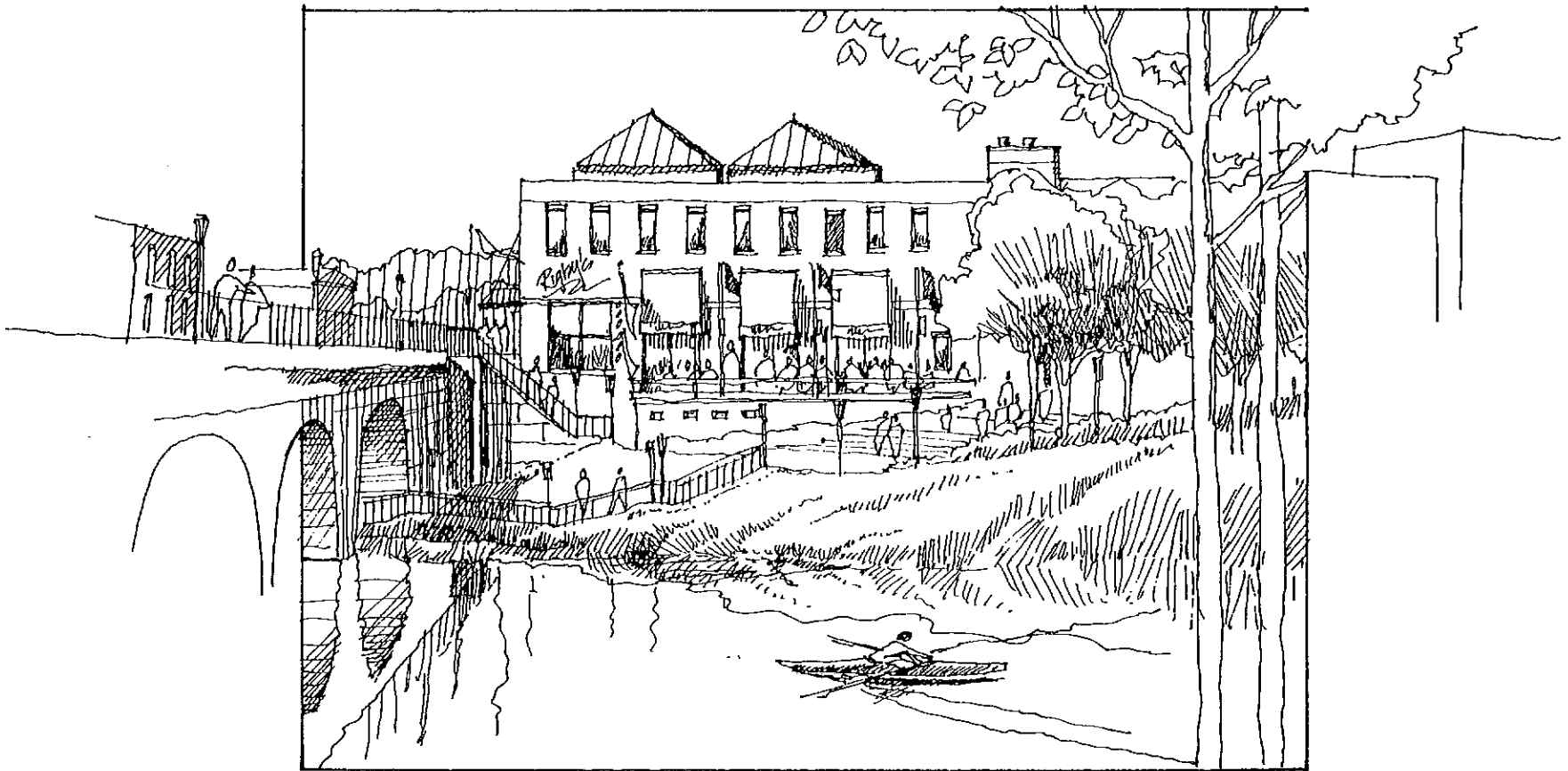


KENT, OHIO

Visions of a New Era





KENT, OHIO

Visions of a New Era

Edited by Lee A. Phillips Goodman

This report was prepared by the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio. The Urban Design Center is supported by the Ohio General Assembly and the Ohio Board of Regents through the Urban University Program.

Cover illustration by Seiw-Hong Ong



February 1993

To the Citizens of Kent:

On behalf of the people who participated in this design investigation of Kent's core, I am pleased to transmit to you this report which was prepared by the Urban Design Center of Northeastern Ohio with support from the Ohio General Assembly, the Ohio Board of Regents' Urban University Program, and Kent State University and Cleveland State University

The Urban Design Center endeavors to provide theoretical and practical bases for the study and research of design and planning. One of the purposes of the center is to provide design assistance to communities while supporting students with opportunities to relate theory and practice. iii

In this project, undergraduate and graduate students from the Kent State University School of Architecture and Environmental Design and the Cleveland State University Levin College of Urban Affairs teamed up to produce the ideas in this report. These ideas were generated through discussions with the Community Development Committee of Kent City Council and through meetings with other University, civic, and citizen groups.

Since the first presentation of this material, Kent City Council has passed legislation that has enabled the study area to secure special status as a district, thus recognizing the unique significance the area has within the city. This action also provides special incentives for development and redevelopment within the study area. My hope is that the city, University, and citizens of the community will continue to work together to improve the city, and that this report will serve as a catalyst for further action.

Foster D. Armstrong, AIA, AICP
Project Director





CITY OF KENT, OHIO

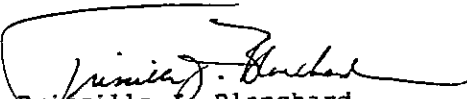
OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

January, 1993

During 1992, an extensive urban design study was conducted by undergraduate and graduate students of the Kent State University which explored future options for the City of Kent. Co-sponsored by the School of Architecture and Environmental Design and the Cleveland State University College of Urban Affairs, this study has served as a catalyst to launch redevelopment initiatives throughout our community.

Without question, the analysis has created an atmosphere for positive change and enthusiasm throughout the community. As a result, the City of Kent will utilize the study as a foundation for public forums to explore the express values and viable alternatives that may be employed as we pursue future development directions. These proposals, as presented, embrace numerous concepts and ideas requiring further review and prioritization. Once this phase is complete, the City anticipates framing a substantive plan of action to steer our projected activities.

Today, the City of Kent faces a myriad of challenges as do most cities in America to address the demands of a rapidly changing world. Thanks to the innovative efforts demonstrated by the creative minds utilized for this study, Kent now stands better prepared to proactively seize today's opportunities so that we might solidly meet tomorrow's challenges. The City of Kent is grateful to all those who played an integral role in advancing the visionary propositions as contained in the analysis.


Rhyscilla J. Blanchard
City Manager



Acknowledgments

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Photographs

Photo of Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal

Courtesy of Mr. Brad Bolton

All other photos by Lee A. Goodman



Executive Summary

This report was prepared by the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio in order to present a summary of the ideas and proposals for revitalizing the city of Kent, Ohio. The ideas and proposals were prepared by students in the Kent State University School of Architecture and Environmental Design and the Cleveland State University Levin College of Urban Affairs.

Chapter One provides a clear image of the city of Kent today. From a description of geographic location, physical features, history, and demographic traits, emerges a picture which portrays Kent as a vital city possessing a rich diversity of natural resources. These resources provide the foundation for renewal and growth.

Located in Northeast Ohio near several major metropolitan areas, the city of Kent enjoys proximity to a wide variety of activities and conveniently located transportation routes allowing it to compete successfully in the regional and national economy. Kent is also the home of Kent State University, which brings national and international recognition to the city.

The Cuyahoga River, gently rolling hills, and a pleasant climate are some of the physical features which form an inviting and interesting setting for residents and visitors. These features contribute a unique quality that provides an exciting and memorable environment to the city of Kent.

Historically the city of Kent has remained prosperous throughout three significant eras of development spanning nearly two centuries. Established in the early nineteenth century as a mill town, Kent quickly learned to take advantage of the Cuyahoga River, and in the 1830s became an important part of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal system. This period is often remembered as the Canal Era. The next wave of prosperity reached Kent with the arrival of the railroad, transforming

Kent from a small industrial town into a vital commercial center. With the dawn of the twentieth century, a new era was ushered in when, in 1910, Kent was chosen as the location of Kent State University. An unprecedented period of development occurred, and Kent has remained an active, exciting community ever since.

Kent State University dramatically impacts the population and economy of Kent, and, as a result, the majority of the inhabitants of Kent are relatively young, college educated, and employed in education-related fields.

Chapter Two explores a variety of evaluation and analysis techniques used to identify and understand the predominant physical characteristics present in the urban environment. By describing the city of Kent in terms of Land Use, Building Form and Mass, Vehicular Circulation and Parking, Pedestrian Pathways, Streetscape, Open Space, and Historic Preservation, one can establish a clear picture of how various physical elements shape the cityscape. Through the use of graphic illustrations, maps, and diagrams, existing conditions may be evaluated to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses and to identify the organization, function, and character of the city. The evaluation and analysis process enables the designers, civic leaders, and community members to locate and identify the possible key areas for development and rehabilitation. These key areas have the potential to serve successfully as cornerstones for revitalization of the entire city.

Chapter Three outlines specific goals, objectives, and strategies for revitalizing the city of Kent. Seven general goals have been established which summarize the numerous objectives proposed by students and members of the community as a result of the evaluation and analysis process as well as a series of public forums:

- I. *To improve the economic vitality of the area*
- II. *To improve the identity and image of the area*
- III. *To facilitate the safe and effective movement of pedestrians and vehicles*
- IV. *To improve linkages between the downtown and the University*
- V. *To utilize open spaces more effectively*
- VI. *To utilize existing structures more effectively*
- VII. *To preserve and enhance the history of Kent*

These goals provide a basic framework for setting priorities and organizing design strategies and may be used as an effective tool for assessing the potential success of ideas and proposals. Included in this chapter are a wide range of creative design strategies and methods for initiating revitalization efforts in the city of Kent. These ideas, which were prepared by students in the Kent State University School of Architecture, are intended to provide inspiration and promote enthusiasm throughout the community, fostering an atmosphere of positive change.

Chapter Four provides a summary of case studies prepared by students of the Cleveland State University Levin College of Urban Affairs. These studies focus on four key sites in downtown Kent. Selected as cornerstones for revitalization efforts are: the Franklin Hotel, the Kent Heirs Block, the vacant site on the corner of Water and East Main Streets, and the Bissler Building. Due to the prominent location, historical value, and unique features of each site, it will be possible to create strong anchors which contain the elements necessary to improve the vitality of the entire city and strengthen the identity and image of Kent. Each case study examines the development potential of the various sites and provides recommendations and ideas as to how they may be used more effectively to contribute to a renewed vision for Kent.



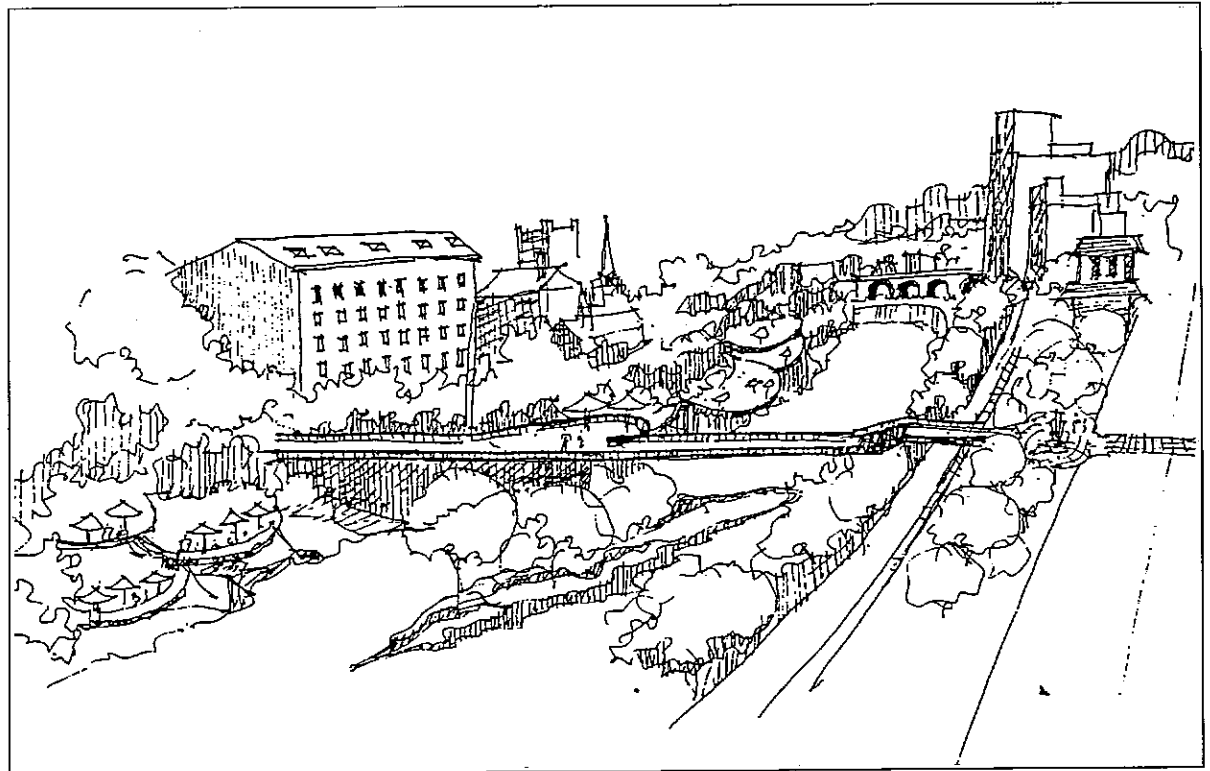
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Introduction

A New Era



Drawing by Sampatkar Pedapenki

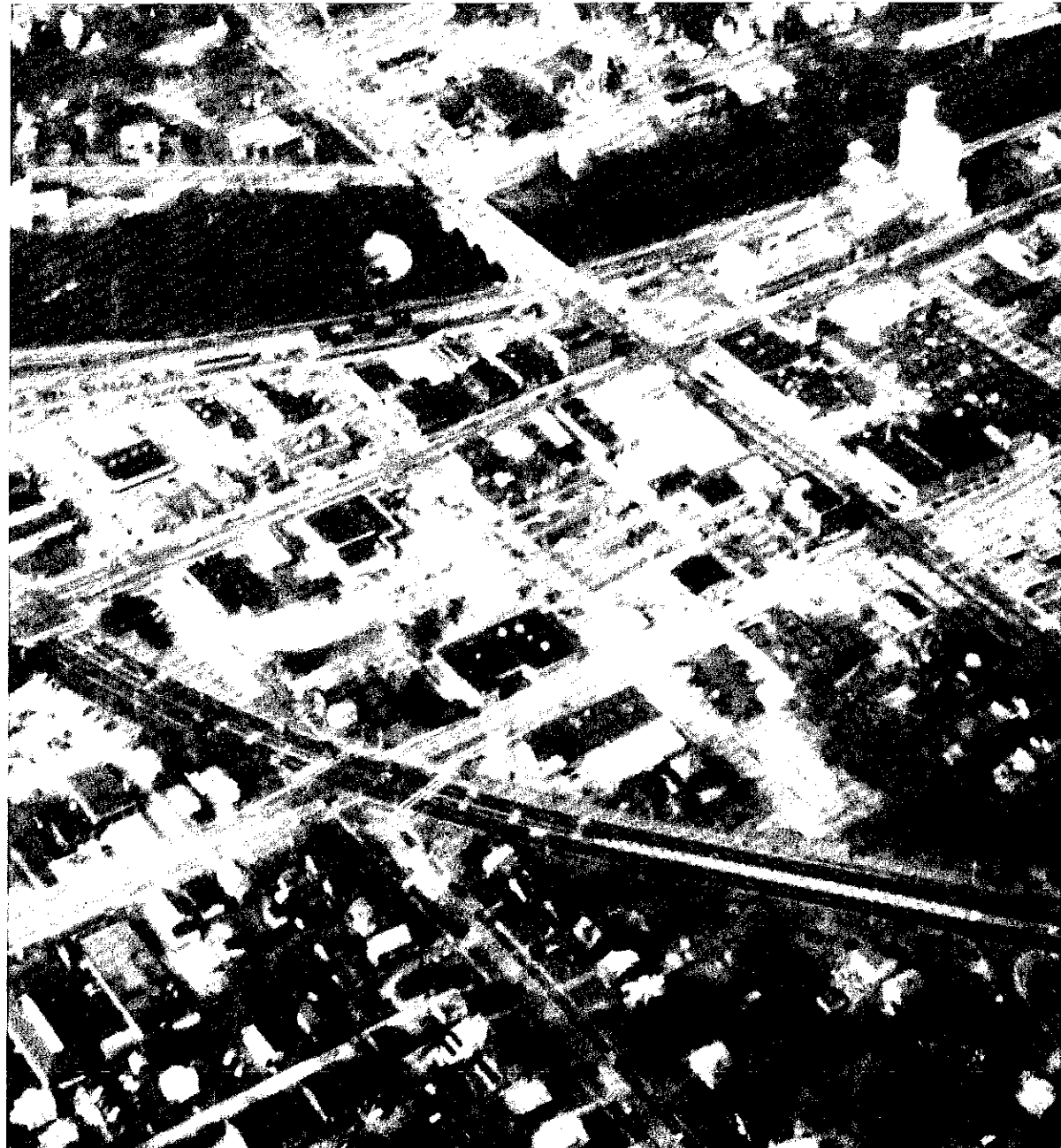
A New Era

As the dawn of the twenty-first century approaches, many cities are preparing to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. Constantly shifting socioeconomic forces, innovative new technologies, and fast-paced lifestyles are drastically altering the urban environments in which people work and play, the very places we call home. No longer can cities rely on traditional methods for change; they must explore new techniques and fresh ideas in order to move forward and embrace the future.

2

Kent, Ohio, is one such city, a city that must undergo a transformation to prepare successfully for the years that lie ahead. Possessing a strong sense of identity and a spirit rooted firmly in history, Kent has the fundamental elements necessary to meet the challenges of the coming century. With careful design and planning, along with creativity and imagination, a renewed civic vision for the entire community will foster an exciting atmosphere of change, allowing the city of Kent to welcome confidently a new era with open arms.

This document will attempt to serve as a catalyst for the revitalization of Kent by presenting a wide range of unique design concepts and establishing a solid framework for analysis and implementation of ideas.



Aerial photo of the city of Kent

Kent, Ohio

The Tree City

1



The Cuyahoga River

Evaluation and Design

In order to prepare an effective, comprehensive urban design proposal, it is essential first to become familiar with the general features of Kent's geographic location, physical description, history, and demographic traits. Together, these features aid in forming an image of Kent as a "place," and help in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of the city.

Next a specific study area should be defined within which evaluation, design, and planning strategies may be focused in detail. This study area will serve as the foundation for revitalization efforts throughout the entire community.

It is necessary at this point to conduct an extensive information gathering process within the study area to understand how the historical and socio-economic forces have impacted the city and to establish a clear working knowledge of the many elements which shape the physical environment. A thorough evaluation and analysis of these factors becomes an essential part of the design process and facilitates the preparation of clearly defined goals, objectives, and strategies by which all future design proposals may be assessed.

Once the analysis has been completed and the goals and objectives have been defined, the conceptual plans and ideas may be explored. Included here are a wide range of creative and imaginative

proposals that highlight Kent's qualities and which seek to strengthen the identity of the city. These proposals hope to provide inspiration for the entire community to work together in setting a new era in motion.

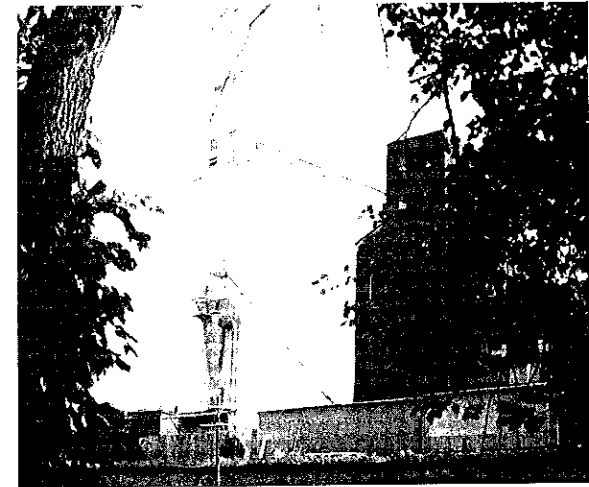


Photo of Kent Grain Tower



Photo of downtown Kent

Location

Located among the rolling hills of northeastern Ohio in Portage County, the City of Kent occupies approximately 8.5 square miles of land in an area that was once part of the Connecticut Western Reserve.

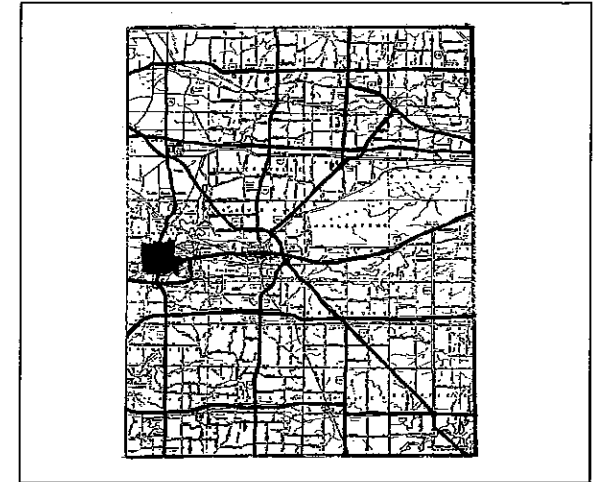
Ideally situated only a short distance from Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Youngstown, the city of Kent serves as a significant link between several major metropolitan areas. This, coupled with convenient access to several interstate highways, railways, and airports, allows Kent to enjoy an active role in the region's economy.

Kent is perhaps best known for being the home of Kent State University, a major university which maintains an enrollment of more than 24,000 students. Offering a diverse range of educational programs and a rich variety of cultural events, the University is responsible for attracting large numbers of people to Kent each year.

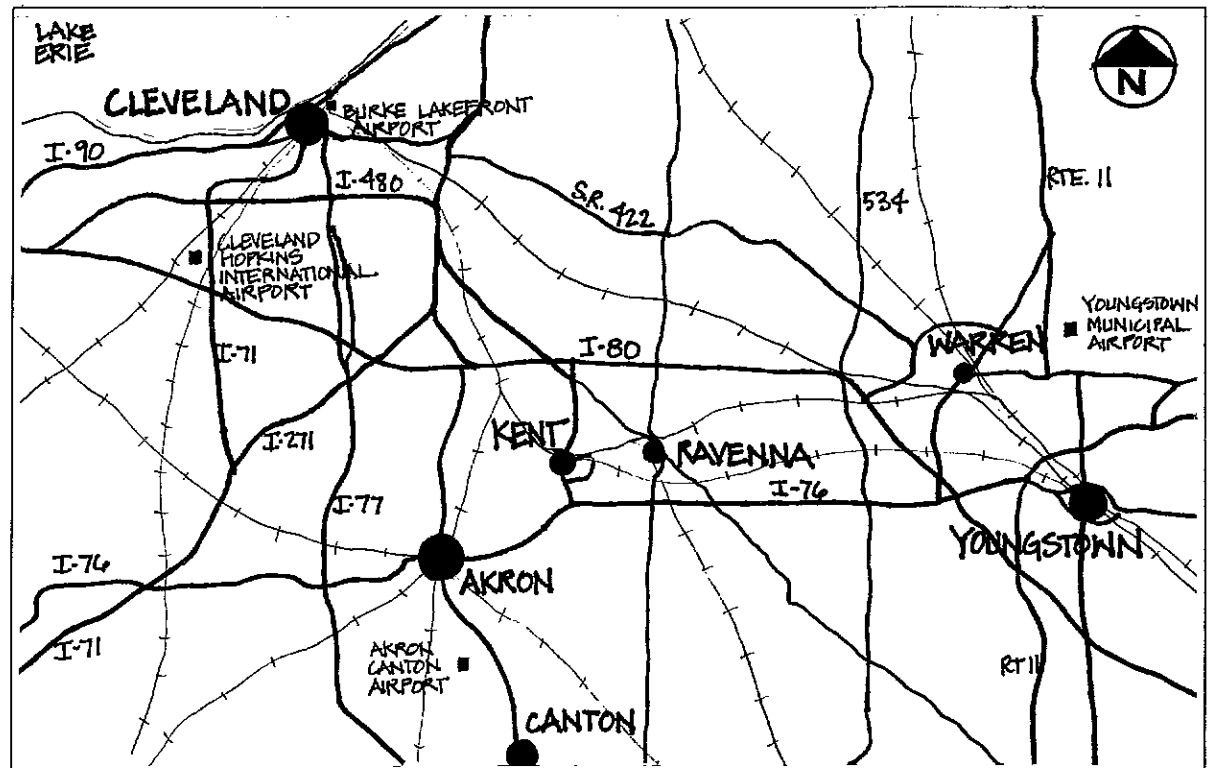
Proximity to Blossom Music Center, Sea World of Ohio, Geauga Lake Amusement Park, and the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area enables the city of Kent also to participate in the regional tourism market, and excellent opportunities presently exist for Kent to take advantage of its location and expand its role as a tourist destination.



Location of Portage County



Location of Kent



Major highways, railways, and airports of Northeast Ohio

Physical Description

Kent's most predominant physical feature is the Cuyahoga River, which flows gently through the downtown area and is marked by a beautifully cascading waterfall near the heart of the business district. A steep stone wall and double tiered railroad bed form the eastern river bank, while a strip of wooded park area shapes the western edge. From here the land slopes away from the river forming discernible hills to the east and west. Typical topography of the entire Kent area, these rolling hills are the result of glaciation which also created a terrain dotted with numerous kettle lakes, streams, bogs, and sand and gravel deposits.

Soils throughout the region are likewise the product of glacial material. The primary soil found in the city of Kent is the Chili type, a well-drained permeable soil that presents very few restrictions on urban or agricultural development.

Kent's climate is characteristic of the temperate region of Northeast Ohio and is best described as having warm, humid summers, moderate winters frequented by lake-effect snow storms (from Lake Erie), as well as daily and seasonal changeability. Extreme variations in temperature and precipitation amounts are not uncommon in this area largely due to the proximity of Lake Erie.

The mean average temperature in Kent is 49.7 degrees F, the mean average annual precipitation is 36.44 inches, and the mean annual snowfall is 48 inches. Kent's growing season generally extends from early May to late September.

When viewed as a whole, the physical features of the Kent area begin to suggest an overall image for the entire city. The Cuyahoga River serves as a very identifiable focal point, the topography provides rich visual relief, while the numerous water sources and parks provide for extensive outdoor activities and the climate allows for comfortable, pleasant summers with tolerable winters.



The banks of the Cuyahoga River

Kent, From Village to City

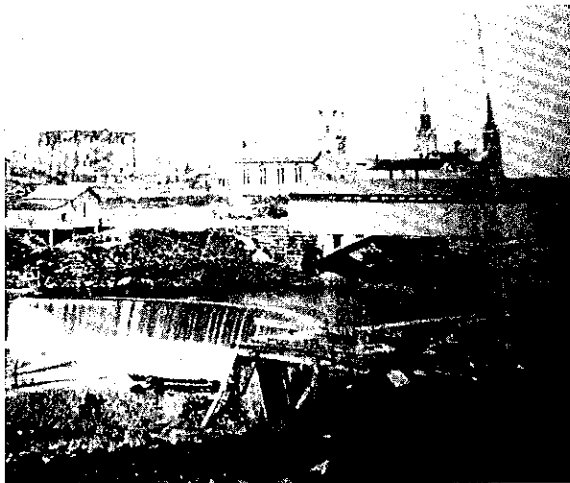
A Village is Born

Nearly two centuries ago, in 1805, an enterprising man named John Haymaker ventured westward to the newly formed state of Ohio and settled with his family on the banks of the Cuyahoga River. Taking advantage of the power offered by a nearby waterfall, Haymaker erected a gristmill operation, marking the beginning of many prosperous years for a village which would later become known as Kent.

Soon after Haymaker's arrival, a village began to take shape known as Franklin Mills due to the numerous mills and factories which dotted the river's edge. During these early decades, the Cuyahoga River was the essential element in the growth and development of Franklin Mills, providing power for a variety of grist mills, woolen mills, cabinet shops, glass factories, and tanneries, forming an industrial center which attracted many businesses from surrounding areas. By 1835, the population in Franklin Mills had grown to nearly 1,400 people.

The Canal Era

Development during the first half of the nineteenth century was located primarily along the west side of the Cuyahoga River, but plans in the 1830s to make Franklin Mills a stop on the Pennsylvania



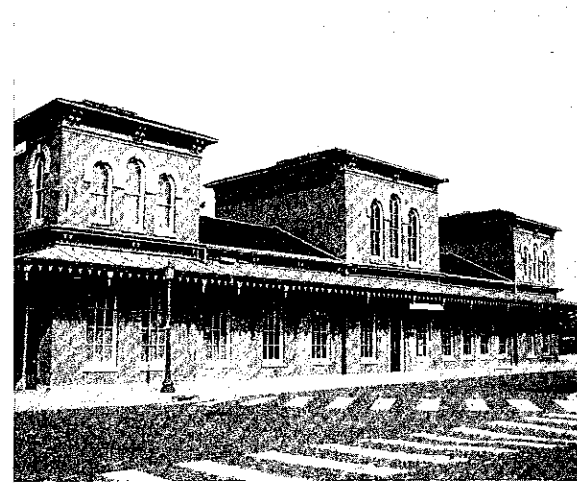
The Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal (photo courtesy Brad Bolton)

and Ohio Canal prompted a great deal of land speculation and development on the river's east side, forming the beginning of what is now the Central Business District.

With the opening of the P & O Canal in 1840, Franklin Mills experienced a new period of growth that lasted for nearly twenty years until the canal closed in 1861, unable to compete with the new mode of transportation sweeping the country, the railroad.

The Railroad Era

Seeing the potential for Franklin Mills to emerge as a vital commercial center, businessman Marvin Kent was instrumental in bringing the railroad to the area, and in 1863, the first cars of the Atlantic and Great Western rolled into town.



The Kent Railroad Station

Franklin Mills experienced an extraordinary new period of growth and development following the advent of the railway. In the Central Business District dozens of new retail, commercial, and manufacturing enterprises were established near the railroad station and the surrounding areas grew markedly as well. This new era of prosperity transformed the industrial town into a thriving commercial center, and, in 1863, the town was renamed Kent. Shortly thereafter in 1867, the town became incorporated as a village with a population of nearly 2,300.

The community enjoyed continued economic success until the turn of the century when reliance on the railways began to diminish and was replaced by motor transportation. Kent was again facing a new era and a new century as well.

The University Era

Probably the most significant event in Kent's history of development occurred when the village was selected as the site for a new normal school in 1910, stimulating an unprecedented new period of growth which would continue for nearly seventy years. Many new residents and businesses were attracted to the area, and in 1920 Kent attained official city status with a population of more than 7,000 citizens.

Presently the University continues to be an essential component of the city, serving as a vital anchor to the entire community.

It was also during this era that the Davey Tree Expert Company was founded by John Davey. Recognized internationally, the business is presently one of Kent's largest employers and is responsible for Kent becoming known as the "Tree City."



Kent State University

The People and the Economy

The People

Since obtaining official city status with more than 7,000 people in 1920, the population in Kent has grown to nearly 30,000 inhabitants. The presence of Kent State University is largely responsible for the present size of the population and clearly affects the composition of the entire Kent community.

Made up of slightly more females than males, the majority of Kent residents are between the ages of 19 and 24, white, high-school or college educated, and are natives of the United States. Employed primarily in professional, managerial, and educational occupations, the majority of jobholders work in Kent or within Portage County.

Kent is a city greatly affected by the presence of a large University, clearly reflected in the kind of individuals who form the community. These people possess the energy and ambition necessary to revitalize Kent successfully and make it a thriving city for future generations.

The Economy

For nearly two decades traditional manufacturing activities formed the primary basic economy of Kent; but with the establishment of the University in 1910, retail, education, and educational service-type activities now account for over one

half of Kent's basic economy, with manufacturing making up about one-fifth of the overall activities.

Although there are actually fewer than ten businesses which can be classified as education or educational services, Kent State University employs more people than any other business making it the single largest basic economic activity in Kent.

Of the other nonmanufacturing type activities, eating and drinking establishments employ the second largest group of people in Kent, while government activities, food stores, automotive dealers/gasoline service stations, and health services each employ roughly the same numbers of people to become the next most popular economic activities. Machinery, rubber, and plastics industries compose the largest segment of Kent's manufacturing base, accounting for roughly one-half of the industrial activities. The production of electrical equipment, petroleum products, and fabricated metals complete the bulk of the manufacturing economy.

Maintaining a variety of business activities which meet the needs of the entire community, as well as the University, is essential for a healthy local economy, but to remain competitive in the regional and national markets, the city of Kent must prepare an aggressive campaign to draw new business enterprises into the area,

especially in the diminishing manufacturing sector. Kent also has the ability to expand its role in the tourism market by taking advantage of its location and physical resources to become a destination.

The city of Kent derives approximately 80 percent of its revenues from local sources, mainly through city utilities, local income taxes, and federal aid, while major expenditures are directed to general government, security, and transportation.

Summary

Having now become familiar with some of the basic historical, physical, and demographic traits of Kent, it is now possible to examine the city in greater detail, identifying specific strengths and weaknesses which provide a foundation for growth and renewal, utilizing knowledge of the general characteristics as tools for assessing the appropriateness of various design proposals and choosing those ideas which are most successful in strengthening Kent's identity.

