

**Bi-Centennial Plan
Assessment of Actions Proposed and Taken
August, 2008**

The following is a summary of action items proposed in the Kent Bi-Centennial Plan dated November 3, 2004 that pertain to planning, community development, economic development, housing and zoning.

- **Enact riparian corridor protection ordinances that apply to creek and tributaries.**

Status: A riparian ordinance was adopted in 2004 and is still in effect.

- **Inventory wetlands and sensitive environmental areas – create base maps to be updated every three years.**

Status: The City has not conducted a city-wide survey of wetlands due to cost. Wetlands are identified on properties proposed for development by the developer, subject to ODNR review. The City is also working on developing a GIS system that could include an inventory of wetlands and sensitive areas.

- **Preserve and expand existing wetlands and create conservation areas and easements with private property owners and not-for-profit groups.**

Status: The City has not actively forced these issues since they are somewhat property owner dependent decisions. In the case of the EQK project on Meloy Road, the City did require the designation of a buffer area along Meloy Road as part of the approval of that project.

- **Encourage the use of rain gardens and other similar water quality facilities.**

Status: This provision was included in the riparian ordinance adopted in 2004.

- **Expand the Keep Kent Beautiful Adopt – A – Spot Program.**

Status: It is not clear as to what the intent was as far as expanding the program but the program is still in operation.

- **Investigate and implement Green Building Codes.**

Status: The Environmental Commission has been studying this concept for the past year and is preparing to recommend a ordinance to Council in the next month that would stipulate that City projects over 5,000 square feet attain silver Leeds Certification when financially feasible.

- **Develop a plan for traffic calming in existing and new developments.**

Status: The traffic roundabout in the Lakes of Franklin Mills is an example of where traffic calming was implemented in a new development. Traffic calming techniques are considered by staff when looking at development plans and are recommended where practical. Staff has also attempted to look at two areas of the City where traffic calming could be implemented (Crain Avenue and Middlebury Road). There was interest on the part of some residents in these areas, but a significant consensus was never developed in those areas as to what should be done. The design of the new Crain Avenue bridge and its relocation may help to retard some of the through traffic on Crain but this will not be known until the bridge and intersection layouts are actually constructed.

- **Create new intersection crosswalk specifications including the use of alternative paving, surface material and coloring systems.**

Status: No new specifications have been created. It is conceivable that some of the items suggested could be implemented under the current specifications. The concepts proposed are generally related to traffic calming and should be part of a comprehensive package of requirements and specifications that are adopted in relation to traffic calming. Such improvements could be implemented today with or without variances to current requirements.

- **Construct street boulevards on Haymaker Parkway, North Mantua Street and South Water Street as part of road widening projects.**

Status: The boulevard concept was implemented on the portion of the State Route 43 project (South Water Street south of SR261) that was constructed several years ago. In regard to Haymaker Parkway and the current downtown redevelopment project being considered, the potential "boulevarding" of a section of Haymaker between South Depeyster and East Main Street is being considered.

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- **Create historic residential and commercial districts.**
- **Encourage the renovation of historic homes.**
- **Identify and register historic buildings.**
- **Create architectural standards for downtown buildings and other commercial zones.**

Status: There are currently three historic “districts” in Kent that are listed on the National Register. One is the area around the Pufferbelly, the dam and the river in downtown. The second is along West Main Street from North Mantua Street to North Chestnut Street, and the third is the old portion of the KSU Campus adjacent to Hilltop Drive. Current efforts are focused on the downtown area. Main Street Kent, with the support of the City have just engaged a consultant to develop architectural design guidelines for the downtown.

- **Increase code enforcement and property maintenance code.**

Status: In 2007, Kent City Council authorized the upgrade of the part time Code Enforcement Officer in the Community Development Department to a full-time position. The position was filled in May, 2008. The Community Development Department has also proposed the adoption of a Property Maintenance Code that is modeled after the International Property Maintenance Code. This document was presented to Council in early 2008 and will be presented to Council in final draft form in the Fall of 2008.

- **Continue housing rehabilitation program and encourage new residential construction on vacant residential lots.**
- **Promote the conversion of rental housing units by promoting home ownership loan programs and investigate 1-2 year tax abatement program.**

Status: The City has continued its long standing owner occupied housing rehabilitation program since the early 1980's and has also operated an Acquisition-Rehab-Resale program for approximately 10 years that has allowed the City to purchase some rental properties and convert them back to owner occupied properties. Recent changes in the residential real estate market, in regard to valuation, predatory lending and other factors affecting credit, have made the program more difficult to implement and the City is having to evaluate the A-R-R program to determine if changes in program design are needed. The City has also allocated \$150,000 in CDBG funds to purchasing vacant lots in the “southend” neighborhood of Kent for new single family construction but has had difficulty finding appropriate lots to purchase. Generally the school district has been opposed to any tax abatement programs on residential properties since those properties may generate additional enrollment for the schools.

- **Proposed grant, revolving loan and tax abatement program for retail and downtown façade improvements.**

Status: In 2003, the City allocated CDBG funding to capitalizing a Downtown Façade Grant / Loan Program. A total of \$100,000 has been allocated to this program and to date, three grant / loans have been made. The total amount of assistance to each client is \$22,500.00 with \$10,000 of that amount being a grant, \$10,000.00 being a loan, and \$2,500.00 being available for architectural fees. Projects are subject to review by the City's architectural advisory board and in some cases by the Ohio Historical Preservation Office.

- **Tighten regulations and increase enforcement for licensing and occupancy of rooming houses.**

Status: The hiring of the full time Code Enforcement Officer will help accomplish better enforcement. The City is also considering ways in which to better regulate and control rental properties.

- **Continue to financially assist needed health and social service programs.**

Status: The City has maintained social service funding despite its tight budgetary situation.

- **Develop and create business programs for new entrepreneurs using volunteers to provide business planning assistance.**

Status: The City has supported the Small Business Development Center and Business Incubator for approximately 15 years using CDBG funding. This programs are operated by KRBA and provide help to persons wanting to start their own business, or for those who have started their own business recently. Technical assistance is provided to clients and in some cases that assistance has been provided by volunteers, although it has been difficult finding other business owners who are willing to dedicate a lot of time to the program.

- **When and where appropriate, place utility wires underground in development and redevelopment project areas.**

Status: This option is considered when new developments are built but is somewhat dependent on the developer and the utility company. This concept is also considered on redevelopment projects but generally is expensive and cannot be accomplished in all cases.

- **Encourage greater communication between KSU and the City regarding emerging technologies and opportunities for employment growth.**

Status: Communication between the City and KSU has varied over the years but has been in place. Current lines of communication are very good and the recent announcement of the move of Alphamicon to the Bicentennial Research park is an excellent example of the university working with the City to help retain and hopefully expand further a promising local business engaged in an emerging technology.

- **Base tax incentives on jobs that pay living wages and increase incentives for those businesses paying living wages.**

Status: State law significantly dictates the provisions of the tax abatement programs that can be offered. Typically when Enterprise Zone Tax Abatements were considered, the City evaluated the amount of tax revenue to be generated in relation to the abatement to be offered. State law now requires most abatement programs to be analyzed with regard to revenue generate and taxes abated, and requiring tax revenue sharing arrangements with the local schools. At this point in time, while there is no direct correlation to the quality of the jobs and the type of abatement offered, it is evaluated in certain abatement programs.

- **Pursue chain stores that will be attractive to KSU students.**
- **Increase the number of Kent residents shopping in Kent and the retail shopping opportunities available in the City.**
- **Conduct a market study of all downtown businesses to determine downtown Kent's overall market area.**

Status: Over the last year or so, the City has engaged the Buxton Company to conduct a "drive-time" market and demographic study whose focus was primarily the downtown, but also entailed evaluating additional sites outside of downtown. Once the drive-time (15 minute) trade area was identified, characteristics of the population within that area were analyzed. Significant market "segments" or household descriptions were identified and Buxton then compared their market database of retailers to the predominant segments in order to determine which retailers would be most attracted to the Kent market. Since that time, the City has been attempting to contact those retailers.

- **Continue the Ambassador Program.**

Status: This program is continuing and involves visiting local businesses to determine if they have any needs the City can assist with.

- **Seek the clean-up and development of the Wheeling and Lake Erie rail yard.**

Status: It is assumed that we are talking about the rail yard to the north of Lake Street. While this area still maintains some potential interest for development, other projects in the downtown area and in other parts of the City have taken a higher priority. Should specific interests develop in this property, the City would attempt to help facilitate projects.

- **Create a comprehensive parking strategy including redesigned and properly signed parking lots.**

Status: As part of the current downtown planning efforts, the City has retained a consultant to evaluate existing and future parking needs based on known projects. The results of this study should help identify needed strategies and ways in which to utilize and sign the parking lots so that they can be effectively used. Separately, the Parking Action Committee and the Community Development Department have been implementing a parking hang-tag program to provide paid, longer term parking alternatives in portions of the downtown and West River areas.