



# DOWNTOWN





## 4. Downtown

### A. Introduction

Sidney's downtown is an important component in the City's economic, physical, cultural, and social structure. It establishes community identity, facilitates community interaction and attracts consumers that support local merchants. A variety of employers are located in downtown Sidney including retail, service-oriented businesses and government. Design principles are tools that can be implemented to help define and maintain the downtown. Civic space plays an important role in downtowns because it creates an opportunity to bring people together. The Downtown Plan addresses the following major topics:



*Many improvements have been made to Downtown Sidney over the last 10 years.*

- **Physical Context**
- **Economic Considerations**

In 2001, the City developed a Retail Market and Recruitment Strategy for the entire City. Specific strategies were created to address vacancies within the City's major retail centers, including the downtown. This chapter has been revised to include the results of that study.

### B. Planning Issues

#### 1. Retail Services

Downtown continues to experience a loss in retail square footage, which is exacerbated by the development of local strip centers on the City's west side. Downtown Sidney has nearly 212,000 square feet of retail space, but as of August 2001, only about 138,000 square feet was occupied. The vacancy rate has increased beyond 35 percent, Downtown Sidney has suffered like many central business districts as a result of suburban competition that, over time, has siphoned away the downtown retail market. Automobile accessibility and visibility, especially from interstate highways like I-75, have become a more important location factor for many retail businesses.

**Table 7 DOWNTOWN SIDNEY RETAIL INVENTORY BY PRIMARY CATEGORY**

Type of Good	Sq. Ft.	Share
Convenience Goods	18,696	8.8%
Shopper Goods	87,688	41.4%
Eating / Drinking	15,383	7.3%
Entertainment	12,470	5.9%
Personal Services	3,400	1.6%
<b>Total Occupied</b>	<b>137,637</b>	<b>65.0%</b>
<i>Vacant</i>	<i>73,966</i>	<i>35.0%</i>
<b>TOTAL Retail</b>	<b>211,603</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Sources: Shelby County Appraiser & R Gross / Development Economics.

The Downtown Sidney business mix is now dominated by shoppers' goods stores, with over 41% of retail space occupied by businesses that cater to those who comparison shop for such items as apparel, hardware, automotive parts, etc. According to the Retail Market and Recruitment Strategy report, furniture accounts for a sizeable share of the downtown shopper goods inventory, with about 33,000 square feet or 16% of the total mix. General merchandise stores are the other large category with 14,300 square feet or 7% of the total mix. Downtown has seven general merchandise stores, all of which cater to a discount (often used) merchandise market.



The remainder of downtown retail is equally divided between convenience, restaurant/bar, and entertainment uses. There are no downtown grocery stores, but there is the one small local pharmacy (Bunny's). Most of the convenience use is in florists and dry cleaners.

There are five downtown restaurants, two bars, and an ice cream shop. Together, these eating & drinking places account for about 7% of the total retail inventory. The movie theater and a video game emporium account for all of the downtown entertainment space. There are relatively few personal service establishments (barber & beauty shops, household / accessory repair shops, tanning salons, etc).

## 2. Physical Environment

Downtown's potential is tremendous for revitalization, especially with its outstanding historic architecture and pedestrian friendly environment. The City should play upon its history, and set a stage for cultural activity. Downtown Sidney has been successful supporting the downtown, but more individuals are needed to make the necessary investment in new businesses. Code enforcement should be increased. A development plan for the downtown was mentioned as a valuable tool.

## C. Existing Conditions

### 1. Physical Context

Within the center of Downtown Sidney is the Courthouse Square, which contains the Shelby County Courthouse. The Square serves as the identity and focal point for the downtown. The surrounding streets include a strong diversity of design styles. The downtown is characterized by a variety of land uses including commercial uses that offer a variety of goods and services, industrial uses and public/semi public uses. A portion of downtown office space is occupied by government services. Residential areas are well within walking distance of the Square. However, vacant commercial space continues to increase in the downtown. While a number of people frequent downtown for work and daytime shopping, the number of patrons tapers off considerably in the evening.

## D. Downtown Plan

### 1. Introduction

The Downtown Plan focuses on improving the aesthetics of the downtown, increasing the level of public improvements, strengthening the local economy through marketing, civic activities and the attraction of specialty merchants and tourism related goods and services. The downtown mission statement focuses on the revitalization of the character of the downtown with an emphasis on history and future activities.

### 2. Policies

The following summarizes the mission statement and objectives that serve as the policy foundation for the Downtown Plan.

#### a) Mission Statement

The downtown mission is to revitalize the downtown with an emphasis on history, activities, commerce and the physical environment.



*The existing Courthouse Square is the focus for many of Sidney's activities.*



## b) Objectives

The following are the objectives for Downtown:

### **Objective 1 - Strategic Plan - Continue to focus on the strategic plan.**

The ongoing revitalization effort should continue in the downtown. Downtown Sidney completed a strategic plan and the City initiated a streetscape program in 1997 and completed construction in 1999. But the downtown continues to lose merchants and other businesses as a result of increasing commercial strip development and a slow economy. The City needs to continually revisit and focus on Downtown Sidney's strategic plan.

### **Objective 2 - Public Improvements - Encourage revitalization through public improvements and improve traffic circulation and parking.**

As an historic district, the Courthouse Square requires its share of improvements. Revitalizing the downtown can be sparked by public improvements including the provision of adequate and convenient parking. Efforts should focus on locating new government buildings (City, County and State) downtown, renovating older vacant buildings and creating linkages between the existing park system, the Miami River corridor and the downtown.

Sufficient traffic flow and parking accessibility pose challenges for visitors to the downtown. Well lit, convenient parking is important to attracting consumers. However, convenience should not be sacrificed for cost and aesthetics. Therefore, well-designed and integrated parking areas should be encouraged.

### **Objective 3 - Local Economy - Encourage reinvestment by strengthening local economy.**

An important part of revitalizing the downtown is a function of local economic strength. Reinvestment can be encouraged by increasing available housing in the area through the renovation of existing historic buildings, location of government and public offices and increasing security. Strengthening the local economy further occurs by protecting private investment and can be achieved through the establishment of design guidelines.

### **Objective 4 - Funding and investment - Utilize tax abatements**

The City already has made available certain resources or tax relief in support of downtown revitalization. For example, the City offers tax abatements of up to 100% for 15 years on the increase in taxes resulting from improvements. However, this program has not been often used as a pro-active tool in support of redevelopment since the impact of reduced property taxes is negligible in comparison with the significant cost of redevelopment.

## 3. Standards

Express technical standards for the downtown exist in different forms. Physical design standards for streetscape improvements and building renovation and construction vary depending on the community and the nature of those improvements. These types of standards have been developed by the City based on what it believes are the features present and not present in other communities. Design guidelines and policies have been written that incorporate the standards which should address such issues as paving, building style, building massing, signage, location of parking, landscaping and other issues.



#### 4. Downtown Plan

The following summarizes the Downtown Plan.

##### a) Introduction

The Downtown Plan will impact the physical context and poses economic considerations for business retention and expansion. Public improvements are one of two important aspects for enhancing the downtown. The second aspect, economic considerations, consists of policies that expand on the physical improvements by providing incentive packages that actively recruit specialty and tourism-based opportunities.

##### b) Physical Context

Courthouse Square, a National Register Historic District, is located at the center of the downtown area. The existing downtown character consists of a variety of building materials such as brick, wood and stone and includes such architectural styles as Greek Revival, Neo-Classical Revival and Art Modern.

The Downtown Plan concentrates on the need for public improvements in the downtown area. The plan further promotes that the built environment should be maintained and encourages increased residential activity in renovated downtown buildings. New buildings should be designed to be consistent with the existing downtown character.

In addition to the architectural component, the plan focuses on creating pedestrian connections between the river corridor, parks and downtown. Creating linear pedestrian connections to areas outside of the downtown will create alternative routes for residents traveling downtown. By taking advantage of its unique architectural diversity combined with business diversity, the City should strengthen its regional attraction of consumers.



*The existing buildings surrounding Courthouse Square contribute to the unique characteristics of Downtown Sidney.*

##### c) Economic Considerations

Economic considerations are an important factor in the success of the downtown. Policies that encourage business retention and attraction are the continued primary themes of the Downtown Plan. A strategic plan for downtown revitalization should focus on physical issues such as those mentioned previously, financial issues such as tax abatement programs and marketing issues. It is important to understand the existing needs of businesses. Retention policies should focus on strengthening the local economy by establishing incentives for existing businesses to remain downtown instead of relocating to commercial strip locations in other parts of the City. Strengthening the diversity of the local economy by developing incentive packages for specialty and tourism-related business will help retain existing businesses.

Additional considerations emphasize citizens' safety and increasing the number and duration of festivals and activities downtown. Implementing this action should assist in bringing more disposable income downtown for shopping and other services. In addition to incentive programs, the plan recognizes that local organizations will need to be more involved in business activities. Coordinated marketing between businesses and the City is suggested as a means to promote downtown to a broader audience of consumers.



**E. Implementation**

**1. Introduction**

The following strategies focus on key implementation steps that will revitalize downtown through public improvements and help strengthen the City's regional attraction.

**2. City Strategies**

The following details implementation of the Downtown Plan:

**Objective 1 - Strategic Plan**

**Strategies**

<i>Responsible Party:</i>	<i>City Manager (Lead) and Downtown Sidney</i>
<i>Timeframe:</i>	<i>Short Term</i>
<i>Estimated Cost:</i>	<i>In-House Staff Time</i>

**Objective 1 - Public Improvements**

**Strategies**

**1a) Encouraging off-street parking.**

Transportation and parking issues are often the source of controversy in a downtown. Efficient transportation and convenient parking are significant factors to overcome in attracting consumer's downtown. Quite often, the issue isn't a factual lack of parking, but a perceived lack of parking due to poor wayfinding signage or parking that isn't immediately visible to the motorist. The City should initiate a parking study to assess the availability of safe, convenient parking for downtown shoppers through a complete inventory of on and off street parking spaces and the availability of such spaces. The study should include alternative parking including the feasibility of structured parking.

<i>Responsible Party:</i>	<i>Community Services Director (Lead)</i>
<i>Timeframe:</i>	<i>Short Term</i>
<i>Estimated Cost:</i>	<i>To Be Determined on a Project Specific Basis; Entire Downtown - \$10,000-\$15,000 for basic assessment study with recommendations.</i>

**1b) Addressing tax delinquent deteriorated properties.**

Revitalization efforts should focus on tax delinquent and deteriorated buildings in the downtown. The first priority of such structures is rehabilitation. Where unfeasible the City should develop an abatement program focusing on obtaining and demolishing tax delinquent, deteriorated properties and expediting the redevelopment process for these downtown properties. Such a program should be initiated by the Assistant City Manager and coordinated with other City departments. The program may include amendments to the City code and administrative policies to address such issues.

<i>Responsible Party:</i>	<i>Community Services Director (Lead)</i>
<i>Timeframe:</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Estimated Cost:</i>	<i>To Be Determined on a Project Specific Basis</i>



**1c) Retaining and attracting government offices downtown and providing parking.**

Keeping government offices downtown is important to its revitalization. County and City offices are located in downtown and future government offices should be located in this area. In addition, parking for those needing services should be in proximity to governmental offices. The City should take a lead role in the development of a coordinated strategy with the County to keep government offices downtown and to provide additional parking as needed.

*Responsible Party:* City Council (Lead) and Shelby County Board of Commissioners  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* To be Determined on a Project Specific Basis

**1d) Maintaining the number and duration of community activities downtown.**

While the downtown contains a strong physical context, the attraction of residents to that area remains equally important. Efforts should concentrate on bringing people downtown outside of normal business hours. The Sidney/Shelby County Chamber of Commerce should explore a program focusing on increasing the amount and length of activities downtown. Initial efforts may involve a survey of area residents to see what type of activities they would attend.



*In Gahanna Ohio, the City constructed a walkway along the river in the Downtown.*

*Responsible Party:* Downtown Sidney (Lead), Sidney/Shelby Chamber of Commerce (Lead), and Parks and Recreation Director  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* To Be Determined on a Project Specific Basis

**1e) Expanding the library.**

Please see the Community Facilities and Services Plan, Objective 3g. This study is currently underway.

**1f) Visually connect downtown to I-75 through streetscape improvements and decorative signage.**

Please see the Urban Design Plan.

**1g) Continue the river corridor park through the downtown and with pedestrian connections.**

Please see the Community Facilities and Services Plan, Objective 1a1 and the 2008 Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update.



## Objective 2 - Local Economy

### Strategies

#### 2a) Maintaining Downtown Sidney's role in promotions and utilizing coordinating retail marketing.

Promotions and marketing are important measures that attract consumers into the downtown. They often involve the business owners and city officials. Local organizations play a significant role in marketing and promoting downtown. Downtown Sidney should continue its role in promoting the downtown, which may be accomplished by maintaining and increasing the numbers of its participants. Efforts may concentrate on getting existing business members to become more involved in Downtown Sidney's functions.

The local chamber of commerce should initiate a program that explores coordinated retail marketing among existing businesses. Businesses should be contacted by the chamber of commerce to develop a methodology on how coordinated marketing would be executed. Such an approach will allow for efficient use of marketing resources that should reach a larger population.

*Responsible Party:* Downtown Sidney (Lead) and Sidney/Shelby Chamber of Commerce  
*Timeframe:* Short Term - In Progress  
*Estimated Cost:* To Be Determined on a Project Specific Basis

#### 2b) Attracting specialty shops and small business and tourism-related attractions

The development of strip commercial centers with specialty retail outside of the downtown often detracts shoppers from the downtown area. In order to strengthen the local economy of the downtown, it is important to maintain business diversity. The City should work with local business organizations and develop an incentive program to aggressively attract specialty shops and small businesses into the downtown.

Specialty shops and small businesses attract consumers from a larger market area. In addition, the community reinvestment area program may offer different tools and funding to attract new specialty businesses downtown. Downtown Sidney's proposed retail incubator is an excellent example that should be supported. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce should initiate the development of an incentive program with the City that attracts specialty and tourist related destinations in the downtown. That may include extensive marketing in chamber literature.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director (Lead), Downtown Sidney and Sidney/Shelby Chamber of Commerce  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time



### **2c) Encouraging quality downtown housing.**

The downtown contains a significant amount of good housing stock representative of different design styles. Strengthening this housing stock will support the local economy and physical context of the downtown. The City should explore and develop policies that encourage downtown housing in refurbished buildings or infill development consistent with the historic character through modifications to the Zoning Code or the development of design guidelines. This coordinated effort of City departments would be initiated by the Community Services Director and result in a program of incentives that support the renovation of downtown buildings for residential uses.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director (Lead), Building Department and City Council  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

### **2d) Expanding incentives for downtown businesses.**

Maintaining existing businesses is important to the long-term vitality of the downtown. Incentives such as tax abatements often work to retain businesses. The City should continue to explore alternatives offered under the community reinvestment area program, as well as other incentive programs.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director (Lead) and City Council  
*Timeframe:* Mid Term  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

### **2e) Increasing safety downtown.**

Please see the Community Facilities and Services Plan, Objective 1d.1.

### **2f) Encouraging owners' responsibility for maintaining buildings.**

Please see the Community Facilities and Services Plan, Objective 1f.3.

### **2g) Develop civic multi-purpose facility.**

If planned well, civic facilities, such as cultural centers or multi-purpose venues, are good downtown anchors because they generate activity that has a spill-over impact in support of downtown retail and are generally active during evening hours after the typical work day. There is an un-met market for entertainment uses that could be incorporated into such a facility. Market support suggests that there are at least opportunities for income-generating activities that can be incorporated into a civic or cultural facility. Such a facility can be constructed through the redevelopment of existing downtown space or as a new building.

*Responsible Party:* City Manager (Lead) and Downtown Sidney  
*Timeframe:* Mid Term  
*Estimated Cost:* To be determined on a project specific basis



**2h) Create meeting or conference venue.**

Conference and meeting space can be incorporated into multipurpose facilities or developed separately in downtown space. It would be virtually impossible to attract a privately-operated conference facility to downtown Sidney, especially without a conference hotel nearby. However, there is probably support and need for venues to accommodate local and regional events that are not already captured at existing venues with conference facilities.

*Responsible Party:* Downtown Sidney  
*Timeframe:* Mid Term  
*Estimated Cost:* To be determined on a project specific basis



*The People's Federate Bank Building is a tourist attraction in Downtown Sidney.*

**2i) Increase number of restaurants.**

Restaurants are a key component of Sidney's downtown revitalization, since they are supported in the market and they help to create full-day traffic and activity that can have important spin-off effects for other retailers. Restaurants are also crucial to support lodging and other local industries. It is highly recommended that Sidney focus on development of its local restaurant trade, starting with existing retailers. Toone P. Wiggins is an excellent example of a new restaurant entering the Downtown area. Strategic recommendations are provided later in this section.

*Responsible Party:* Downtown Sidney, Sidney/Shelby County Chamber of Commerce  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

**2j) Enhance tourist attraction/entertainment.**

Downtown Sidney already has several historic treasures and sites of interest to the tourist. Downtown Sidney's historic and architecturally significant People's Federal building has recently attracted visitors from throughout the United States and from as far away as Chile and Austria. Sidney currently attracts tourists with practically no marketing or promotion of its heritage resources. Since tourists are an important part of Downtown's potential market, opportunities for additional tourism anchors should be assessed. As recommended in the Retail Market and Recruitment Strategy, this may include:

- **Museum** – A museum could be established that focused on Midwestern architecture, banking, civil war history, or another topic specific to Sidney's downtown and its heritage. Alternatively, a unique specialty museum focused on an unusual topic might provide more destination appeal. A small museum could be incorporated into a civic or cultural facility. The Sidney North Street Cultural Corridor Study, completed in 2008, identifies an expansion of the Ross Historical Center to significantly increase the available amount of museum space in the City.
- **Historic Inn / B&B** - An historic inn can provide guestrooms downtown in support of retail and other activities. The more people staying or living downtown, the more likely that downtown can support a retail base.
- **Cinema & Drafthouse** – The Sidney Theater should be renovated and reprogrammed to offer a unique entertainment experience, such as a "cinema & drafthouse" which combines first-run or second-run films with eating & drinking. These types of facilities are also frequently rented out for parties. This model is fairly successful in several cities. This facility would rely primarily on the regional market, but could also attract visitors staying in local hotels, if marketed properly.

*Responsible Party:* Downtown Sidney (Lead), and Sidney/Shelby County Chamber of Commerce and Sidney Visitors Bureau  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* To be determined on a project specific basis



### **2k) Family entertainment center.**

The opportunity exists for a community-sponsored venue that appeals to all ages. These facilities normally combine adult eating & drinking with activities for youngsters. Again, the market would primarily be regional, but could potentially attract family tourists traveling I-75 if marketed correctly and wayfinding signage was available.

*Responsible Party:* Downtown Sidney (Lead), and Sidney/Shelby County Chamber of Commerce, and Sidney Visitors Bureau  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* To be determined on a project specific basis

## **Objective 3 - Funding and Investment**

### **Strategies**

#### **3a) Capital Rehabilitation & Equipment Program**

Businesses that desire a downtown location often face the difficulty of financing capital improvements or equipment. The City and County have an opportunity to assist in funding capital projects using CDBG funds or through dedicated sources such as State and EDA loans and grants for business equipment. City CIP funds could also be dedicated for building rehabilitation. A variety of lease-to-own or other pay-back arrangements could be made with the businesses based on percentage of sales or other flexible mechanisms that ensure security to both the business and the City. By controlling and maintaining ownership, the City retains security over an asset.

*Responsible Party:* Sidney/Shelby County Chamber of Commerce, and Sidney Visitors Bureau (Lead) and Downtown Sidney  
*Timeframe:* Short Term  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

#### **3b) Tourism Development**

A lodging room tax is in place which funds a convention and visitors bureau (CVB) for marketing and tourism development. Funding is also used, along with memberships and sponsorships, to leverage contributory support from other local corporations including manufacturers. Funds could also be targeted for capital projects such as the development of a downtown cultural/civic facility, museum, or other attraction meant to increase tourism and downtown activity.

*Responsible Party:* City Manager (Lead) and Downtown Sidney  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

#### **3c) Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District.**

A TIF could be used as a financing mechanism for a downtown parking garage or other public improvements such as wayfinding signage or streetscape updates, if such facilities are necessary to support a certain level of redevelopment or for a civic or tourist facility. The project TIF must be linked closely to the activity generator, such as the civic facility. Other public improvements, such as extensions of the City's urban design improvements, road re-alignments, or façade programs might also be funded through a TIF.

*Responsible Party:* Assistant City Manager (Lead) and Downtown Sidney  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time