtown begins, when less important downtown spaces begin and more important downtown spaces start. These are critical signals that are not being sent to the market, and which profoundly impact how people perceive downtown Canton. Ultimately what is signaled is uncertainty, and this issue of uncertainty becomes paramount in rebuilding downtown, for persistent uncertainty is what undermines confidence that downtown is a good and safe place to be, much less invest in.

The most important antidote to uncertainty is to begin building a firm set of edges around the downtown core, so that people are clear about when they are downtown and specifically, when they are in the most important part of downtown, and when they are not. By doing this, patrons will begin to adjust their expectations. Inside of these boundaries they will expect certain levels of safety. Certain elements of infrastructure. A level of service and specific qualities of businesses and experiences. Inside a certain line, new behavioral norms - marketable and likely to make people want to come back - become established.

**Clearly Understood Edges**
Boundaries need to establish what is now a missing hierarchy so that there is, ultimately, a core part of downtown that contains the most special downtown blocks. Inside this focused core, sidewalks need to have an elevated level of attention and care, festivals and other activities are concentrated, extra yet subtle safety precautions are in place, and expectations for customer or patron behavior are likewise elevated. The boundaries need to make sense so that casual patrons clearly understand why the lines have been drawn where they’ve drawn. The boundaries have to help strengthen market values by creating scarcity. Fewer special blocks with special treatments.

These ingredients - hierarchy of spaces according to importance, elevation of expectations commensurate with special places, value through scarcity - form a large part of the basis of how boundaries need to be set. The other balancing part of determining boundaries is the degree to
which current blocks are performing well. How vacant are the spaces? How safe do people feel on those blocks? What are the distances between active uses? How marketable and prominent is the architecture? What are the parking considerations? Which tenants are there now?

Clearly Understood Edges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>To create differing expectations among patrons in different locations and to signal increasing specialness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity</td>
<td>To reduce size of the area designated as special as a means of increasing existing value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>To first build on the blocks with the greatest existing strengths and reconnect those strengths to achieve maximum value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, attention to hierarchy, scarcity, and market conditions has a purpose beyond defining edges inside of which revitalization can feasibly occur. By creating sections within downtown of differing use and importance, by making the most important section small, and by paying attention to the sharpness of the edges around the the most important areas, suspense and anticipation will form and work to downtown’s advantage. Downtown becomes a special place on the other side of certain lines, and the legibility of those lines helps people approach downtown with the aim of engaging positively. An important result will be enhanced value. Right now downtown has dozens of important strengths. The outlines of a well-located public square at 4th and Market, many historically significant buildings, an extraordinarily beautiful corridor along Market, an emergent arts and cultural scene, and several first rate restaurants, to name a few. But these strengths are hard to find, and they are not linked together optimally. A new visitor to downtown cannot discern from any approach exactly when they are in downtown, when they are at its center, or how predictable its outskirts are which can be especially frustrating if one isn’t sure where the outskirts actually begin. Good edges shine a light on the assets inside, which is going to be very critical for downtown Canton to go forward strongly. This is not a strategy without cost, however, because once edges begin to come into focus, expectations for downtown will increase and the Partnership (SID management) and the City (infrastructure, safety, regulations) alike will have to deliver on the implicit promise such boundaries suggest.

A Vibrant Center

Just as the edges around downtown Canton today are amorphous and lead to uncertainty among patrons about stability and safety, the absence of a clear center contributes to additional confusion. Right now downtown has no center to go along with the fact that it has no clear edges. Having a center helps people orient their arrival. It encourages people to stay not only around a single destination, but a destination in relation parking, across greater walking distances, and to possible other related activities - planned and unplanned - such as strolling through downtown, window shopping, or going to a second restaurant for dessert after dinner elsewhere. It ratifies curiosity and encourages exploration.
As a general rule, people will walk about eight minutes between two possible destinations before they resort to using a car. If they think the walk will take longer, they will tend to drive. If they perceive the distance between where they park and where they want to be as being greater than a walk lasting a few minutes, their reluctance to patronize that business increases. If they perceive the spaces between their car and their destination to be unsafe, they will tend to avoid downtown altogether.

### Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchor</td>
<td>To provide a visual and functional frame of reference for everyone who visits or participates in civic or commercial life downtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering</td>
<td>To create an informal, public space where a range of planned and unplanned civic and celebratory activities can occur, and to create a dense complex interactive space that will begin to shape downtown’s personality over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distance that most people cover in under ten minutes is roughly two fifths of a mile, or just about the distance between the Palace Theatre and the McKinley Grand. But their willingness to make the trek will be undermined if they perceive problems may exist along the way. What extends people’s willingness are three things. First, the presence of others like them, thereby reducing a sense of vulnerability. Second, lively and activated spaces between a departure point and a destination, thereby reducing uncertainty and filling voids with positive experiences. And third, a frame of reference along the way that is a clear and visible marker; a kind of North Star working in the background as a subconscious directional valet, reminding them at all times where they are. This frame of reference serves as encouragement and an “exploration expander”; if properly located, it allows people to roam freely within its sight, comfortable and relaxed at all times because they know where they are. In Big cities with great distances and building heights such as Washington, DC and Paris, the Washington Monument ad Eiffel Tower serve this purpose. In medium-sized cities like Tulsa and Baltimore, the Blue Dome in Tulsa’s Historic District and the Domino Sugar marquee along the harbor are beacons that let everyone know where they are. A center can be a tower, a park, a significant building. Optimally it serves not only as a frame of reference but a gathering place, such as in Santa Fe at the Historic Plaza. Such “centers” can also be corridors as in Santa Cruz along Pacific Avenue, or an expansive lawn typical of New England as in the case of Warren, New Hampshire’s Village Green.

In the case of downtown Canton where so many blocks have been transformed into surface parking, creating vast expanses of disconnected space, a focal point that serves as a gathering place, has locational centrality, and can be framed by surrounding high quality structures will be especially important. Over time such a space also becomes the directional guidepost. A central gathering place of this nature will begin to anchor downtown in a manner that is much needed. When it is complimented by understandable edges, the result will be a downtown core that is recognizably special, very navigable, and easily marketable. Over time, as this center is established, each of the several and eventually more distinct sub-areas (or districts) will be able to grow their own focal points (arts, government, warehouses).
Right Sizing
Two major statistical shifts have occurred on a continual basis for the last fifty years of Canton’s history – shifts that have profoundly shaped downtown and which have accelerated in impact in recent years. The first shift is population loss. Canton has steadily shed population, meaning that the number of families in the city capable of spending and contributing to the city’s tax base has gone down significantly. The second has to do with incomes. Since 1950, poorer families have steadily moved in while large numbers of financially stabler families have moved away. Though downtown never was the sole location for retail, declines of such significant magnitude have a big impact. Canton today leaks more than $60M in annual retail sales to surrounding jurisdictions, including nearly $9M in restaurant activity alone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Est Purchasing Power 2010 $</th>
<th>Supportable Sq Ft Retail</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>116,912</td>
<td>38,971</td>
<td>$545,589,333</td>
<td>1,983,961</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>73,007</td>
<td>24,336</td>
<td>$237,994,708</td>
<td>865,435</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-1,118,526</td>
<td>-56.38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What this table illuminates are the impacts of the city’s continual loss of purchasing power over the years, and how that accounts for significantly reduced demand for commercial real estate in Canton. Within Canton it explains a great deal about persistent vacancy downtown, especially retail.

How do these figures relate to downtown, and specifically the issue of right-sizing? With the sole exceptions of spending at gas stations and spending for cars, Canton residents spend more outside the city than in. The city’s total potential purchasing power is about $1.1B annually, or power enough to support approximately 3.8 million square feet of retail, and that is if every Canton family spent every disposable dollar 100% of the time only in Canton, which of course is never the case. The annual leakage of more than $60M in retail spending to Canton’s competitors substantially impacts downtown. Such levels of diminished demand mean more vacant storefronts and more vacant buildings. The primary way that visitors experience this in downtown Canton is in the form of so much surplus surface parking. Getting downtown sized to realistically align with the spending capacity of the region is critical.

Within Canton, there are major spending gaps that reinforce the fact that downtown is too big and is not supportable as is. Where there is genuine opportunity are those instances where there is retail leakage from both the city and Stark County.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Supply</th>
<th>Demand</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>441</td>
<td>Motor vehicles + parts and dealers</td>
<td>116,548,000</td>
<td>110,574,000</td>
<td>5,974,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>442</td>
<td>Furniture + home furnishing stores</td>
<td>3,498,000</td>
<td>10,552,000</td>
<td>-7,054,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4431</td>
<td>Electronics + appliance stores</td>
<td>4,321,000</td>
<td>13,975,000</td>
<td>-9,654,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>444</td>
<td>Bldg materials, garden equip., supply stores</td>
<td>9,152,000</td>
<td>16,511,000</td>
<td>-7,399,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>445</td>
<td>Food + beverage stores (groceries)</td>
<td>71,579,000</td>
<td>85,804,000</td>
<td>-14,225,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>446</td>
<td>Health + personal care stores</td>
<td>17,343,000</td>
<td>24,896,000</td>
<td>-7,553,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>447</td>
<td>Gasoline stations</td>
<td>102,068,000</td>
<td>83,915,000</td>
<td>18,153,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>448</td>
<td>Clothing + clothing accessory stores</td>
<td>9,483,000</td>
<td>20,354,000</td>
<td>-10,871,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>451</td>
<td>Sporting goods, hobby, book, music stores</td>
<td>5,635,000</td>
<td>6,402,000</td>
<td>-767,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>452</td>
<td>General merchandise stores</td>
<td>71,834,000</td>
<td>85,980,000</td>
<td>-14,146,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>453</td>
<td>Miscellaneous store retailers</td>
<td>4,972,000</td>
<td>11,591,000</td>
<td>-6,619,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>454</td>
<td>Nonstore retailers</td>
<td>14,398,000</td>
<td>14,176,000</td>
<td>222,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>722</td>
<td>Food services + drinking places</td>
<td>73,752,000</td>
<td>82,431,000</td>
<td>-8,679,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>504,583,000</td>
<td>567,201,000</td>
<td>-62,618,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

sources: ESRI, Clue Group, LLC

As the above table shows, Canton is losing sales in most retail categories, meaning that the amount of money the city's businesses are capturing in sales is less than the amount of money that its residents are spending. This tells us that a large number of Canton residents are going elsewhere for their retail needs. Stark County, by contrast, enjoys an overall retail sales surplus, meaning that the county's businesses are attracting non-resident shoppers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAICS</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Supply</th>
<th>Demand</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>441</td>
<td>Motor vehicles + parts and dealers</td>
<td>709,062,000</td>
<td>694,585,000</td>
<td>14,477,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>442</td>
<td>Furniture + home furnishing stores</td>
<td>58,044,000</td>
<td>69,476,000</td>
<td>-11,432,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4431</td>
<td>Electronics + appliance stores</td>
<td>56,292,000</td>
<td>87,993,000</td>
<td>-31,701,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>444</td>
<td>Bldg materials, garden equip., supply stores</td>
<td>107,722,000</td>
<td>116,774,000</td>
<td>-9,052,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>445</td>
<td>Food + beverage stores (groceries)</td>
<td>615,502,000</td>
<td>515,986,000</td>
<td>99,516,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>446</td>
<td>Health + personal care stores</td>
<td>125,818,000</td>
<td>152,364,000</td>
<td>-26,546,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>447</td>
<td>Gasoline stations</td>
<td>531,640,000</td>
<td>500,021,000</td>
<td>31,619,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>448</td>
<td>Clothing + clothing accessory stores</td>
<td>142,539,000</td>
<td>126,254,000</td>
<td>16,285,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>451</td>
<td>Sporting goods, hobby, book, music stores</td>
<td>41,893,000</td>
<td>39,609,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>452</td>
<td>General merchandise stores</td>
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<td>453</td>
<td>Miscellaneous store retailers</td>
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<td>454</td>
<td>Nonstore retailers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>722</td>
<td>Food services + drinking places</td>
<td>509,100,000</td>
<td>509,389,000</td>
<td>-289,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

sources: ESRI, Clue Group, LLC

Canton residents are spending enormous amounts of money not in the city. Demand for space is subsequently down, and this has and will continue to affect downtown in the form of vacancy and too much surface parking. In some instances, the county has surpluses in store categories in which the city has sales leakages. Three stand out especially: food and beverage (groceries), clothing and accessories, and general merchandise. This means Canton residents generally leave the city for the county to buy basic consumer staples. In several other instances, city and county alike are leaking spending. So in the areas of furniture, electronics and appliances, building and gardening supplies, health and
personal care, gifts, and restaurants, there is a strong opportunity for downtown to recapture sales. The key is to coordinate business development, incentives and financing tools, and tenant mix in such a way as to reinforce a compact rather than a diffuse downtown, and to strategically link like businesses (such as a butcher and fishmonger and a bakery; or a dry cleaner and shoe repair shop) near one another.

Offsetting these citywide demographic shifts is the real foundation for growth and for right sizing downtown. In this area, the city has a largely untapped source of potential: its daytime worker population. By far, it is downtown’s single greatest market asset. If the daytime workers in downtown Canton were a city, it would be larger than 30% of present-day Ohio communities. The 9,400 daytime workers in downtown Canton represent at least $47.4M in annual retail market demand. A strong downtown that hopes to emerges in the next decade will have to capture a greater share of this valuable and untapped market. To do this, businesses downtown, as well as those elsewhere in Canton, will need to:

- Create merchandising and store clusters that explicitly respond to the needs of downtown workers
- Shift promotional activities to the times that work for downtown workers, which is usually lunchtime and right after work
- Offer downtown deliveries
- Create downtown customer loyalty programs
- Frequently change window displays
- Lay the groundwork for a realistic amount of downtown or near downtown market rate housing

If these steps are done and if they are complimented by a strong voice from City Hall that orients business development towards downtown (especially in the areas of education and energy on the demand side, and in the areas of arts, culture, dining, and entertainment on the supply side) a smaller yet significantly more vibrant downtown can result.

**Multiple Definitions of Downtown :: Choosing the Best One Going Forward and Making Sure it is the Right Size**

In an important respect, downtown will always be the general area where Fulton, McKinley, Cleveland, Market, Tuscarawas, Cherry, plus Mahoning and 12th come together. But because this is a large area - about 320 acres comprised of what would be about 195 blocks - and because today’s population at 70,000 is but 40% of what downtown was really sized for in the 1960s - it is impractical to operate as if this is an area that can be managed with current resources. There simply is not enough market demand, as the nearly 60 acres of surface parking inside this general vicinity alone show. Within the above described general area, there are initially four subareas. There is the area around the Civic Center, comprised of about 33 city blocks between 9th and 12 and McKinley and Cherry. There is the area anchored by the library between 9th and 6th and McKinley and Cherry, which is comprised of about 40 blocks. There is the area anchored by Timken High School, the Federal Building, and McKinley Park, and that has about a 32 city block footprint. And there is what most people will consider true downtown, which is between 6th North and 6th South, from McKinley to Savannah. This “true downtown” is comprised of 90 blocks. By itself this final “true downtown” area is more than 135 acres in size and is a half a mile end to end. While in some respects this whole area (including these parts) will continue to be thought of as downtown, it cannot be managed as if it were. A smaller area needs to be the focus of work, an area with clear
and legible edges and a defined center; an area small enough for people to walk across in a few moments, and an area where there is a basis of market strength.

**Hierarchy :: Primary Focus (black outlined blocks)**
Some attention to all of the 195 blocks should continue by various parties, but the area of primary focus needs to be the 17 block area between Piedmont and Cleveland to the east and west, and between 6th North and 2nd South. This is the area that meets the test of being generally marketable now with some challenges, easily bound, and of a size that can be managed to a very high standard. It is the “mainstreamable” part of downtown, where the best restaurants will flourish, where public festivals need to be concentrated, where the core of the market - downtown office workers - is located, and where the city should invest significantly in infrastructure improvements that help set this area apart as a truly special place.

**Hierarchy :: Secondary Focus (the off-Broadway effect) (red outlined blocks)**
Just outside the primary focus area, along a one block belt are 16 additional blocks. These are in good shape but further from full recovery, and near enough to blocks of sufficient weakness that their pricing advantage will not be enough to overcome locational disadvantages. These blocks will, however, be the first ones to be scooped up by those with an eye to the future who see downtown coming back and want a buy low opportunity. These are the blocks where edgier businesses, tenants, and customers will locate.

**Hierarchy :: Third Area of Focus**
All blocks in the Special Improvement District require continued quality services. Extra investments in the primary (black) and secondary (red) areas show here does not reduce on-going commitments to SID blocks.

**In the Primary Focus Area :: General**
What has to happen is the primary focus area needs to become the part of downtown that everyone’s attention is on, and everyone in the community needs to dial in to make this area strong. This will require concentrated, coordinated infill development married to strategic improvements in sidewalks, streetlamps, curbs, signage, storefronts, and marketing efforts. It will be good to think of this as the epicenter of the SID for management purposes.

This area will need clear boundaries and a definitive center. It will need the owners and merchants and tenants in this area to function cohesively in terms of marketing and programming. The City will need to complement infrastructure investments with public safety efforts. The efforts previously stated especially apply in this primary area as well:

- Creation of merchandising and store clusters that explicitly respond to the needs of downtown workers
- Shifting of promotional activities to the times that work for downtown workers, which is usually lunchtime and right after work
- Creation of downtown delivery and customer loyalty programs
- Frequently changed window displays
- A strategy for developing a realistic amount of downtown or near downtown market rate housing

**In the Primary Focus Area :: Center**
The center needs to be a gathering place, a place well known and easily found, and a place that can become truly distinctive. The space where the old Kresge building stands is such a space.

For this block to become the North Star that it can be, the following will be needed:

1. Current parking on the square needs to be removed.
2. Landscaping and hardscaping work needs to occur at a high level. By the end of 2014 the square should be prominently renamed and opened after extensive renovations. The model for the new square should be the historic plaza of Santa Fe, NM. It should have the capacity to host small musical concerts, outdoor film viewings, political rallies, and other special events. But its main functional purpose is for on-going informal gathering space. Following a visit to New Mexico, a local design team should be retained to adapt the Santa Fe model to Canton in time for spring use in 2014.
3. A key rule of public space is that the primary defining quality is determined by the prominence, quality, and use of the *edges of surrounding private space*. So parallel to investments in the square’s centrality, prominence and value will ultimately rest on the disposition of the properties surrounding it. Marginal properties like the Rite Aid need attention. 401 E Market needs to be massively upgraded. The square will not succeed with the Renkert building in its current condition, with VXI operating as is, and with so much unappealing parking within eyesight. These necessary improvements are detailed later in this report; the point for now is that the square will become truly special when the edges of surrounding private space become truly special.

**In the Primary Focus Area :: Edges**
It is critical that people know when they are in the primary part of downtown Canton. Signals to this effect should be functional and symbolic. They should reference important aspects of history, and communicate a festive sense of arrival. The elements should be dignified and send clear signals that downtown is unique and vibrant and worth investing in.

1. The roadbed in the primary area should be comprised of vernacular brick pavers or a contemporary substitute. This will alert everyone that on these blocks something is going to be different. Such treatments are now inside several intersections along market, but the whole primary area should be modified to have this same quality.
2. At every intersection (24) with the exception of Market between 2nd and 4th, there should be four gate entry columns, as there now are at 5th NW and Court. An effort should be made to modify the existing design and install a sculptural element on top, such as a large outsize bearing to celebrate manufacturing, a ceramic Lombardi trophy replica to celebrate the NFL, or something similar.
3. At appropriate intervals, new street lights should be installed that are different from any outside this area. Inside this area, lighting should replicate the period from 1905-1915, and each light should have two hanging flower baskets. The color of the lighting in this focus area should be different from lighting outside the area. Outside the area, traditional solar vapor is appropriate. Inside, a softer yellow-white light is recommended.

4. Public safety measures will be addressed later in this document, but for the purposes of edge and area definition, the City of Canton should purchase two Segways and their use in routined patrol should be confined to the primary focus area. The unique presence of a distinctive patrol method will add to the sense that this is a different - and special - place, and do so without triggering a sense of police-driven alarm.

5. Parking will also be addressed later in this document, but inside the primary focus area, parking should receive special treatment. The city should validate all customer parking for any patron of any business in the primary area. This will convey a special importance to being in this area as a business and as a customer.

6. All nods to special treatment will come at the significant cost of concerns about blocks outside of the primary focus area. However, every effort should be made to resist enlarging these recommended boundaries. The faster that a finite downtown core can grow through rising values owing to scarcity and differentiated specialness, the faster the surrounding blocks will win through spillover, cannibalization, and comparative affordability advantage (the off-broadway effect). The importance of maintaining this center focus cannot be overstated.

Programming
Downtown may eventually be suitable for the development of significant amounts of market rate housing. That is not the case presently. But some downtown housing should be planned, as described in more detail subsequently. Plans should be made to develop 12-24 contemporary downtown rowhouses one block north and west of the new central square, and loft housing at the current Muggswigz site should be considered. These however are later stage developments.

In the meantime, all vacant storefronts need to be immediately
activated. The Partnership needs to obtain an agreement with each owner of each property in the primary area to ensure that any vacant ground floor space with windows is upgraded and activated. Jerseys from Hall of Fame inductees could be procured on a rotating lent basis to the Chamber and installed in windows with a prominent display and museum quality lighting. Installations can be removed when new leases are signed, but in the short run, the goal is that all space are active, attractive, engaging, and relevant.

The most important space at this time is the area immediately surrounding the new central square. Efforts to fill all spaces around the square take priority. Converting as much square footage of existing space around the square to complimentary arts and dining related activities is critical. These are the uses that stretch the day from 9-5 to 7-7 and beyond. These are the uses that are indoor as well as outdoor. The goal here is complementarity and spillover.

Complementarity is critical and will be addressed secondly. Complementarity stems from the primary customer, meaning the office workers who may become patrons of quality coffee, lunch, dinner, and entertainment establishments, especially at lunch and after work. These workers are joined by city and suburban residents who are not downtown workers but who want a sophisticated downtown dining and entertainment experience a few times a month, from a casual but upscale Asian meal to a fancier sit down dinner, and which includes a desire to patronize young, urban music and bar scenes. These customers already patronize The Strip in North Canton and will continue to do so, but they crave something less sterile than a typical suburban dining or entertainment experience.

Leakage data suggests that residents of Canton alone (not including residents of suburban jurisdictions) can support at additional 29,000 square feet of restaurant space, demand now being leaked. This translates into roughly eight small, upscale, quality restaurants, or twice that amount of more moderately-priced places. Of course this is citywide demand, but this is still part of the downtown equation. This figure is also separate of downtown worker demand for dining and related opportunities, which we’ve already established as being the biggest potential untapped market in Canton.
Naturally, the chicken and egg essence of tapping into unmet or leaked demand is tricky. If it is built, will they come? If it already exists and they are not coming, what is the problem? Our conclusion is that the establishments downtown are too far apart, and not precisely enough targeted to specific markets. Basil, Lucca, and Picciano’s are the best example of what the market wants more of, what the market wants to see closer together, and what it wants to be complemented by other establishments with a distinctive anti-suburban look and feel. Creating a ladder of establishments within the same, walkable proximity that range in price and quality but are all fundamentally mid-scale casual and above is what the downtown Canton market will succeed with. Concentrating like uses (affinity), such as midscale restaurants, which downtown can clearly support, or upscale home furnishings, makes sense. This will eventually lend itself to subdistricts with stand alone strength.

To buttress efforts at establishing downtown Canton’s primary area as the region’s “go to” restaurant district, the Chamber will need to make marketing and recruiting of space, loans, business planning, and marketing assistance a priority. Recruitment should be regional and extend to the Cleveland community in search of entrepreneurs. The Chamber should reach out to the Midwest Culinary Institute (Cincinnati) or Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts (Chicago) and secure a place at these schools’ externship programs with local restaurants. The opportunity for young chefs to open a restaurant in Canton should be a high priority with incentive packages ranging from financing to tax abatements. The customers exist but they are currently spending in North Canton. The physical setting exists but in a raw and insufficiently improved form.

What will substantially strengthen the prospects for success in the primary area is if the city builds upon the current most striking evidence of downtown’s potential: the arts and cultural scene. The galleries and the studios. The demand for music and entertainment. The success of Canton First Friday, the Arts District, the Historic District, and the opportunity to leverage these assets into a truly vibrant setting more consistently. But the galleries need to get to the next level, and for that to happen there needs to be a greater concentration of studios. In the secondary focus areas, space should be secured for artists studios and a national recruiting effort should be launched, offering portfolio artists front of the line opportunities to own a home in Canton and have a downtown area studio at below market rates complete with a negotiated relationship with existing galleries. The many studios in Canton now offer terrific works for sale, but the products are not revolving frequently enough; production rates need to be faster, quality of work needs to advance further, and the diversity of artists needs to be widened.

Downtown also needs related professions that will further contribute to remaking the primary area as a hub of activity. Steps should be taken to establish a relationship with the business school at Kent State University, and a credit-earning off campus project for PMBA students should be anchored each semester in the primary area. In 2014, the Partnership and KSU should collaborate on creating an MBA field exercise to assist local restaurants with business planning, budgeting, and marketing. In 2015 the same effort should be repeated but in partnership with artists and gallery owners. Such efforts along similar but different lines exist between the Kenan School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the local community, Harvard Business School and the Boston community, and Auburn University’s School of Architecture and its Rural Studio in West Alabama. Each injects energy in specific local markets, creates needed business and design products, and diversifies presence while raising the level of activity. One of downtown Canton’s greatest opportunities for growth is in developing support businesses (accounting, marketing, suppliers, consultants, order fulfillment) for the region’s many thriving industries.
To further elevate downtown as a social networking location, SID or other funds should be invested into creating the area’s fastest public internet connection, the focal point of which should be the central square. As recruiting for artists and restaurant developers occurs, so too should the Chamber begin recruiting web designers, architects, planners, designers, and consultants to open offices near downtown with lease rate encouragements, and tax considerations from the City. Kansas City and Austin need not have a duopoly on high speed Google fiber.

Thematically, what is needed is for the primary area to be special and energized, and this requires elevated levels of investment, a consistent and strong commitment to aesthetics, a focus on stability and safety, and a high level of use and user affinity. More diversity than is available in North Canton is needed so the primary area is something of an antidote to the suburbs. But though diverse, it cannot be so eclectic that themes are obscure or that potential visitors feel unsafe. One reason for the small area designation is that the goal should be 100% performance. All 17 blocks need to perform at a high functioning level. All real estate on each block needs to perform at a high level. The pattern of the last ten years has been the frequency of one corner of one block to work really well, but stand six blocks away from the next such corner, thus depriving the area of the benefits of critical mass. This pattern imposes burdens on existing businesses to overcome the resulting sense of isolation between businesses so many downtown customers complain about.

This is all the side of programming that has to do with creativity and energy. It is what will stretch the period in which downtown is being used. But this alone will not cash flow downtown. What makes downtown work today is office workers. Clerks at the Post Office, municipal employees at City Hall, attorneys, accountants, secretaries, managers. These are the people who are the backbone of downtown. Their orientation includes downtown but downtown does not figure prominently in their routines. It can and needs to. Upwards of $47M in spending each year resides in downtown workers' households (9,400 downtown workers), yet little is reaching downtown business on a regular basis at the rates that are possible. It is estimated that in 2013 downtown workers will spend $6.8M in restaurants, or about $1,300 per worker per year. Today their options are very limited. Current restaurants should be encouraged to modify their menus to respond to the downtown worker. The demand for downtown restaurants has potential to grow significantly if two additional market strengthening opportunities arise. The first is the possible arrival of Stark State College downtown or near downtown. The second is the potential for the Shale Energy to increasingly make downtown Canton a functional hub of its financial, business, banking, and other operations. Prominent real estate on the periphery of the central square should be dedicated to the purpose of ensuring these two possible entities are welcomed downtown, and once there, find the restaurant and entertainment offerings satisfactory.

Compatibility of Uses
The Canton market has shrunk tremendously. It stands at 40% of its former capacity, and the most visible sign of this is emptiness, whether in the form of surface parking, vacant storefronts, or empty sidewalks. But the affect these spaces has on customers and potential future customers is complex.

When there is vacancy in a place like downtown, what is introduced is the issue of uncertainty. Occupancy projects predictability. People may avoid a tattoo shop but they do so because they feel able to predict what they will likely encounter. They will gravitate towards a pharmacy.
because they know what to expect. Vacancy and abandonment on the other hand are another kettle of fish entirely. An unclaimed piece of real estate means it is hard to tell what will happen there, and when people are uncertain about what’s a hundred yards in front of them, many avoid going forward.

Not all avoid such situations. But, importantly, many do. Different people have different levels of tolerance for different degrees of uncertainty, disorder, and diversity. Some crave it. Others do everything they can to avoid it. In the end, all places are dynamic and are constantly changing. Good management of the primary focus area of downtown is not prescriptively executing the placement of every narrowly defined tenant into a specific space, but, rather, the work of constantly increasing the probability of positive interaction and positive experience.

There are principally two areas that require vigilant attention to ensure a high probability of a positive experience.

First is the issue of isolation. As customers feel squirrelly about certain blocks and certain parking lots and certain hours of the day, they withdraw to situations that do not leave them unsettled. They reroute their trip towards streets that give them a sense of predictability and away from those that don’t. They gravitate towards places that have high levels of order signified by cleanliness, reinvestment activity, understandable norms and civil behavior, as examples. When positive signals such as these are not present, customers will not emerge, and the few who are present invariably cope with a sense that they are somewhat alone as they walk from, for instance, the Palace Theatre to Bender’s. The way to address this is to shrink the footprint of the Partnership’s work, shrink the footprint of the most special parts of downtown, and communicate clearly to the market the norms that are acceptable and unacceptable inside the primary area. These efforts coupled with the activation of empty spaces and the on-going work of infilling aggressively only inside the primary area will speak to the issue of isolation.

The second issue is related to the first. It is the issue of use compatibility. Earlier the idea of complementarity was introduced and explained as the importance of clustering like businesses and marketing to like customers. And to not so narrow the business lines or the customer types that downtown ends up as a bad effort at vanilla suburbia. The future of downtown is not bland and defined by chain stores and sterility, but it is not the other end of the spectrum either shaped by panhandling and vagrancy and loitering. Use compatibility is related but different. To illustrate, consider a vegan and a carnivore who both want to dine out; they are both restaurant customers but of different types. Two different restaurants catering to the tastes of two customer types may actually be part of a good clustering strategy; it would be appropriate to find a vegan and a steakhouse restaurant on the same block. What is to be avoided as downtown is taken to the next level is not differentiation within categories but real estate uses where the customers, clients, employees, or users of some properties and businesses clash with those of others.

There are four specific compatibility concerns that have been identified that merit attention. One is the impact of the VXI call center at 4th and Cleveland vis a vis customers of Lucca, Gasser and other establishments. Another is the prospect of a Stark State College satellite facility downtown. A third is the Refuge of Hope emergency/temporary shelter facility at 3rd and Walnut. These three establishments pose a challenge for downtown’s recovery, in related but distinct ways, as each does or will add value by occupying real estate, yet the normal behaviors of their
customers and clients do or will likely have the effect of pushing away the customer base downtown really needs. A fourth concern relates to demographic shifts.

- The employees of the VXI call center take their breaks out front, along 4th and Cleveland. Many VXI employees smoke during breaks, and customers of nearby business have become increasingly comfortable coming downtown if the process of parking and walking involves interacting with VXI employees. This general situation extends to employee parking habits and use of cars before and after work to loiter. The situation illustrates that the reality of having one business located downtown (VXI) means a conflict with other businesses (Dehoff, Lucca, Gasser). In short, VXI employees push away important patrons of the primary focus area of downtown, and this will impede continued recovery. A choice will have to made about which kind of business is more vital to downtown, and if relocation is not an option, then both managing the conflicts between customers, and modifying the fortress-like exterior of the building needs to become a city priority.

- A main clustering goal is to have complementarity. Students, artists, and young professionals are an example; and downtown is well on its way to making this work very well, thanks to Arts in Stark, the Partnership, the Chamber, and others. The possible addition of Stark State College to the downtown fold could either be a superb addition or quite a challenging one. Approximately 65% of the Stark State College student body is a “non-traditional student”. This is a student who typically has a full or part time job, attends classes as night, and is on an extremely tight budget. The profile of this student is an example of adding youth to the mix, but not obtaining significant financial benefit. It is also an example of a possible challenge similar to the VXI situation. The non-traditional student will not likely add to the dining and entertainment atmosphere that is so essential for downtown to work, and will instead tend to be more like a McDonald’s customer. There is a place for a Stark State campus in Canton, and some businesses will do well being located near classrooms. But if the Stark State entry into Canton is primarily for the non-traditional student, the optimal place is not at the epicenter of downtown. That noted, if Stark State were to enter Canton with a curriculum and facilities aimed at the traditional student, then the closer to downtown the better. Non-traditional students at Stark State will help some businesses, but not necessarily the ones vital to continuing downtown’s recovery. The better option is to orient the new Stark State towards adaptively re-using industrial or warehouse space on the edge of downtown, so those structures can become productive again and in the vitally important context of vocational training.

- In addition to the reality of VXI and the potential of a Stark State College satellite facility, each a circumstance that poses a challenge to downtown recovery because of employee or customer behaviors, is the issue of the homeless clients of Refuge of Hope. Refuge of Hope provides food and other emergency services to the destitute, almost 100% of whom have drug and alcohol addictions. But Refuge of Hope clients present real problems for downtown. An array of services are located throughout the downtown area and immediate vicinity. The everyday comings and goings of Refuge of Hope customers can and often do include panhandling, drug and alcohol use and loitering. Customers avoid downtown to avoid unpleasant interactions with Refuge of Hope clients. It is not going to be possible to have a commercially thriving downtown and homeless clients with drug and alcohol problems in the vicinity. It is one or the other.
- Finally, one of the most troubling influences is the significant demographic shifts that have occurred in the near downtown neighborhoods. The residential blocks to the north between McKinley and Fulton are in outright free fall, with the blocks from 9th to 4th in particular distress. Southeast around McKinley Park, it is mostly empty, hardly urban, and without a future as a healthy residential neighborhood absent considerable reinvestment. East of Cherry it is more benign than the Shorb Avenue corridor to the northwest, but this area too is in decline, with too many empty buildings, vacant lots, and much evidence of disrepair. These residential areas have become decreasingly owner-occupied, and increasingly home to higher numbers and percentages of troubled families renting substandard housing from slum landlords. The closer such conditions are to downtown, the more they will influence downtown in the form of vagrancy, crime, and disorderly public behavior. And because these conditions flank the entryways, the corridors into downtown themselves will become degraded if these conditions persist.

The compatible use issue is a very important challenge that the City, the Partnership, the Chamber, and others will have to sort out. But what is certain is that if VXI’s employees are not compelled to park elsewhere, and take breaks elsewhere and differently, the value of the real estate around VXI will decline. What’s certain is that if Stark State opens a satellite downtown with traditional students, it is a game changer if they also marry that to a substantial investment in building architecture; but if they were to locate a satellite downtown for non-traditional students, downtown’s upward trajectory would for all intents and purposes be halted. What’s certain is that as long as there is a significant compatibility problem downtown, downtown will be not operate in a healthy market way.

To address these issues, the following is recommended:

- VXI and the Chamber need to negotiate a reorientation of the VXI facility away from Cleveland and towards Dewalt.
- The Partnership, the City, and Stark State need to clearly communicate on the student type Stark State envisions in Canton, and orient site selection towards the periphery of downtown if the choice is a non-traditional student
- Refuge of Hope should be relocated to an alternative site and assistance provided to co-locate important wrap-around supportive services nearby; supportive services should not be located downtown
- The City needs to make its highest near term priority the demolition of 300-350 dilapidated residential structures in these near downtown neighborhoods, and along prominent entryways, and to marry demolition to an aggressive vacant lot maintenance and disposition strategy.
- The Canton Police Department needs to disproportionately deploy resources to establish a firm set of behavioral expectations in the near downtown neighborhoods, adopting a set of zero tolerance strategies regarding speeding, loitering, and nuisance behaviors in these neighborhoods and along main entryways.
- The City’s code enforcement staff needs to sweep these neighborhoods for violations by owners of rental property, making it financially painful to own distressed rental property near downtown.

**Parking**
A dominant view in the community is that there is not enough parking downtown. This assumption is not correct.
There are 4,255 spaces within a 20 minute walk of any major facility downtown. While fragmentation is an issue, parking volume is not. With eight parking decks, 15 surface lots, large quantities of on-street parking, and a walkable grid, there’s ample parking downtown on all but the largest Hall of Fame event days. From an efficiency point of view, in fact, downtown has too much parking, and attention in the long run - should the City invest in drafting a new Comprehensive Plan - ought to focus on parking demand management to address this oversupply.

The tendency in many communities is to build for peak demand on one hand and, particularly in soft markets such as Canton, concurrently develop surface parking downtown. Oftentimes, the justification is that parking is “the next highest and best use strategy, since otherwise the lot will just be a grassy field.” However, adopting this approach leads communities to a high “parking coverage rate” downtown that comes at significant opportunity cost. Every surface lot is where a building or a park or another amenity isn’t.

Rather, the real issue that demands attention is that people perceive the distance between where they now park and where they now want to be to be unsafe. They drive towards downtown on Mahoning, and turn onto Walnut looking forward to a nice dinner at Bender’s. On their way they receive a call from a female friend working downtown at PNC. Would they mind very much pausing in front of the bank so that she could give them a package, rather than try to get it afterwards? She suggests they pull up out front and get the package in the car as it is heavy, drive around the block to park in the five story deck off Piedmont, park, meet her, and then walk to dinner. This is not received well by those in the car. They are concerned. So they reply, “how about instead we meet out front and then you and your package ride with us to Bender’s, since there’s a lot right there?” That is what they do.

This and like scenarios, repeated hundreds of times a week, is not about too little parking, but rather too little willingness to walk from a parking space to a destination when in downtown. In the scenario mentioned here, the walking distance is 1,100 feet, which would take ordinary people about five to six minutes. Moreover, in this example, these three people are planning to attend a show at the Palace Theatre after their early dinner at Bender’s. That distance is about 1,800 feet, which at an after dinner pace, might take 15 leisurely minutes. The optimal place to park, in fact, exists: the garage on Piedmont behind PNC, as originally suggested. But that would entail three walks. The first to dinner. The second from Bender’s to the Palace Theatre. The third from the theater to back to the car (1,400 feet). What the group decide to do is different. The couple decide to pick up their female friend in front of PNC, then drive two blocks to the Bender’s parking lot. After dinner they will drive six blocks to the show. And after the show they will drive home. They will not have walked up Court Street and added their presence to the primary focus area. They will not have window shopped. They will have missed an unplanned chance meeting of another friend there that night walking towards Picciano’s, and will miss after show drinks. Even more important, others venturing downtown will miss seeing them, regardless of whether they know one another or not. If some were willing to walk, they will experience their walk as more isolating and they will feel more vulnerable. Why? Because they don’t want to walk. And while many are reluctant to walk because they tire easily, in downtown Canton the real issue is one of perceived safety and the working assumption that safe or not, visitors perceive they have to run a gauntlet that includes encountering vagrants or other kinds of uncomfortable scenarios. It is the challenge of vulnerability that is at the root of the parking issue downtown, not excess demand for spaces or insufficient supply.
There is a real irony here. These distances – between 1,100 feet and 1,400 feet – are not incomparable to distances that people willingly and comfortably walk every day to park and then shop at Dick’s Sporting Goods on Everhard Road, or park and then get a sandwich at Panera at Westfield Belden Village. The parking issue to resolve is that people feel unsafe being isolated given chance encounters with people who give them pause. There are parking issues to address, but a shortage is not one of them.

What does require attention is a marketable and functional combination of which spaces are used by which people at which times of the day. The following is recommended:

- An in-depth capacity/turnover analysis should be done as part of the citywide comprehensive planning process as soon as possible to cement and add to these next suggestions. The study needs to include confirmation of the precise time for peak demand.
- All metered parking in the primary focus area should be recalibrated for a maximum of four hours. This will allow customers to spend time downtown without having to feed the meter repeatedly. This should be done by 2014.
- In the secondary area, the meters should be also reset to a four hour maximum.
- All coin meters should be replaced by 2015 with card-reading meters in the primary focus area. This should be done by 2015 using revenue from collections starting immediately. The meters should read Visa, MasterCard, and a specially created Downtown Canton Card. An alternative approach would be to install a ParkMobile system (accessible by iPhone or Android) like the one now in use in Columbus.
- Every business in the primary area should be encouraged to purchase Downtown Canton (parking) Cards, and gift them to their customers (who may also buy them from the city on-line).
- A program should be created where customers can get cards from businesses in the primary area. As they make purchases from the businesses, they earn parking credits. For example, a purchase one day from Gasser would generate a credit to their parking. Later in the month, when going to dinner at Basil, those stored credits would feed the meter. Initially, this system would apply only to businesses in the primary area, but over time it could be expanded outside the primary area as well as to private lots, using the same technology.
  - All businesses in the primary area need to agree that all of their employees park outside of the primary area, without exception, unless they own dedicated spaces, or unless consumption of spaces by employees is part of a strategy used sometimes to communicate, for marketing purposes, higher demand than is actually the case.
- All first time expired meter violations should receive a mulligan from the monitor. No ticket should be given for first time offenders; instead a “Thank you for visiting downtown, we noticed you forgot to feed the meter, please remember on your next visit!” stickynote should be placed on the windshield.
- Clearer signage about parking times needs to be installed. There is confusion about this.
- As the primary focus area begins to fill in, and as demand grows, demand-based pricing will need to be considered. After the new digital card meters are purchased, all revenue from meters downtown needs to be channeled towards downtown improvements only, not placed in the general fund.
In sum, the best antidote to perceived parking problems is more demand for spaces, not less; scarcity is the commodity that will best address parking, forcing a recalibration over the definition of best and highest use. Long-term employee parking will need to locate outside of the primary area and incentives will have to be used to attract customers into returning again and again.

Feeling Secure
There is no easy path to remaking downtown into a place where everyone feels secure. Actual and perceived safety are factors. As is precise location, and time.

For instance, people in and near the primary focus area feel safe in the same location at one hour of the day but not at others. In front of Carpe Diem at 10 am, people feel safe, but at the same location at 10 pm, that feeling is less so. Additionally, people cannot always predict ahead of time if last week’s good and safe feeling in front of Carpe Diem at 10 am will recur this week at the same time.

Feeling Secure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>To build on downtown’s niche of being diverse yet safe by filtering out incompatible uses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictability</td>
<td>To establish signals throughout the primary focus area that contribute to visitors feeling able to know what is going on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>To remove signs of disorder, such as trash, low levels of property maintenance, and people prone to erratic behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>To maintain public spaces and the edges of private space at very high levels, thus communicating continual reinvestment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People project a likely sense of security based on a finite number of factors.

First is the issue of perceived isolation and vulnerability. The reason that having others “others like them” near them is so critical is that people project onto others like them a self-referential expectation of how they will behave. The less one can relate to a stranger, the less predictable the stranger’s future behavior will seem. Being in a group or amongst others like oneself is a first step towards feeling secure. What the Partnership needs to take away from this is the imperative to invest in addressing use compatibility issues previously identified, as use compatibility aligns with customer and user similarity. The nuance is that the Partnership’s goal is not sameness, but similarity. For vanilla sameness, there are the suburbs. Downtown’s niche is diversity within a context of similarity, and this has to be achieved through filtering uses until people begin to project a high likelihood of good and safe encounters on their way to and from great meals and concerts and shopping.
Second is the issue of uncertainty. Occupancy conveys greater certainty than does vacancy or open spaces. And vacancy communicates uncertainty. People don’t feel confident they are making wise decisions when they lack information. Vacancy is not enough of an informant for people to feel confident moving about a place, especially one weighted down by reputation, and visual cues signaling disorder on the way towards a destination. This is a major factor in the recommendation to shrink not only downtown, but the primary focus area, and to shrink it down to the largest area within which near 100% control can be asserted on one hand, and the smallest area within which current empty spaces can quickly be turned into occupied and vibrant ones on the other. Because it takes time for the market to work - demand and supply are constantly sorting and resorting - the Partnership will need to be extremely intentional about infill, getting as quickly as possible to a place of fully occupied corridors, courts, and alleyways. In the meantime, lighting and signage will need to be stepped up, as will the presence of community police officers trained especially for the purpose of helping visitors and merchants feel confident going from place to place. The engagement of docents or some other ambassadorial outreach and directional effort would be a valuable way to activate downtown Canton’s many patrons. As Richard Florida recently noted (The Atlantic, 4-16-13), “areas where people feel safer have higher levels of income and education, less unemployment, less homelessness, and more knowledge-based and creative economic structures.”

Third is the powerful disincentive for a person to invest their time and energy visiting a place that appears disorderly. Though the distances from car to storefront in the suburbs are usually 80% of those for patrons downtown - a wash - people perceive the space between car and storefront in the suburbs to be predictably safe, and they arrive at this conclusion because they are mainly surrounded by people like them, and the visual cues available to them on their way there communicate order. Parking lots are clean. They are well lit. There are virtually no blind spots. There are no panhandlers near the entry to the Bonefish Grill, as there are constantly in the orbit of the doorway to Carpe Diem downtown. Consider that the entries to Court Avenue, one of the most important spaces in the primary focus area, or to the unsightly frequent parking garage and other brick walls along second and third (that effectively make some people feel trapped between one intersection and another). Any signs of disinvestment in such spaces further adds to a sense of disorder and exacerbates one’s feeling of not being able to predict what will happen next. The key here is not to focus mainly on eliminating disorder, but instead to spend time and energy and money adding elements that contribute to order. For example, as noted previously, the primary focus area needs to be at the top of the hierarchy. It needs to be extra special and that sense will be achieved in part through greater investment in elements like period lighting, trees, and flower baskets. By doing this, the Partnership will obtain a crucial “two for the price of one” result. When there is continuity of elements like hanging flower baskets that require constant attention, people interact with those elements to very good result. First, such elements require attention - watering and replanting on a constant basis. Or the installation of seasonal lights and festive treatments continually. Having people working on those elements is a signal that the place is cared for, tended, and the presence of stewards adds to one’s confidence. Second, even when no one is visibly maintaining these elements, the elements themselves signal they are being cared for. The installation of such elements thus achieves two goals: specialness as well as stewardship. Along the way, disorder is addressed mainly through additive rather than subtractive measures, and the focus of energy is on what works and on asset building rather than what does not and who is to blame.

Each element of downtown Canton’s primary focus area needs to be maintained to a spit polished finish. The primary focus area needs to stand out no matter where one is. This is a major reason for having a seemingly small focus area. The on-going care of trees, street lamps, flower
boxes, hanging baskets, banners, other lighting, signage, and storefronts can’t be compromised. If the public senses a pulling back from a high commitment to a high standard, they will read inconsistencies and withdrawals - no matter how minor - as disinvestments and this will revalidate their own instinct to avoid downtown. People - current and potential Downtown patrons - positively identify with others like them, more so in the face of disorder; they embrace their pre-existing belief systems by re-investing in them. If the high standards recommended in this report are not scrupulously maintained and exquisitely fine-tuned to remind the customer that downtown Canton is orderly, and thus safe, downtown will struggle. Every square foot of the primary focus area has to be special. Walking into downtown has to feel as good as walking into Gassers or Lucca: like you are entering an extremely loved and special place.

How to Think About This Work

Revitalization work is difficult even in strong markets. The defining characteristic of the need for revitalization is excess supply and too little demand. So in Canton, Ohio which is and has for many years been struggling as a weak market city, revitalization will continue to be tough. And for this reason, the work will require extraordinary effort. In cases occurring in strong regions, what is known as spillover demand becomes “capturable”. People unable to buy into Manhattan in the early 1980s “discovered” Hoboken across the river, and Hoboken was able to capitalize on the excess demand through their comparative affordability advantage. However, in soft markets, revitalization is far more challenging. While not necessarily a zero-sum game, a build it and they will come strategy can be incredibly risky, rarely works overall, and never works as the sole approach. The best response to a revitalization challenge in a soft market is not even a question of building or not building, but on focusing the work on preparing Canton to compete. Competing within a soft market means both adding and subtracting: adding quality of life elements and subtracting hindrances to recovery. These are two dominant thrusts of work that the Partnership and its partners must pursue.

In both cases, private and public effort alike will be needed. Little progress downtown can be expected if either downtown is left to the Chamber alone, or the entryways and surrounding neighborhoods become the sole domain of the City. The former should be mainly a private sector effort with public involvement in comprehensive planning, infrastructure, code enforcement, police deployment, and resistance to any activity that would further concentrate weak near downtown. The latter should be mainly a public sector responsibility with private involvement in redeveloping property at key locations when the market can support it. Preparation is less about real estate development than the work of achieving a combination of complexity, diversity, density, and complementarity within a small area. As it turns out, such an approach steals a page from the playbook used in strong markets: taking advantage of scarcity. In downtown Canton’s case, the work is to intentionally create scarcity so that demand can eventually spill over. Complexity, diversity, density, or complementarity, if attained over too large an area, will not matter. The key is to work in a small area and communicate vibrancy in that specific and urban setting to a slice of the market in the greater Canton region that craves authenticity, prefers experience over acquisition, and prizes some degree of diversity. In an important way, the efforts at establishing a strong arts district have worked. The cultural setting is superb. The musical scene is solid. The emerging dining district is very strong. But these assets are squandered by being too spread out. The 2003 report smartly identified the importance of a critical mass of activities. But that report did not channel its recommendations into a space small enough for an emergent
whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. By carefully infilling with precisely sequenced new development, and by cultivating redevelopment opportunities as recommended, and then marrying these efforts to stabilizing real estate inside such a small area, a core segment of downtown real estate will become more valuable. Simply put, the next positive development can’t be outside the recommended focus area without further thinning the net effect. But because this has been the approach used for so long, the temptation to do this will be present. It should be resisted.

Downtown Canton boosters have to remember that is about stimulating demand. It is about creating a truly special place. It will not happen quickly and it will not happen without risk; nor will it happen without partnership or significant spending. The more the various parties work together to share costs and risks, the greater the likelihood of success.
Master Guide

Illustration No.1 - Major Entryways

Second Street
Cleveland
Market
Fulton
12th
Tuscarawas
Downtown
Master Guide

Illustration No.2 - Downtown

Timken HS

City Hall
Master Guide

Illustration No.2 - Prevailing Uses
Illustration No.4 - Primary Focus Area

- Primary Focus Blocks
- Timken HS
- City Hall
Illustration No.6 - Parking

Master Guide
Blocks w Strengths That Will Fill Once the Primary Area Recovers

These border blocks will enjoy a competitive pricing advantage as the primary focus area becomes more successful. The work on these secondary blocks is to maintain their current condition so that as the primary focus area blocks grow in value, speculators do not have to add to their costs the expense of additional deferred attention.
Master Guide

Master Plan Discussion
The core of this work is to create a destination, but without adopting a *build it and surely they will come* strategy. A place people want to go to, and will remember favorably. It has to be special. Every block. A simple exercise illustrates the point. Assume hypothetically that the Canton community (City plus the Chamber plus the Foundation, plus the Partnership) is able to raise $1.7M to polish downtown. For a variety of reasons those who have come together to contribute to this resource pool have three different ideas about how small or large an area should receive attention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>No of downtown blocks</th>
<th>Average $/Block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>$34,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>$56,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a straight forward illustration of a looming practical challenge for Canton. The larger the area, the less resources will be available - on average - to achieve a high standard, precisely the carrot needed to stabilize downtown and rebrand those blocks as predictable.

The Partnership’s work must consist of pursuing visual change in balance with continuity. Refreshed storefronts due to a consistent standard. Memorable anchoring posts at intersections. Differentiated roadbeds, tree canopy, and street lights. At the same time, the Partnership must strive to retain and expand the reach of existing businesses like Gasser, Muggswigz and Bender’s, and so even the best and most beloved businesses will need to adapt in some ways in order to thrive.

Next 36 Months
1. Focus on landing Stark State near the new central square, and encouraging them to orient their curriculum and facilities to traditional students.
2. Aggressively recruit Gervasi and a second known quantity of high quality to locate in the primary focus area.
3. Begin the process of installing key aesthetic and signally elements: corner columns and street lights with hanging baskets.
4. Within 18 months, refresh 100% of the exteriors of properties facing central square with awnings, upscale lighting and complementary iconography; apply this same goal in the next 18 months to Market between 3rd and 6th N.
5. Focus all marketing efforts on downtown workers through delivery options, coupons, discounts, promotions, and special events. This is the bread and butter of downtown stability.
6. Initiate a more aggressive annual calendar of festivals than now exists, and move as many of these these events towards the new central square. This area has to be complete before other areas can be considered. Blocks 3-11 are the highest priority blocks.
7. Initiate the development of 6-9 lofts above the current Muggswigz location so they open in the spring of 2015.
### Activity Set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remove parking at Market/Kresge Square, and begin process of redeveloping at the focal point of downtown</td>
<td>Downtown needs a clear center</td>
<td>Santa Fe Square; Santa Fe, NM Lincoln Park; Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop 401 Market for Stark State as a Satellite for traditional students</td>
<td>Grow downtown presence of consumers and important market segment</td>
<td>Seattle Community College; Seattle WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocate Rite Aid and redevelop as microbrewery with rooftop dining</td>
<td>Install a dining establishment directly adjoining the central square</td>
<td>Craddock Terry Hotel and Microbrewery Lynchburg, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redevelop Renkert Building as Energy HQ</td>
<td>Enlarge downtown presence of critical white collar workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire and develop 12 blocks between Cherry and Walnut as a municipal park</td>
<td>Addresses complementarity problems and provides a needed east edge to the primary focus area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop beehive space for web designers and related Gen Y professionals</td>
<td>Create a cluster of activity for an important cohort</td>
<td>Santa Fe Complex; Santa Fe, NM Matter, Inc; Atlanta, GA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerate completion of Onesto Hotel</td>
<td>Build downtown residential market cautiously but intentionally</td>
<td>Battle House (Mobile, AL); Capital Hotel (Little Rock), Hotel Blackhawk (Davenport, IA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a signature restaurant at the site of the former downtown ice rink</td>
<td>Continue to show that there is a market for locally special dining downtown</td>
<td>Ted’s Hot Dogs in Buffalo opens second signature establishment in Phoenix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit Gervasi to open a satellite bar and restaurant</td>
<td>Contribute to the intensity of the emerging restaurant scene in the vicinity of the Palace Theatre</td>
<td>The Breadline on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinvigorate Bender’s</td>
<td>Expand the market for fine dining</td>
<td>North End; Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reorient VXI AWAY from the new central square</td>
<td>Address competing use problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Install numerous hardscape elements as described in the narrative</td>
<td>Establish downtown hierarchy and the primary focus area as special</td>
<td>Ironhorse District; Park City, UT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin the development process for 16 contemporary downtown rowhouses in the lot immediately east of VXI</td>
<td>Begin to raise the market for housing downtown</td>
<td>Morgan Street, St. Louis, MO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish an anchoring bakery and store at 120 5th Street</td>
<td>Contribute to identity building with a highly marketable product</td>
<td>Denver Bread Co; Highland Neighborhood Denver, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerate facelift along Court Avenue to include improved signage and cleanup around the Imperial Room</td>
<td>Facelift plus redeveloping Quonset and installing lighting behind Bliss will upgrade safety and recognizability</td>
<td>Church Street; Burlington VT (but NOT a pedestrian mall)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessments

2003 Downtown Plan

The 2003 Downtown Development Plan prepared by Winter & Company was a thorough analysis of the market, land use and zoning, automobile circulation, parking, other transportation systems (pedestrian and bicycle), streetscapes, and urban design in Canton. It was developed through a process that involved over 300 Canton residents and stakeholders, and gave the community both a framework for approaching the challenges downtown was facing ten years ago, and a thorough review of all the systems germane to managing downtown. Predating the work was the existence of several organizations and efforts - the City, the Chamber, CTI, the Land Bank, and the SID. Procuring a downtown development plan was a powerful recognition of the need to take action.

Of the many observations and recommendations contained in that report, the most important was the need for downtown to have a “critical mass of activity”. This remains true today.

In the planning work contained in the 2003 report are important recommendations necessary to obtaining the needed critical mass. A retail core. An urban design concept based on street type differentiation and hierarchy. Parking and parking management strategies. Phased programming, and the identification of opportunities.

Our review of the 2003 report in the context of progress made since then and market conditions today has generated the following conclusions:

1. The general approach taken in that report was sound in the areas of urban design and place-making, and should be continued.
2. Assertions about the importance of partnership were accurate, and the programming recommendations (what kinds of of retail in which specific locations) were sound, and should remain as important guides.
3. The underlying assumption that the market would support an expansive view of development was inaccurate.
   a. It was asserted that “downtown is underutilized”; the key issue should have been stated as “downtown is overbuilt by a full 50%”
   b. When it was recommended that a market for 200,000 square feet of retail be generated, it overlooked the role of competition.
   c. When the recommendation was made to add 2,700 new households, it defied reason that Canton would add thousands of people near downtown in a region with knowingly flat population growth trajectories.
4. In effect, by proceeding upon a set of growth presumptions that were questionable at best, important issues went unaddressed that to this day remain impediments to downtown Canton becoming vibrant.
   a. The first impressions of downtown have never received the attention they require. The corridors into downtown remain blighted, and the then decayed near downtown neighborhoods are worse today than ten years ago. Both severely constrain downtown potential.
   b. Downtown remains too big for the current market, and an opportunity was missed in 2003 to start the process of right-sizing for reality.
How then should the 2003 plan be used in 2013? **In short, the plan's guides to place-making principles – from circulation to parking to streetscape to open space – should all be continued.** None of these approaches are unsound. And the recommended actions and sequence should also remain guide posts going forward. **However, the difference is that these efforts need to happen in a smaller, more clearly defined central area.**

Fundamentally this document should be viewed as a modification of the 2003 plan, not a replacement.

In that vein, the main way to use this document is to take the place-making recommendations made by Winter & Company and scale - or fit - them appropriately. That is, to adjust the recommendations to market conditions, and that means scaling back, not scaling up. It means doing more in less space, not across too large an area, and being sequentially strategic.

The principle market conditions that are present today that must guide the use of this update are a smaller population, a smaller tax base, a stronger set of suburbs, an aging regional population, the prospect of energy sector-led economic renewal in eastern Ohio on one hand, and a further deteriorated area surrounding downtown on the other. Taking these influences together, the key recommendation in this report is to work in the largest area possible where it is plausibly true that 100% of the space in that area is operating at close to 100% efficiency. Put another way: focus on the small 17 block area identified in this document, and do so with the single-minded intent that only when demand to be in that area exceeds supply - excluding landbanking - can attention and energy justifiably shift to a larger footprint.
Assessments

Zoning, Land Use, and Transportation

Downtown Canton covers a large area - 84 to 120 blocks in some views, and as many as 195 if all the blocks with a downtown orientation are considered and consolidated blocks are divided into 1.4 acre squares. Within this area there exists many differing urban forms and functions.

The downtown is a traditional urban grid with long avenues oriented north and south and intersecting streets oriented east and west. Many urban theorists and planners consider the grid to be the ideal urban form and with respect to Canton, it should be considered an asset. In regards to function - downtown is organized into smaller areas or submarkets with specific and predominant uses. For example, the northern reaches of the downtown are organized around large performance arts and entertainment venues, such as the Palace Theater and the Civic Center. The area from approximately 3rd N to 6th S is the Central Business District with high-rise office buildings, government, civic, and institutional uses there and nearby. To the east, the area from Walnut Avenue to Cherry Avenue is an older downtown section with marginal uses and significant abandonment. To the west of McKinley Avenue is a modern downtown section characterized by institutional uses. To the south, another older section exists with industrial and warehouse uses. The other areas surrounding Downtown Canton are primarily older distressed residential neighborhoods suffering from significant disinvestment, high levels of abandonment, and concentrations of failed households. Within the core downtown and the surrounding downtown frame many other uses can be found—retail, office, service, non-profit, and residential - dispersed throughout.

Retail, including service, is the one use in downtown which cannot be identified as dominant in any one area. In general, retail uses are dispersed throughout downtown. However, within the context of such dispersed retail organization, there are small areas and individual blocks where retail uses cluster. The majority of retail uses downtown are oriented toward servicing the daytime offices, government, and institutional uses and populations. This is not retail oriented toward providing the activity or experience of shopping. This partially explains the dispersed spatial configuration of retail uses - clustered into small pockets of available storefronts near to the primary daytime uses.

Downtown’s urban grid is made up mostly of short-length blocks which are preferable to long blocks, with regards to accessibility and functionality. However, many blocks within downtown are occupied by large single-use buildings (or parking decks and surface lots) that limit the availability of street-level uses and storefronts on these blocks. This further contributes to the dispersion of retail uses and further impedes the clustering of retail uses and storefronts. In general, the single use blocks (redeveloped between 1955 and 1975) without storefronts intensify feelings of vastness, vacancy, and emptiness downtown, making it a nearly illegible milieu for potential customers to sort out, understand, and invest in. Most important, the prevailing organization of form and function downtown - the legacy of planning and development decisions principally made between 1955 and 1975 and once recognized and accepted, points to the need for a shift. There needs to be focus on areas of cohesion, where density facilitates a complex set of activities exist and where street-level storefronts are available to maximize clustering.
Complexity, diversity, density, and complementarity must be the objective, and much of the current form downtown makes that hard, especially outside the area this report has recommended as the primary focus area. Furthermore, weak market conditions - oversupply of space (buildings and lots) and little demand - limit opportunities for infill development where vacant lots and even surface parking exists. Therefore, strategies to improve downtown should focus on increasing demand rather than adding supply.

Of course, the form of downtown and the resulting functions create both challenges and opportunities.

For example, single use blocks, the lack of storefronts on such blocks, and the many blocks dominated by parking structures and surface lots create the challenge of fragmented retail locations and street-level activity. However, while parking decks and surface lots contribute to this fragmentation, they also provide opportunities related to accessibility - a pattern of well dispersed parking throughout downtown. There are a total of eight parking decks (4,255 spaces), 15 surface parking lots (554 spaces), and large quantities of on-street parking that ensure an ample supply of parking throughout. Add to this the urban grid with short blocks and mostly ample sidewalks, the fact is that once visitors have parked, downtown offers a very walkable and pedestrian friendly environment.

The downtown urban grid is designed with alternating traffic directions (one-way streets). This design is rational, functional, and provides benefits. While one-way streets are sometimes perceived as inconvenient - having to go around the block to access a one-way street - it does not create a significant barrier to accessibility. In addition, once a visitor has parked, the one-way street system is non-existent for pedestrians. All blocks are equally accessible to the pedestrian. Most importantly, the alternating one-way street pattern has provided greater capacity for on-street parking within downtown - lane capacity has been converted to on-street parking. This is an asset.

Downtown aesthetics are mixed. On one hand, there are many aesthetically pleasing buildings, both historic and more contemporary. However, there are also many unsightly buildings. Both aesthetically pleasing and challenged buildings are equally dispersed throughout, but as yet there is not a critical mass of structures that are high quality in design, have high quality ownership and high quality tenancy.

Downtown is generally clean—free of both litter and graffiti. However, the quality of investment and maintenance on display, in regards to both buildings and infrastructure, is also mixed and troubling. Some buildings and blocks are well maintained, displaying moderate to high levels of care and investment, while many other buildings and blocks are poorly maintained, suffering from deferred maintenance. These poorly maintained blocks convey negative images and messages to the market, as a place of little care and investment. And again, strengths are dispersed, weakening the positive impact they might have.

The same can said for public infrastructure - streets and sidewalks. Some blocks and areas display high standards of care and investment in regards to the streets, sidewalks, and associated fixtures. Unfortunately, many blocks and areas also convey negative images and messages to the market, as a place of little care and investment. The result is that the overall aesthetics of downtown Canton - a mixed message of care and
investment - undermines market confidence. Nevertheless, downtown Canton has superb bones, a solid urban form, reasonable functionality, and an aesthetic that can be addressed through strategy.

The urban density of downtown, while varied and at times low, is ultimately an asset that provides potential for clustering of investment, activities, uses, and leveraging walkability. Most important, the urban form of downtown is unique to Canton and the metropolitan region which is generally dominated by sprawling-suburban forms, functions, and aesthetics. This not to say that the sprawling-suburbs are bad, or that the conventional urban form of downtown Canton is good or better. The point is that the urban form, function, and aesthetics are unique to downtown. Therefore, this unique form, function, and aesthetic can be leveraged as an asset and positioned to appeal to those seeking an urban lifestyle and urban experience.

The bottom line is that the challenges that face downtown Canton today are not primarily the result of zoning, land use, or transportation deficiencies. Rather, they are a function of a shrinking and poorer market with a suburban orientation, and a too little concentration of strengths across too large of an area. For downtown to be perceived as worthy of a visit or a purchase or a new lease to all but the truly committed, a new, more focused approach will have to be adopted. To grow downtown’s capture rate, attention needs to be on working inside a smaller area at a higher level of investment.

Another way to look at the challenges downtown now faces is that they are not best solved through changes, modifications, or improvements to the existing land use regulatory framework. While elsewhere within Canton such changes are essential, and thus speak to the imperative of that the City soon invest in a new comprehensive plan, for downtown, neither modernized zoning regulations, form-based codes, new design standards, nor changes in transportation patterns are going to provide the interventions or results needed in this market. Instead, change will arise through a clear restructuring of activities downtown in a way that is hierarchical and prioritizes the clustering of compatible uses within a defined and limited boundary.
Data

The most important storyline contained in the data presented below is that the market is smaller and weaker than in 2003, so adjustments to the growth-based approach advocated in the 2003 plan require adjustment. There is a market for downtown, but it is small and specialized. What follows are six key findings.

1. The Canton-Massillon, OH Metro Area has nearly the same population today (2010) as in 1970: in the last forty years, the MSA gained just (roughly) 10,000 people. During this same time period, the city of Canton continued to lose population (a trend dating back to the 1950s). By 2010, the city was home to just over 73,000, down by more than one-third (37%) from nearly 117,000 in 1950.
2. **Most of Canton’s population losses are occurring in Census tracts within 1 mile from Downtown.** Population continued to decline in downtown area Census tracts in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. In contrast, other Canton Census tracts (as a group) lost population over the 1980s but held steady since.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Population Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Census Tracts within 1 Mile of Downtown</td>
<td>70,430</td>
<td>63,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Census Tracts</td>
<td>58,144</td>
<td>54,644</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Despite overall population declines in downtown area Census tracts and steady populations in tracts throughout the rest of Canton, both areas added poor people between 2000 and 2010. As a result, poverty rates are up in both sections: reaching 29% in downtown area Census tracts and 14% in all other Canton Census tracts by 2010.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Census Tracts within 1 Mile of Downtown</td>
<td>11,786</td>
<td>15,151</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Census Tracts</td>
<td>5,300</td>
<td>7,570</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Poverty Rate for Census Tracts Near and Far from Downtown Canton, 2000 and 2010](image)
4. **House values are significantly lower in downtown area Census tracts than in tracts throughout the rest of Canton.** In tracts within 1 mile of downtown, two-thirds (67%) of owner units are valued below $100,000. At the same time, nearly all census tracts in the southern half of Canton have median property values below $75,000, and the vast majority (at least 75%) of units in these tracts is valued below $75,000.

5. **Abandonment rates are significantly higher in downtown area Census tracts than in tracts throughout the rest of Canton.** The downtown property abandonment rate (of 9.9%) exceeds the city’s rate (3.0%) more than three times over.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Housing Units</th>
<th>Vacant Units</th>
<th>Abandoned Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tracts within 1 Mile of Downtown</td>
<td>26,627</td>
<td>4,326 16.2%</td>
<td>2,640 9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Census Tracts</td>
<td>24,203</td>
<td>1,515 6.3%</td>
<td>725 3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vacancy and Abandonment Rates for Census Tracts Near and Far from Downtown Canton

- Vacancy Rate:
  - Census Tracts within 1 Mile of Downtown: 16.2%
  - Remaining Census Tracts: 6.3%

- Abandonment Rate:
  - Census Tracts within 1 Mile of Downtown: 9.9%
  - Remaining Census Tracts: 3.0%
6. Since the height of the boom, the **number of jobs fell substantially in the MSA as a whole and in downtown Canton**. The Canton-Massillon, OH Metro Area lost roughly 20,000 jobs between 2006 and 2010 while downtown Canton lost approximately 1,500 jobs.

![Graphs showing employment trends](image)

It is possible that attention to this data will be controversial. Not because of disagreement with the facts, but rather because of a preference to rely more on what might happen if the energy sector materializes as hoped for, or on what might happen if this parcel or that parcel about which there is speculative interest were to flip forwards.

Throughout this report, and especially in the master plan, it is recommended that downtown stakeholders indeed prepare for the possibility of such investments - by Chesapeake Energy, by Timken, by Stark State College. But the right preparation is not to assume growth, but to invest in making the strengths downtown has sustainable, and in aggregating those strengths so that the possibility of the arrival of the energy sector becomes a probability. The essential mistake Canton continues to wrestle with is a half century of having failed to adjust to market reality.

These numbers validate a strategy to focus in a smaller area; such a focus does not invalidate downtown’s unique set of marketable assets and capacity to capture the share of the regional market that desperately wants to be downtown. To capture those young professionals and young
families who crave a unique urban experience, and to return downtown to the special place others remember, the lesson from these numbers is to creatively program in a rightly-sized (smaller) area, address the entryways, and stabilize the near downtown neighborhoods. As a number of downtown patrons expressed during the development of this report:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leslie, 24; lifelong Canton resident</td>
<td>“The city feels welcoming to young people today, but the young people tend not to live downtown. However, there is more Canton pride than you might think. My friends and I are really involved in the art scene.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob, 50; visitor to Canton</td>
<td>“I really like Canton, but there’s not enough continuity. You need to be able to do more activities with your family and then walk somewhere to dinner together.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mike, 40; telecommuter and Canton resident</td>
<td>“Would professionals consider living in downtown Canton? I don’t know, maybe. I do know a lot of people who would prefer to walk to work.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jay, 30; IT professional</td>
<td>“The assets are here, but they’re just spread out. We have a lot of tech people in this area who are remote and working from home. We should create a space where these kinds of people can be around others like them in the city. That would create all kinds of new energy downtown.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike, 40; telecommuter and Canton resident</td>
<td>“It feels small, but Canton is actually considered ‘the big city’ in the area, particularly to anyone south of Canton. I know lots of people who are commuting an hour or more every day to work in the city.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young mother and lifelong Canton resident</td>
<td>“Young people think the city is pretty cool right now. A lot of people seem to look into getting their first apartment here.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jon, 25; sales representative</td>
<td>“Canton feels safe, but it needs more gathering places, like a good cafe. People my age would really gravitate towards a gastropub, like they have in Cleveland. We just need a few blocks of good activity.”</td>
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</tbody>
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