

# CITY OF WOOSTER

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## CHAPTER 3—ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Introduction and the Citizen Participation Process

In order to identify and define the key planning and development opportunities and ultimately develop implementation policies, it is necessary to outline the issues impacting the City of Wooster. These issues serve as the starting point for the generation of actual plan implementation strategies and policies.

The planning process provided the opportunity for citizens, community leaders and city staff to provide their input on what issues or problems need to be addressed or solved. Individual interviews with community leaders and city staff; and a public meeting with the Plan Forum steering committee was held in March of 2002. Additional review of the plan by the public occurred in June to October 2002 during the plan adoption process. The following outlines the key issues, visions, public comment, and opinions expressed through interviews, meetings held, and surveys conducted as well as core values that the planning process has identified.

### Core Community Values

Wooster is viewed as a community with vitality, contains a good mix of housing options, and provides strong economic opportunities. The past public/private partnerships are seen as the key to past successes in providing quality community services to a wide range of socioeconomic elements. There is a deep concern, however, that the past corporate support for community-wide services may decline in the future. Gradually, the City must identify appropriate dedicated funding sources to support the high quality of service that is currently offered. Continued Downtown Revitalization is seen as the key element in Wooster's unique identity. Past Downtown Development efforts are given high praise and continued cooperation between the City Administration, Mainstreet Wooster, Inc., and the Wooster Foundation is seen as critical.

Concern was expressed about unplanned growth and growth for growth's sake. The general opinion is that issues related to zoning changes and annexations should be based on a sound cost/benefit analysis. In short, the goal of the Comprehensive Plan should be to provide policy guidelines that are consistently adhered to by governmental agencies.

The existing business community was vocal on the need to manage growth, development quality, and the creation of a sound fee and impact structure that recognized the concept of new development "paying its own way." There was consensus on the issue that certain sectors of the City were not provided with the same quality infrastructure as other areas. The need for capital improvements to support development in the north of the City had decreased the resources available to fund other portions of the City.

### Parks and Recreation Issues

The issues related to parks and recreation that were mentioned were related to enhancing the quality of life available to current and future residents over the long term. Strategic planning of parks and recreation facilities was a common theme.

- ▶ The City should be more proactive in the provision of park and recreation services.
- ▶ The City needs a citywide, parks and recreation master plan to allow for proactive and strategic planning of parkland acquisition, park maintenance, and parks programming and other recreation facilities.
- ▶ There is a need for linkages, such as greenways, to connect parks and neighborhoods together.
- ▶ The city's three pools are all at least 30 years old and need to be updated to today's standards.

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- ▶ There no central recreation center for the city.
- ▶ The City leases county-owned land on an annual basis for soccer fields. The long term unpredictability of lease renewal combined with the uncertainty of constructing on county-owned property has limited the construction of permanent facilities to support soccer.
- ▶ The City partners with and uses various venues such as schools, the YMCA, the Gault Fitness and Recreation Center, and county facilities.
- ▶ Concern has been expressed that the City has outgrown the south end community center. An assessment of the south end community center will need to be completed.
- ▶ Any future development or annexation should contain park and recreation facilities as part of the development either as a fee in lieu of or actual park land and or actual facilities that meet the needs of the city.
- ▶ The City of Brunswick Park Plan has been identified as a model for park and recreation master planning in Wooster.

## **Parks and Recreation Visions**

- ▶ The development of a variety of parks and recreation facilities serving a variety of needs including larger parks for youth and adult active recreation needs and smaller neighborhood parks for more passive and leisure activities.
- ▶ The preservation of existing parks.
- ▶ The establishment of new neighborhood scale or larger parks as part of new development. National park and recreation standards should be used.
- ▶ The preservation of environmentally sensitive areas through parks and open spaces.
- ▶ Wooster's park and recreation staff indicated that the City of Brunswick Park and Recreation Master Plan would be a useful model for a similar plan in Wooster.

## **Infrastructure Issues**

Infrastructure issues in the City of Wooster focus on water and sewer utilities as well as transportation elements. Strategic planning of and wise use of resources was identified several times.

- ▶ There is a need to develop a proactive utilities master plan. This type of plan would cover both the water and sewer systems and prepare an assessment of existing conditions, identify problems, identify inefficiencies, deficiencies, and develop improvement plans.
- ▶ Specific areas in need of investment or attention as part of utility systems' investments include the following:
  - ▶ The wastewater treatment plant has a capacity of treating 7.5 million gallons per day (mgd) under normal flow conditions. However, a flow of 15 mgd is treated on occasion, although this capacity is limited in duration. If flows exceed 15 mgd, then a by-pass situation occurs. Improvements to the treatment plant are planned to raise capacity during storm events from 15 mgd to 24 mgd.
  - ▶ The city has numerous areas where combined sanitary and storm sewers are used. These contribute to peak flows during rain events.
  - ▶ As growth occurs in new areas, especially the north end, increased demands on water and sewer services occur. Adding flows to the existing system may make it more difficult to handle flows with existing lines.
  - ▶ 19 sewer and storm line separation projects have been identified. Two have been completed to date. The realistic timeframe to complete the other 17 projects is between five to ten years. The budget for these projects is approximately 6.0 million total.
  - ▶ The industrial area east of Highway 3 needs a trunk line and lift station.
  - ▶ The city has its own water wells in two fields, one on the north and one on the south end of town. There is contamination in the vicinity of the north field, but this does not impact the wells. The south field has two wells, one of which has VOC (volatile organic compound) contamination. The VOC contamination is mitigated by strip towers.

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- ▶ The water plant has a capacity of 6.1 mgd. If additional growth occurs, analysis of the system should be considered in order to maintain adequate water supply.
- ▶ Water lines are aging and need to be replaced on a systematic basis.
- ▶ Access management standards and design alternatives such as ODOT standards and the exploration of the slip street concept to minimize curb cuts and improve safety in these and newly annexed areas was mentioned. Specific areas where access management would be useful include Cleveland Road, SR 83 and other areas that are annexed into the city.
- ▶ It was suggested that an interconnected street system, without cul-de-sacs, is preferred as cul-de-sacs take more time for police to patrol and more challenging for snow removal.
- ▶ Traffic impact studies should be required of all project proposals and annexation requests. Projects that degrade traffic level of service should be required to pay for upgrades to assure smooth traffic management.
- ▶ A Capital Improvements Plan is needed to allocate and prioritize infrastructure investment resources.

## Infrastructure Visions

- ▶ The provision of a sound infrastructure system to serve the city's current and future needs of the city.
- ▶ The development of investment and maintenance programs to improve the capacity of water, sanitary and sewer systems as well as transportation systems in a fiscally sound manner.
- ▶ The provision of high quality streets and roadways that will enable safe travel, mobility and accessibility within and to various points in the city and contribute to the quality of life.

## Growth Management Issues

The City of Wooster is the county seat of Wayne County and is the business and cultural center of the region. The city and the surrounding areas have experienced growth and are expected to continue to grow in the future. A key issue identified was preparing the appropriate framework to manage new growth.

- ▶ The city needs to manage growth and direct the development pattern in order to retain the qualities of a quaint small town and utilize the comprehensive plan as a roadmap.
- ▶ The development of a criteria to analyze potential annexations is needed. Specifically, costs to provide services, extend utilities etc. and the revenues generated from that land such as income and property taxes need to be analyzed. In addition, analysis of specific land use types and their demands on city services should be developed to provide guidance on what a specific land use will cost in services compared to revenue generated. Annexations are rarely denied and have been accepted without a cost/benefit analysis as to the merits of a particular annexation.
- ▶ Development should pay its own way.
- ▶ Retain the current balance of commercial and residential land uses in the city.
- ▶ Retired people and young families are moving back to Wooster so there is some demand to live in Wooster.
- ▶ There is a recent trend of residential development being made up of larger homes on smaller lots.

## Growth Management Visions

- ▶ The adoption of land use and development strategies and regulations that preserve Wooster's unique historic and college town atmosphere and high quality of life.
- ▶ Land use strategies and tools should provide the framework for continued growth and or re-development consistent with the existing character, scale, and pedestrian friendly environment that presently exists in Wooster.

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- ▶ The establishment of a land use framework that serves as a guide for investment decisions.

## **Development Character Area Issues**

The establishment of development character areas is a method to organize development parameters and provide a means to customize development regulations to the specific parameters or characteristics of that area. Topics that could be customized include aesthetic issues related to the visual appeal of buildings, streets and landscapes; building types, land uses, off-street parking, and architectural guidelines.

- ▶ The adoption of guidelines and or regulations in the zoning ordinance addressing aesthetics issues such as architectural details, urban design, green space and landscaping would enhance the quality of place.
- ▶ The architecture and massing and setbacks of buildings should reflect the building's use and function.
- ▶ Sign code provisions should be amended to reflect aesthetic standards
- ▶ Parking lot design standards should be adopted to provide a more appealing appearance of parking lots.
- ▶ There is a concern of the possible oversupply of rental units
- ▶ There is a lack of homes in the \$50,000 to \$80,000 range which minimizes the housing opportunities for younger/entry level employees.
- ▶ There is a perception of a parking problem downtown.
- ▶ There is a parking management problem downtown as employees park on the street taking up the prime parking spaces preventing these spaces being used by shoppers.
- ▶ There is a perception of a traffic congestion problem in the north end as the recent addition of traffic signals have caused travelers to have to stop for red lights versus previously not having to stop at all.
- ▶ There is a desire of residents to have the small town lifestyle yet have big city shopping/chain stores opportunities.
- ▶ The City's relationship with the College of Wooster is improving, but there are issues related to noise from student homes, the conversion of homes from single family to rental and parking that need attention and coordinated solutions between the city and the college.
- ▶ A residential parking district has been proposed in the streets around the college. This policy would restrict on-street parking to residents only. Those students that live in dorms that park on the street would not be allowed to obtain a parking permit for on-street parking within the parking district.
- ▶ The Founders Settlement Area has declining housing stock; possibly home ownership programs to convert rentals back to owner occupied units should be encouraged.
- ▶ Annexations of land in the 1980s and 1990s are still being digested by the city.
- ▶ There does not appear to be any conflicts with the Wayne County Future Land Use Plan.

## **Development Character Area Visions**

- ▶ The adoption of guidelines and or regulations in the zoning ordinance addressing aesthetics issues such as architectural details, urban design, green space and landscaping would enhance the quality of place.
- ▶ The preservation of existing neighborhoods' quality of life.

## **Finances and Economic Development Issues**

Economic development and financial issues are related to providing employment opportunities for residents and tax revenues for the city.

- ▶ The Wayne Development Council is the marketing arm of economic development efforts.
- ▶ The Wooster Growth Corporation is the financing arm of economic development efforts and has a revolving loan fund and can grant tax abatements.

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- ▶ Providing good roads and utilities are a key to attracting new industry as “just in time” inventory becomes standard operating procedure.
- ▶ Use caution on additional expansion of north end retail area.
- ▶ It is important to retain and or expand the existing manufacturing base and seek high tech manufacturing companies.
- ▶ Continued corporate support of community services may decline in the future.
- ▶ It may be possible to capitalize on the tourism attraction of the Amish region as well as the dairy and agricultural industry ties.
- ▶ Capitalize on the Amish influences such as a strong work ethic, simplicity, and openness to outsiders.
- ▶ Develop a cost of service and benefit analysis for annexation of land into the city.
- ▶ Due to layoffs and the restructuring at large companies, the executives of companies are moving to the Greater Akron area instead of Wooster because of a more stable market in which to eventually sell their homes.
- ▶ Recent rezoning of lands on the eastside from multi-family to industrial will help the tax base. Strict buffering standards were negotiated between the developer and adjacent residents as well as road access from the south or east (away from residential areas) to make the rezoning possible.
- ▶ Capitalize on the Ohio Light Opera that is based at College of Wooster.
- ▶ Focus big box retail development in north end, but add aesthetic standards.

## **Economic Development and Finances Visions**

- ▶ Sound decision making with regards to economic development including the merits of future annexations and their costs and benefits to the city.
- ▶ The retention of existing businesses and residents.

## **Emergency Services Issues**

Emergency services include police, fire and emergency medical personnel as provided by the city.

- ▶ The Fire Department has two fire stations from which to cover the entire city.
- ▶ Service coverage does not meet the four minute maximum response time in newly annexed areas on the east side of the city; and it is very challenging to meet the four minute response time in the north end.
- ▶ A master plan of fire and emergency service provision should be completed to analyze ways to provide adequate service coverage, especially as new areas are annexed into the city.
- ▶ An interconnected grid of streets are easier to service than cul-de-sacs.
- ▶ Street naming should minimize potentially confusing or similar names to ease the provision of emergency services.

## **Emergency Services Visions**

- ▶ Provide timely emergency services to city residents and businesses as needed.

## **Downtown Issues**

Downtown Wooster is an architecturally significant historic district and contains a mix of offices, retail, residential and civic uses. The downtown is an attractive amenity for the city. The issues mentioned focused on methods to maintain and or enhance the atmosphere of the downtown.