

NEWBURGH DOWNTOWN ACTION PLAN



2011

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Downtown Business District
Revitalization Plan

Commissioned by
The Newburgh Town Council



Adopted
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The scope of the Newburgh Downtown Revitalization Plan is to outline goals, objectives, and action items to be implemented within the next eighteen (18) months and which are designed to promote local business and increase visitation to the historic business district. The planning area includes Historic Downtown Newburgh and areas north and west of this district.

The objective of the plan is to create a proactive framework with a short two-year timeline designed to spur quick action and generate visible, meaningful results. The planning process was focused around the simple idea of asking local merchants, residents, and community leaders about their needs, issues and opportunities, listening to their responses, and then crafting an implementable action plan to meet those needs. Plan goals fall into two general categories: 1) to increase local capacity to accomplish a broader range of projects and 2) to enhance the physical features and atmosphere within the business district.

The plan is designed as a “how-to action guide” to spur activity in the private sector as well as direct public sector efforts to support and expand local business opportunities. The planning team discovered that the desired outcomes could easily be divided into three types – those that were the responsibility of the Town, those that were the responsibility of the private business community, and those that required a joint effort by the public and private sector working together. These three “buckets” provide an excellent framework for categorizing projects and clearly establish who should take the lead to drive various projects forward.

The creation of districts is one way to recognize and promote unique qualities in different areas, and this plan proposes to create two new districts to complement and enhance the historic district core that is already well established. The three districts are referred to in the plan as the West End, Historic Downtown, and Midtown. Some plan recommendations are overarching and are intended to apply across all districts, while others are intended to be specific to each individual district.

The project goals range from simple sidewalk improvements to more complicated efforts to rehabilitate existing structures and create new community assets. The goals are summarized in an ‘action plan’ that identifies the driver, timeline and costs associated with each project. Additionally, the appendices contain case studies that provide insight into other communities’ efforts to address issues similar to those detailed in this plan.



Historic Downtown Newburgh, corner of Jennings Street and State Street.

ABOUT THE PLAN

A plan is a reflection of a community's vision for its future. The plan document describes what success looks like and how to get there. Producing a plan is not the end goal. Creating the vision by taking the actions described in the plan is the goal.



The Town of Newburgh understands the importance of creating and sustaining a thriving business district in the historic heart of the community. In an ongoing effort to improve the community for residents, merchants, and visitors, the Town Council obtained funds from the Indiana Office of Community and Rural affairs to underwrite the cost of development of a downtown revitalization plan. A planning team led by Green 3 LLC, Indianapolis, Indiana, working in consultation with ArchTrio and Commonwealth Engineering, was hired to lead the planning process. The planning team worked closely with a Steering Committee composed of local merchants, property owners, and government leaders to create the final plan.

Plan Scope & Purpose

The scope of the Newburgh Downtown Revitalization Plan is to outline goals, objectives, and action items to be implemented within the next eighteen (18) months. These are designed to promote local business and increase visitation to the historic business district and the outlying districts. The plan includes recommendations for construction projects and capacity building initiatives. The goal of the plan is to create a proactive framework with a short timeline designed to spur quick action and generate visible, meaningful results. This timeline is also structured to capitalize on the momentum generated by the recent opening of the Rivertown Trail, which has dramatically increased tourism and publicity in and around the planning area.

Planning Area

The planning area includes Historic Downtown Newburgh and areas north and west of this district. The study boundary extends along State Street from Sharon Road south to the Ohio River, Jennings Street from Middle Street west to old S.R. 662 and continuing west to Ellerbusch Road. The planning boundary was observed with regard to recommendations for construction or infrastructure improvement. However, planners explored a broader geographic context with regard to opportunities for advertising and promotion.

Planning Process

The planning process was focused around the simple idea of asking local merchants, residents, and community leaders about their needs, issues, and opportunities, listening to their responses, and then crafting an implementable strategy to meet those needs. A steering committee was formed to listen to merchants' concerns and then identify priorities to guide the final implementation strategy. Planners facilitated the information exchange between merchants and the committee and also inventoried physical conditions and collected relevant background information to provide context for planning and decision making.



The project began with a discovery process in a two-day round of interviews with local merchants and property owners (see merchant list, Appendix A). Additionally an intensive inventory of existing site and building conditions and research on historic development patterns, architecture, and events was also completed during the two-day session. A summary of the planners’ site observations and merchant interview responses was shared with the Steering Committee. The review session discussion shaped the project direction and resulted in the identification of several basic goals.

The planning team fleshed out the project goals and key concepts and developed a series of recommendations that responded to merchants’ concerns and aligned committee priorities and the implementation timeline. An open house was held on November 16, 2010 to present the preliminary goals and recommendations and collect feedback on public preferences and implementation priorities. This open house was well attended and the comments received were used to fine-tune the plan approach and priorities. A final draft plan was prepared that reflected the identified goals and objectives of the plan and clearly outlined the recommended strategies and projects to be implemented in order to reach the stated goals. The draft plan was presented at a public hearing on February 9, 2011 for final comment. Final revisions were made based on comments received and this document, the final plan, was adopted by the Newburgh Town Council on February 23, 2011.

Using the Plan

The plan is designed as a “how to action guide” to spur activity in the private sector as well as direct public sector efforts to support and expand local business opportunities. The document includes narrative descriptions of proposed actions and graphics to illustrate a vision of what successful implementation of projects might look like. The planning area is described using a district framework with recommendations categorized and presented for three unique districts.

Case studies have been included in the plan to provide real-life examples of how projects similar to those recommended for Newburgh have been successfully implemented in other communities. These examples illustrate that success is possible and also offer important guidance and inspiration relevant to Newburgh’s future efforts.

And finally, an action plan chart has been created that synthesizes the recommended goals, objectives, strategies, drivers, and timeline for implementation into an easy to follow format. The action plan chart is the bridge between the ideas represented in the plan and the workplan that must be set in motion to really get the job done.



Heart of Newburgh owners.

CONTEXT

In order to understand what needs to be done to move proactively toward a better future, it is important to understand the history of the community and its present day context. This information provides the foundation for development of a plan that is respectful of heritage and with an eye toward the future.



History

The Ohio River has played a significant role in the history of Newburgh and is a focal point of this historic town today. It provides a magnificent setting for the town which is as impressive today as it was when the town was founded over 200 year ago.

The Newburgh area was the site of a community of Mississippian culture peoples from 1100 to 1450 AD. This agricultural community traded with other chiefdoms and peoples along the Ohio River. The people of the Mississippian culture settled around what is now called Angel Mounds State Historic Site, which became a National Historic Landmark in 1964.

Newburgh is the oldest town in Warrick County. The area where the town is situated today was founded by two men, John Sprinkle and Abner Luce. Sprinkle platted the area in 1812 and named it Sprinklesburgh. Abner Luce arrived in 1829 and founded Newburgh, directly east of Sprinklesburgh. Later, in 1837, the plats for Sprinklesburgh and Newburgh were merged to form one town, Newburgh.



Historic Interurban Car in Newburgh.

By 1850, Newburgh had become the largest river port between Cincinnati and New Orleans. Even though Newburgh was a major river trading point, the national railroad system bypassed Newburgh for Evansville, making Evansville the regional hub for commerce.



The River Town Antique Mall on Jennings Street.

The Town of Newburgh today is a recognized Indiana Main Street community. Downtown Newburgh is home to sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and the Newburgh Historic District is made up of over forty (40) core properties and eleven (11) scattered properties. As one of the oldest communities in Indiana, Newburgh is a town of scenic river views, rich cultural history, annual festivals, and small town charm.

Community Description

According to the American Community Survey, the Town of Newburgh is home to 3,311 residents. The median age of Newburgh residents is 36.8 years, with the majority of the population (about 72%) over the age of 18.

Downtown Newburgh is the site of fifty-two (52) businesses ranging from services and retail to fine dining. Household and clothing boutiques as well as antique businesses are among the major retail establishments. Of the 1,266 businesses in the greater Newburgh area, major industries include construction, professional services, health care, retail, and personal/business support services. Among all industries in the Newburgh area, the largest employers are in the health care field.



Streetscape on Jennings Street today.

Events & Projects

The Town works with and for the local community to sponsor festivals and events. These events represent important annual events celebrated by local residents that also attract thousands of tourists to the heart of the historic district each year. The events are unique to Newburgh and capitalize on the town's history, local heritage and culture, and location on the Ohio River (see list of events, Appendix B). Attendance at these events can range between 5,000-12,000 people and provide a great boost to the local economy.

The Town of Newburgh has made ongoing and consistent investment in infrastructure upgrades and other improvements within the public right-of-way over the past decade. The town has concentrated many projects in and around the historic district and along the riverfront. Roadway improvements, installation of sidewalks, upgrades to public parks and public buildings, and most notably the recent construction of a 3-mile riverfront trail have all been completed. The completion of the trail in 2010 resulted in a boost to tourism and an overall increase in pedestrian circulation in and around the planning area. This uptick in visitation and interest in Newburgh was one of the key outcomes forecasted to result from trail construction, and unlocking the economic benefits of this surge in popularity is one of the driving forces behind this plan.



Rivertown Trail.

Merchant Input

One of the most vital aspects of any successful small town is a diverse and vibrant business community. Without local shops, restaurants, recreation venues, service providers and “mom and pop” shops, small towns would lose their identity and, with that, their long term viability as a community. Newburgh is fortunate to have a large number of local merchants in and outside the planning area (see merchant list, Appendix A).

Case Study 1: **preservation + growth** Hillsborough, North Carolina

Promoting heritage-based tourism and managing growth to achieve economic diversity and quality of life.

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The logical starting point for understanding the needs of the business community is to talk with business owners about their issues, experiences, and hopes for the future. Over a two-day period in August, 2010, the planning team conducted interviews with 21 merchants located within the planning area. The interviews lasted approximately thirty (30) minutes and were held at the local businesses so that the planning team could better understand the type and size of businesses currently

in operation and observe the physical setting in which the businesses are located. These interviews yielded a wealth of first-hand information on the perceived strengths and weaknesses in the downtown business environment.

The comments collected during the interview process showed some remarkable consistencies and also articulated some areas of opposing viewpoints (see following page). This information was compiled and immediately shared in great detail with the Steering Committee. This approach had the effect of bringing an urgent sense of reality to identifying what could and should be done to respond to the needs of the local business community. As a result, this plan offers a fast-paced, action-oriented approach to increase the chances of success in a short time frame and for a reasonable cost.

One of the most unexpected outcomes of the analysis and discussion of merchant input was the realization that the Town alone could not accomplish what needed to be done. One major weakness was the lack of an organization comprised of representatives of both the Town and the business community working together toward common goals. The absence of some type of public/private group had created an unnecessary communication void between the Town and the local merchants. The planning team quickly recognized that Newburgh needed the public and private sector to work in tandem in order to bring about meaningful and lasting improvements that would truly benefit the local merchants and the entire community.



Merchants consistently expressed a desire for wayfinding signs and information kiosks to direct visitors to businesses and key destinations.

MERCHANT COMMENTS

Below is a summary of comments collected from merchants during on-site interviews in August, 2010.

- *Increase the number of parking spaces to accommodate daily parking needs for workers, residents and visitors, as well as event parking.*

- *Improve the sidewalk conditions throughout the planning area to draw pedestrian traffic throughout the planning area.*

- *Install signage to direct visitors to stores (particularly those outside the historic core), bathrooms, the trail, parking.*

- *Make more of an effort to attract people from the Newburgh area to the historic commercial core.*

- *Increase the number of public restrooms.*

- *Install amenities such as trash containers, bike racks and benches to benefit visitors and trail users.*

- *Some interviewees expressed a desire for more business variety; others thought more antique shops would increase the area's attractiveness or meet the common expectation of Newburgh as a center for antique shopping.*

- *Increase the role of new, younger merchants in the activities of the Merchants' Association.*

- *The Merchants' Association should be more active and extend its focus beyond the traditional historic core, and there should be greater cooperation with the Town.*

- *Develop more or better events, such as Fiddler Fest, etc.*

- *Address drainage issues.*

- *Build on the success of the trail.*

- *Expand use of the trolley.*



Docia Peveler, owner of The Village Knitter.

GOALS & DRIVERS

It is not difficult to imagine a better future, but it is impossible to realize that future if great plans are made, and no one steps forward to act on the plans. No goal can be accomplished and no plan will succeed without a group or an individual to drive it forward. The better the driver, the faster you reach your destination.



Who Is Responsible?

A plan is only effective if the recommendations it contains are implemented. Planning is easy; it is getting the job done that is always the tricky part. The key to success is to clearly identify not only what has to be done but to also clearly identify who will be responsible for doing it.

The planning team discovered that the desired outcomes expressed by merchants and the Town fell into three categories – those that were the responsibility of the Town, those that were the responsibility of the private business community, and those that required a joint effort by the public and private sector working together. These three “buckets,” described below, provide an excellent framework for categorizing projects and clearly establish who should take the lead to drive various projects forward.

Public projects are the responsibility of the Town. The task of making the business district accessible and attractive by maintaining facilities and features on public property is the responsibility of the town. This could include work in the public right of way such as new sidewalks, drainage improvements, street paving, signs, public restrooms, etc.

Private projects are those that require investment in private property and cooperation among and between business owners. The task of creating a climate of cooperation between businesses and establishing unique and inviting storefronts is the responsibility of the private sector. This could include establishing consistent hours of operation, engaging in cross marketing for complementary businesses, installing unique signs and window displays, and the maintenance and upkeep of buildings and landscape areas, etc.

Public/Private partnership projects can take many forms. Collaborating to develop projects that are catalysts for expanding business start-ups or attracting new audiences and revenue sources to support the business community are undertaken by public/private partnerships. These projects could include the redevelopment of a large vacant property as a site for multiple new businesses, large scale media campaigns, development of a brand identity, etc.

Case Study 2: partnership

Edenton, North Carolina

Working together, the Town of Edenton and Preservation, North Carolina transformed dilapidated historic living quarters for mill workers and their families into modern village residences.

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Goals & Timeline

A series of broadly defined goals was developed to guide the plan based in large part on input from merchants along with input from the public. These goals were not predetermined by the Town and are not “leftover” goals from a prior plan that have been reinserted into this plan.

The goals of this plan fall into two broad categories: 1) those designed to increase the community’s ability to organize groups and individuals in order to complete needed projects and 2) those targeted at enhancing the physical features and atmosphere within the business district. Additionally, each goal listed is clearly identified with regard to which “bucket” of responsibility it falls so that it is clear who should shoulder the responsibility of making sure the actions needed to reach the goal are implemented.

Case Study 3:

building capacity

Bakersville & Hayesville,
North Carolina

Bakersville and Hayesville have taken steps to build physical infrastructure and organizational capacity to facilitate community and economic development.

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COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

PUBLIC: Create a business growth and sustainability plan for each district.

PRIVATE: Establish merchant leadership teams for each district.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE: Form a business advisory board composed of merchant and town representatives.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

PUBLIC: Create definable districts and expand access to each district.

PRIVATE: Improve storefront visibility.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE: Promote and develop projects to increase business and foot traffic in each district.

The objectives detailed on the following pages support the plan goals and have been specifically selected to produce quick results. The recent completion of the Rivertown Trail has created momentum in the community that this plan must capitalize on. In order to take advantage of the new visitors coming to town to use the trail, the plan goals must be initiated quickly and completed on time.

A planning horizon of only eighteen (18) months has been set for this plan. The plan is designed to promote the businesses in the area that are open now and those scheduled to come on line in the next year. As a result, realistic objectives have been set that provide the “most bang for the buck” with an emphasis on showing results quickly. Some objectives may extend beyond the 18 month horizon, but the foundations of each can be substantially realized in the short term.



DISTRICTS

Many communities struggle to survive, and the standard planning strategies to keep them alive seem somewhat obvious. Taking a vibrant community and making it even better requires a different mindset. You must have an appreciation for quality not quantity and understand that simple, meaningful improvements are often the most important and effective.



The District Concept

Newburgh is fortunate to have a scenic riverfront location, a rich and fascinating history, and a friendly, small-town culture. This combination gives Newburgh a distinct and attractive character that has contributed greatly to the creation of a vibrant and growing downtown business district. Today business is expanding north and west from the historic downtown into areas that do not hold the same level of unified character as the historic town center. These expansion areas are somewhat like diamonds in the rough when compared with the downtown historic district. They present different opportunities and challenges, but, with a bit of polish, they have the potential to become much more than bookends on either side of the historic downtown.

The creation of districts is one way to recognize and promote unique qualities in different areas. The benefit of creating districts is the opportunity to create a sense of place in an area that is still tied to an overall community identity. This plan proposes to create two new districts to complement and enhance the historic district core that is already established. For the purposes of this plan, the districts have been given generic names – the West End, Historic Downtown and Midtown. The West End already has a different look and feel from the Historic Downtown, and Midtown does not now and should not in the future necessarily look or feel like either of the other two districts. The new districts will create a sense of progression and arrival into the historic downtown that is now missing. Creating a sense of place in these districts will attract visitors and, subsequently, lead to additional business development and expansion in the areas that still have ample room to grow.



District-wide signage recommendation