

**HIGHLAND STATION,  
RESOURCE TEAM REPORT  
(OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN)**

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## INTRODUCTION

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On October 24 – 27, 2006, a Main Street Oakland County (MSOC) Resource Team visited Highland Station, Oakland County, Michigan, to create a set of comprehensive recommendations to assist the local community in achieving long-term revitalization and management of its downtown commercial district. This resource team consultation is a service provided to Michigan Main Street communities engaged in comprehensive downtown revitalization according to the nationally recognized Main Street Four-Point Approach™, developed by the National Trust Main Street Center (NTMSC).

The Resource Team, comprised four commercial district revitalization professionals and staff members from Main Street Oakland County, evaluated the progress of Highland Station's Main Street Program, presented observations of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the downtown district, and made recommendations for revitalizing the downtown and ensuring the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority (DDA) continues to move forward in building its Main Street program. The team's recommendations for implementing long-term, historic preservation-based revitalization goals for the downtown business district are presented in this report.

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE TEAM REPORT

The team's recommendations are based on the conditions of downtown Highland Station during its visit and the capacity of the community at large to respond to those conditions as opportunities for action. Secondly, all recommendations are based on the premise that in order to successfully implement a revitalization effort, a strong partnership must exist among all stakeholders, including Highland Township, the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority (HTDDA)/Main Street Program, downtown property owners and merchants, volunteers, and other significant community members. The Resource Team bases its observations and recommendations on years of field experience with many different communities, but the citizens of Highland Township know their community best. Therefore, the selection of local revitalization projects and activities should be based on community priorities and on what can be accomplished with available resources.

The resource team report should be distributed to all downtown stakeholders, including the boards of the Downtown Development Authority and to the members of the Highland Township Board of Trustees and other appropriate Township staff. Relevant sections should be distributed to each of the Main Street committees, other volunteers, and to all interviewees as deemed appropriate. It is strongly recommended that all Highland Township DDA board members and Main Street committee volunteers read the report, discuss the recommendations, and develop or adjust their annual and long-term work plans accordingly. At minimum, Main Street staff and the board president should fully review this document and use it to guide committee actions and assess the community's progress in developing its Main Street program.

Finally, it is important to note that Main Street Oakland County and NTMSC assistance does not end with this report. The Resource Team strongly encourages the Highland Township DDA board of directors, Main Street committee members, and staff to contact MSOC and the NTMSC, to discuss the contents of this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A Resource Team assembled by the National Trust Main Street Center, in partnership with Main Street Oakland County visited downtown Highland Station from October 24 – 27, 2006. The team, comprising of four commercial district revitalization professionals, recorded their observations and recommendations in order to formulate appropriate and comprehensive, historic preservation-based downtown revitalization strategies. The following are the key recommendations presented to the Howell community during the on-site visit; succeeding sections of this report expand on these recommendations and related issues in further detail.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Integrating the Main Street Four-Point Approach in DDA operations.** The Highland Township Downtown Development Authority has made substantial progress in the past year in forming its Main Street committees, recruiting volunteers, and developing and implementing its first work plan. In fact, the Highland Township community has done well in establishing a firm foundation for future success with its Main Street program. However, much work still remains in integrating the Main Street methodology into all aspects of DDA operations including budget and work plan development, volunteer management and in relations with the Highland Charter Township. In addition, the DDA board of directors and the Organization Committee will need to engage the community at large and develop strong partnerships with other stakeholders in order to implement successfully its long-term vision for the downtown district. Additional initiatives in public relations and external communication will be needed to educate the community on the roles the DDA is taking in the development of Highland Station and the opportunities for the community to participate.
- **Building an effective Highland Station promotion program.** In the past year, the Highland Township DDA Promotion Committee has been quite active in undertaking various work plan activities including the production of special events and marketing and image-building activities. Undertaking a comprehensive approach to developing a downtown promotion program will need to include all forms of promotions as well some creativity that will promote a positive and unified image of Highland Station. In terms of overall promotion strategy, for the near-term, the HTDDA's marketing, promotion and image enhancement efforts should continue to emphasize and nurture a strong sense of the Highland Station downtown area as the center for community activity, culture, entertainment and commerce. As Highland Station revitalizes and develops in the years to come, long-term marketing and promotion efforts should incorporate a stronger retail promotion component to support and capitalize upon existing and evolving clusters of retail and service businesses. All promotion activities should highlight and capitalize upon character-defining features, historic resources and community assets that help to identify Highland Station as a special place in Oakland County.
- **Conducting effective business development activities.** In the short-term, Highland Station's most important short-term economic restructuring challenge is to encourage the reuse of its remaining historic commercial buildings, to improve the competitiveness of existing downtown businesses, and to promote the attraction of new business enterprises. In order to meet this challenge, the Economic Restructuring Committee will have to develop specific initiatives in business recruitment and retention and real estate development. Some aspects of a comprehensive retail market analysis will also have to be conducted so the HTDDA can make the most appropriate decision on the types of business that could be recruited or how existing ones can be repositioned to capture additional market share. Since Highland Station is a compact business district with relatively few commercial buildings, undertaking these activities should be strategic and straightforward. In other words, the Economic Restructuring Committee should be able to work closely with each downtown property and business owner to implement the most appropriate business development strategy that will achieve long-lasting positive economic impact in the downtown.

- **Planning effectively for Highland Station's future.** Preserving Highland Station's unique sense of place and developing an effective plan for its future evolution should be a high priority for the HTDDA and the greater Highland Township community. Creating a master plan for Highland Station will not be an easy task but the rewards of undertaking and effective planning process will have many benefits including the development of design ideals that build upon Highland Station's unique character and breathing life into the community's vision of Highland Station by using tools that sharpen the understanding of what could be possible in the future. To accomplish this, the Highland Township community and the HTDDA will have to think in new ways about what could be possible and develop an effective planning process that engages community stakeholders. It is the development and implementation of this plan that can help Highland Station become the true social, economic and cultural center of the Township.

## ORGANIZATION

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The comprehensive Main Street Four-Point Approach™ has long been proven an effective methodology for revitalizing traditional, pedestrian-oriented commercial districts like downtown Highland Station. With concurrent and ongoing implementation of activities in organization, design, economic restructuring and promotion, in the long-term, a Main Street community can almost certainly experience measurable levels of progress and success in revitalizing the downtown district. However, beyond the mechanics of undertaking Main Street revitalization projects, the Main Street methodology itself is also, more importantly, a process of building consensus and involving the community at large in making the most appropriate decisions for the downtown's future. In essence, the Main Street Four-Point Approach stresses grassroots involvement in the revitalization process where the Highland Township DDA board of directors works with the community beyond just the downtown stakeholders, to develop a compelling vision for downtown Highland Station, and establishes a mechanism, like volunteer committees, to develop and implement strategies to turn the vision into reality. Therefore, an aspect common to all successful Main Street programs is that they are community-supported and volunteer-driven. Indeed, the Highland Township DDA Main Street program will no longer just be a department of the municipality; it will also need to transition itself to a grass-roots Main Street organization that activity engages both the public and private sectors in the work of revitalizing the downtown.

To successfully lead the downtown Highland Station revitalization effort and engage the community in the process, the Highland Township DDA will need to build a strong and efficient organization with an active volunteer corps, an engaged board of directors, and adequate funding to support a comprehensive revitalization agenda as represented in the Main Street Approach. To build that strong organization, the DDA will need to improve and enhance its internal operating structure and assume the additional responsibilities of volunteer recruitment, fundraising, public relations and external communication, as well as budget management, board development and annual work planning. Though the board of directors is primarily responsible for overall management of the DDA, including budgeting, personnel, strategic planning and policy-making, it is the Organization Committee that helps to build the volunteer and financial resources needed to implement the Main Street program. The Committee is also critical to developing partnerships within the community and informing the public on the DDA's revitalization initiatives, both of which should serve to build vision and consensus regarding downtown Highland Station's future. Although every Main Street committee is important, the success of the others relies on the effectiveness of the Organization Committee and the Highland Township DDA board of directors to develop the vision and resources necessary for long-term success.

## OBSERVATIONS

- The current HTDDA/Main Street board of directors consists of twelve members appointed by the Township Supervisor and approved by Township Board of Trustees. The introduction of the Main Street program to Highland Township earlier in 2006 has created a situation wherein the HTDDA board now finds itself in a new and expansive role in implementing a more comprehensive approach to shaping the future of its downtown district. In prior years, the HTDDA board of directors operated essentially in an advisory and advocacy capacity, requiring approximately one to two hours per month of service. Over time, the DDA chairperson has found it necessary to spend and focus more time on DDA and the organization has benefited from this strong and engaged leadership.
- Since its designation as a Main Street community by Oakland County, the HTDDA has made a number of fundamental organizational changes and adjustments. The board of directors have developed a work plan, hired a part-time Executive Director, secured office space, and formed volunteer committees along the Main Street Four-Point Approach. However, in recent months, the board has had a difficult time in securing chairpersons to manage these committees, creating unevenness and inconsistency in the

execution of the work plan. In addition to the work plans, the HTDDA now has newly adopted vision and mission statements, which focuses on economic and quality of life goals through projects as well as intangible goals such as “remaining sensitive to those individuals already living and working in the area” and cultivating “on-going energy and enthusiasm”.

- Since its formation in 1999, the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority (HTDDA) has had a consistent record of accomplishment of utilizing Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds to accomplish important projects within the DDA\TIF boundaries. Like most Michigan DDA’s, Highland Township’s was formed to undertake and plan for various physical improvement projects such as new street lighting fixtures, the Highland Station Park and gateway, sewer installation, and traffic and road improvements. In this role, the HTDDA board acted in its appropriate role as a quasi-governmental commission approving capital projects, which were often executed by paid Highland Township personnel or hired contractors.
- Perhaps, the overarching organizational issue facing the HTDDA in the next eighteen months is to fully transition from operating as a quasi-governmental organization to one that operates as volunteer-driven, mission-driven Main Street organization. Implementing the Main Street Approach will certainly challenge the board of directors on how it perceives its mission, how it operates, the activities in which it involves itself and the level of time and commitment that will be required of both individual board members and the board as a whole to successfully implement the Main Street program. From another perspective, the HTDDA will need to build upon its past project-oriented successes by adopting the comprehensive Main Street Approach and the process needed to engage the community in its efforts. To do this, the entire board, and particularly the Organization Committee must accept the responsibility of being in the business of developing *human capital* with the end result of leveraging that capital to achieve its downtown revitalization and development goals.
- While organizational development was addressed in the annual work plan, development and training of individual board members was not an explicit goal stated within the work plan. The Executive Director, however, has prepared a good “orientation notebook” for each board member including job descriptions. The notebook should allow board members to have a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibility they must take within the Main Street program.
- The Highland Township DDA is fortunate to have a budget sufficient to pay and underwrite most general operating expenses as well as capital projects. Compared to many similar organizations across the country, the DDA’s budget is most likely on the higher end of average. This will allow the DDA to spend more time raising and developing the human capital needed for the program than on typical start-up fundraising activities.
- Upon observation, there appears to be a strong spirit of cooperation between the HTDDA board and Highland Township elected officials and executive staff. This high level of cooperation stems from the willingness of the various stakeholders and Main Street participants to place “achievement” above “who gets credit.” The relationship is fairly informal at this point and it will depend upon continued goodwill and mutual respect for both parties to achieve long-lasting success.
- The Main Street Oakland County designation and the organization activities that have taken place since that time has uncovered and unleashed a long-dormant desire for the community to renew and restore civic pride. The recent report *“A Sense of Place for Highland Station: Defining a Context Sensitive Design Solution for Milford Road”*, as well as comments made throughout the course of the Resource Team visit, indicates that there are a fairly large number of residents who understand that Highland Station, and particularly its downtown area, has special attributes that contribute to a strong “sense of place.” During the Resource Team visit, citizens that were interviewed consistently stated honest and forthright desires to retain Highland Station’s special attributes. It will be incumbent upon the HTDDA to seize this moment and

identify and reach out to more of those who want to see the revitalization and development of its community core. In essence, the HTDDA should become a “keeper of the community’s character.” and actively promote this sense of community and pride in its work.

- The HTDDA is in a prime position to tap into this newly found community spirit and activism by building partnerships and welcoming all community stakeholders to participate in the planning and implementation of various Main Street committee projects. Volunteers are the backbone of success in any Main Street program and while the HTDDA has an adequate budget, it is faced with the challenge of undertaking a comprehensive Main Street effort with a relatively small pool of volunteers. This challenge is compounded by an acknowledged need for even more people within the community to understand and embrace the Main Street program. The HTDDA has astutely recognized the importance of volunteer development in its annual work plan and has devised a simple and straightforward volunteer application form to identify prospective volunteers beyond the board of directors. The HTDDA, through its Promotion Committee has already successfully brought groups together into coalitions not seen before in the community. The Organization Committee can take the lessons of success from the Promotion Committee, especially the partnerships that have been forged, and seek actively to apply them and within the other Main Street committees.
- The Executive Director is very well received by the community and has developed good working relationships with merchants, property owners and other stakeholders in a relatively short time frame. The Director has positioned the organization well in terms of building partnerships with other groups and entities. There is a need to continue to build the visibility and legitimacy of the Main Street program and the Executive Director within the community in order to establish the HTDDA as the “go to” place with regard to any issue relating to downtown Highland Station.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for the HTDDA to implement the Main Street program successfully and carry out its stated mission and goals, a strongly focused emphasis on human capital development will be required on several levels: First, developing the board of directors and committees within the context of their new and expanded Main Street role will be critical. This will include ongoing education and training activities and careful selection and retention of board members. This should be an immediate focus of activity for the Organization Committee. Second, implementing active volunteer recruitment and retention initiatives will be needed to build a strong volunteer corps within the committees. Third, building partnerships and linkages with other direct and indirect stakeholder groups will help to expand the HTDDA’s ability to implement the Main Street Approach. Last, but not least, a durable mechanism should be created to promote the necessary on-going public-private partnership required for any successful Main Street program.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND MAIN STREET COMMITTEES

The following recommendations are made to encourage more effective board member participation within the board of directors and the Main Street program as a whole.

### ***Recommendation #1: Conduct board of director orientation activities.***

The Organization Committee should conduct at least one formal board orientation session each year on an annual basis for newly appointed board members. In addition, a general overview of the Main Street Four-Point Approach and board member roles and responsibilities should also be conducted at the beginning of the annual work planning process. An effective orientation session should include, at a minimum, the following components:

- **Welcome/introductions.** A warm-up or icebreaking activity should be considered that helps new board members feel comfortable within the organization.



- **Overview of Main Street Program.** It is important that each new board member understand the philosophy and principles behind the Main Street Four-Point Approach™, the relationship between the local program to Main Street Oakland County and the National Trust Main Street Center.
- **Brief history of the local organization and its accomplishments.** A description of how the Highland Township DDA was started and its overall mission should be included in the orientation. A discussion on past accomplishments and current projects should also be considered.
- **Long-term vision for downtown Highland Station and work plan goals and objectives.** Time should be devoted during the session to talk about the long-term vision for Highland Station, the organization’s vision statement and the current work plan that is in place to guide the actions of the Main Street committees.
- **Board member and staff responsibilities.** Respective board member and executive staff roles and responsibilities within the Main Street program should be explained in detail. The Main Street committee structure should be explained along with any committee participation requirements.
- **Board meeting mechanics.** A discussion should be included on how regular board meetings are conducted, who does what during the meetings, and the format for how matters are decided.
- **Financial profile.** Each board members should know how the HTDDA budget is developed, current funding sources, and any ongoing fundraising and financial reporting activities.
- **Questions/closing.** At the end of the orientation session, time should be allowed for participants to ask questions regarding board member roles and responsibilities. Closing remarks may remind new board members of the next regular board meeting, committee volunteer opportunities and upcoming Main Street events and activities.

In conducting the orientation session, the Organization Committee should consider the following suggestions:

- Use a “buddy” system, pairing a veteran member with each new member;
- Encourage members to participate fully and frankly;
- Ask for their ideas on improving the operations of the committees;
- Remind new and veteran members of the importance of the job they have agreed to do;
- Have veteran board members make most of the presentations; and
- Make it fun for the participants.

***Recommendation #2: Schedule and conduct an annual board retreat session.***

In the next year, a more in-depth two-day board of directors retreat, with board members, local Highland Township officials, volunteers, and community residents should be organized and scheduled to start the work planning process and craft committee work plans. A trained facilitator should be brought in to guide the session. Since the HTDDA’s vision has advanced into the realm of protecting and conserving the tangible and intangible elements that make Highland Station special, it is recommended that at its next planning retreat, a set of “core values” or “principles” be developed and adopted. Such values or principles will help provide DDA board leaders a guiding philosophy in which to evaluate and assess the appropriateness of new ideas, work plan activities, proposals, or new developments. A statement of core values also tells everyone in the community how the HTDDA will approach downtown issues or concerns so that decisions by the organization are relatively consistent now and into the future. Furthermore, a set of core values goes beyond both the vision and mission statements and committee work plans. Core values state in clear terms “why” the organization is operating in the manner in which it does. These principles should be promoted to the community at large and perhaps printed in the newsletter, included in the website, and displayed in the office

alongside the mission and vision statements.

***Recommendation #3: Conduct Myers-Briggs evaluation and other team-building exercises.***

The board of directors and the Organization Committee should consider integrating a Myers-Briggs personality type or similar self-evaluation and team building exercises as a part of the annual retreat or work planning session. Learning the motivation of fellow board members and volunteers in the Main Street program will make it easier for all participants to understand what should be their respective roles and responsibilities within the Main Street effort. Through this process, board members should be allowed to discover the areas of the Main Street program they would most enjoy working in, not necessarily in regards to their educational background or work experience. For example, a banker may not always wish to serve on the Organization Committee in order to develop the DDA budget. Instead, this person may want to work with Economic Restructuring Committee on making calls on prospective businesses.

***Recommendation #4: Implement an on-going board of directors' recognition program.***

Serving on a board of directors for Main Street organization can be satisfying as well as tedious and trying at times. Whenever possible, ways should be sought by the Organization Committee to recognize and thank board members for the service and contributions to program. On a yearly basis, perhaps during the DDA's annual meeting or volunteer appreciation dinner, current board members should be presented with a plaque or framed certificate signed by both the Town Supervisor and Chairman of Downtown Development Authority. Plaques and certificates help to make service on the board a point of pride as well as remind members of their commitment to the organization and its goals. In addition to plaques, the Organization Committee should create an introductory welcome letter to new board members signed by the Town Supervisor and HDDA Chairman. Nameplate badges could also be issued to new board members, indicating that they are members of Main Street organization. These can be worn at social and business functions and special events to promote further the HTDDA's presence and visibility in the community. New board members and officers could also have their pictures taken and submitted to the local newspaper. When any board member rotates off the board of directors, at minimum, a letter of thanks by the Chairman and Township Supervisor should be sent as an acknowledgement and thank you for their service.

## **VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIP BUILDING**

The following recommendations are suggested to build the volunteer corps and develop effective partnerships throughout the community to leverage its ability to implement the Main Street Four-Point Approach.

***Recommendation #5: Develop detailed work plans or volunteer action plans.***

In addition to the volunteer solicitation form that has already been developed, the HTDDA or the Organization Committee should devise a new form or work plan sheet specifically for special projects or promotion activities. These new forms should break down tasks into smaller steps to allow for a better understanding of volunteer needs to carry out the project and to encourage greater participation from the community at large. One benefit of such a form is that it should help facilitate the planning and execution of an event or project since it forces the relevant Main Street committee to think through the components and steps necessary to complete the activity. It will also help to foster more effective implementation of these activities and events in the future by new volunteers.

***Recommendation #6: Evaluate activities to ensure increased future volunteer involvement.***

After each special event or work plan activity, the appropriate Main Street committee should perform a post evaluation in order to continue breaking down the activity into additional individual tasks, which can then be promoted as specific volunteer opportunities to the community. In today's world, a Main Street program may get a greater response if a prospective volunteer can commit to perform a discrete and distinct project task, rather than undertake an entire project.

***Recommendation #7: Form a Highland Station Main Street Youth Council***

To help cultivate new volunteers and build a sense of civic pride in Highland Station among the young citizens in the community, the Organization Committee should consider establishing a Main Street Youth Council. Several Main Street communities in other parts of the country have had good success in setting up such councils that provide additional support and assistance for a variety of Main Street committee activities including special projects and events. For example, the Youth Council in Newkirk, Oklahoma created a coloring book of local landmarks that served to promote the awareness of downtown's historic resources. The Organization Committee and DDA Executive Director should research similar youth councils that may be operating in other Main Street communities.

In forming the council, the local school district and their public relations officer should be contacted to help in the solicitation and selection of students to participate. A teacher or advisor, along with the DDA Executive Director, should be asked to serve on the council to help identify or develop specific projects. Possible projects may include collaborating with the high school broadcasting or media class to produce a series of programs on the HTDDA\Main Street program to be aired on the local cable access station. In addition to the Youth Council, school clubs such as Interact and the National Honor Society can be tapped for volunteer assistance and project support. Internships from nearby colleges should also be seriously investigated as a source of assistance.

***Recommendation #8: Consider forming a Main Street Senior Citizens Council.***

As with the local youth, the HTDDA should explore the opportunities with the Senior Center to start a Main Street Senior Citizen Council that could be used for in supporting various committee projects and providing office assistance for the Executive Director.

***Recommendation #9: Undertake "Make a Difference Day" activities.***

Utilize "Make a Difference Day" to rally the community around some downtown project each year. Flowers and bulb planting were suggested as one project that can be used to help build local community spirit and participation in the community.

***Recommendation #10: Conduct idea exchanges or advisory roundtables.***

The Organization Committee should conduct periodic "downtown idea exchanges" or "advisory roundtables" that meet several times a year for the sole purpose of allowing the community to discuss directly with the HTDDA areas of mutual concern and ideas and potential initiatives. Stakeholders that could be invited to such forums might include churches, civic clubs, schools, the local Cooperative Extension Service, nearby universities, the Highland Township Historical Society, the garden club, Oakland County Road Commission, Township trustees and other executive staff, and local industry heads. A typical meeting or exchange might include a luncheon and a brief update on HTDDA\Main Street activities including upcoming events. Minutes of these exchanges should be taken to capture good ideas and to record any organization or individual who might be interested in undertaking a specific Main Street committee project or task. At the conclusion of each meeting, the Organization Committee might distribute special "goody bags" or tee shirts to those that attended as an expression of appreciation for their participation. Additionally, after the exchange, follow-up thank you letters from board members might also be sent to attendees as well as special editions of the corporate newsletter and invitations to future HTDDA events. The "Young Life" chapter in Cleveland County, North Carolina began a similar program of exchanges and roundtables several years ago and has received tremendous feedback from the community resulting in a higher percentage of sustained giving than had been seen prior to conducting such forums.

***Recommendation #11: Involve local religious institutions in HTDDA activities.***

The HTDDA board and Main Street committees should strive to involve local churches and other religious institutions in it activities and projects whenever needed and appropriate. For example, the Organization Committee should add local churches and religious organizations to the newsletter list so that they can receive the latest news on HTDDA activities and become more familiar with the Main Street program. Sunday

school classes and church youth and mission groups can be potential sources of volunteers for Main Street projects; therefore, they should be contacted and kept informed about upcoming volunteer opportunities.

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

### ***Recommendation #12: Schedule regular walk-throughs of the downtown district.***

Another effective strategy to build cooperation is to schedule regular “walk-throughs” for the Executive Director and any available HTDDA board members and Highland Township officials. The purpose of these walk-throughs is to maintain visibility and close contact with the DDA district stakeholders and merchants and to determine and resolve any specific issues they might be experiencing. Several communities use walk-throughs as opportunities to look for public infrastructure problems such as parking, missing street signs and broken streetlights. In addition to the walk-throughs, whenever a new business, resident or property owner moves into the HTDDA district, a letter from the Board Chairman and Executive Director should be sent along with information about Downtown development Authority and the Main Street program. This should not take the place of the walk-throughs, which should be done on a regular basis by the Executive Director and perhaps a board member or two.

### ***Recommendation #13: Develop a HTDDA information brochure.***

The current HTDDA marketing brochure provides good information but it should be revised by the Organization Committee to explain the Main Street Four-Point Approach, its downtown vision and corporate mission statements, core principles, and how to volunteer and donate to the organization. In addition, if a new corporate logo is developed, it should also be incorporated into the brochure. The brochure should be distributed in a variety of ways perhaps as an insert to the newsletter, or hand-delivered to all HTDDA residents and property owners.

### ***Recommendation #14: Develop special portable displays and marketing materials.***

In addition to the corporate brochure, the Organization Committee should invest in and develop a high-quality and portable display board for use in exhibits, special events and local conferences and business fairs. The display boards can include a variety of information including building improvement initiatives, new development activity, special events and promotions, ongoing committee projects, and volunteer opportunities across the Main Street activities.

### ***Recommendation #15: Place news information and updates in other organization newsletters.***

The Organization Committee should seek ways in which to place its articles or announcements in the newsletters of other organizations, institutions and agencies. For instance, local churches may be willing to promote DDA activities and events within their weekly or bi-weekly bulletins. Likewise, the Cooperative Extension Service may be able to undertake the same service within their newsletters or bulletins. In some cases, even local industries may place announcements in their employee newsletters.

## **STAFF AND OFFICE OPERATIONS.**

### ***Recommendation #16: Plan for adding DDA executive staff.***

The HTDDA will soon reach a stage in its organization development where part or full-time clerical and administrative assistance will be necessary to support the Executive Director and overall program operations. It is recommended that HTDDA board of directors begin to plan its budget for this eventuality. It is possible that with the right person and a well-written and balanced job description, that this position can also assist with the organization and production of the DDA’s current and future promotion events and activities.

### ***Recommendation #17: Encourage the Executive Director to attend the Certification in Professional Main Street™ Management Institute***

In the next couple of years, the HTDDA board of directors should support and underwrite the Executive Director’s attendance and participation in the Certification Institute in Professional Main Street Management.

Operated by the National Trust Main Street Center, the Certification Institute is a two-year advanced training course in the Main Street Approach to commercial district revitalization. Those that attend the course and pass the associated exams become certified Main Street managers/executive directors. Attendance at the Institute helps to build the professional skills needed to manage a commercial district revitalization program and to resolve complex problems and allows practicing Main Street professionals to explore current revitalization issues presented by industry experts. The HTDDA board should plan for the Executive Director's attendance within upcoming budgets.

***Recommendation #18: Relocate HTDDA/Main Street office.***

Upon observation, the current shared office arrangement within the same building as the Huron Valley Council for the Arts and Senior Center seems to be working well. For the time being, it affords opportunities for connections and networking with these and other groups and organizations. In time, it will probably be to the benefit of HTDDA to relocate to a facility with larger offices and more space dedicated for committee meetings, volunteer work areas, and storage. This need for more space will be particularly true should clerical or other paid staff are added to the organization in time.

**OTHER ORGANIZATION ISSUES**

***Recommendation #19: Define the roles and operating relationships between HTDDA and the Highland Charter Township through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)***

Currently, there is an informal working arrangement between the Highland Township DDA and Highland Charter Township, especially in regards to proposed development projects and zoning issues. For example, when it comes to new development projects, the HTDDA conducts a review before final action is taken by either the Planning Commission or the Township Board of Trustees. During the Resource Team visit, it was determined that HTDDA's input in such matters is heavily valued, which is precisely the type of cooperation required for a true public-private partnership to work effectively. It is also a tribute to the local government's commitment to the revitalization of its downtown district that it willingly desires and accepts such input from its downtown development authority. However, a more formalized written "Memorandum of Agreement" (MOA) should be drafted to prevent any future misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities of each entity when it comes to possible changes in respective personnel and the political climate change, which in every community happens as a matter of fact. An MOA should outline the duties expected of the HTDDA in fulfilling Main Street program goals and objectives and the process by which the Township and the DDA interact on certain issues. Several other Main Street Oakland County communities have similar documents and these, and others, should be examined when developing one for Highland Township. Items specific to Highland Township that should be addressed within the MOA could include the following:

- **Day-to-day administration, finances, bookkeeping and DDA budget.** The current financial accounting arrangement between the HTDDA and Highland Township seems to be working well. In time, it may be beneficial to contract for these services. There is merit in having the HTDDA keep its own books and financial records as well as write its own checks yet still remain accountable through Highland Township's normal auditing and budget approval process. This is an option many DDA's are exploring as allowed by state enabling law (State of Michigan Public Act 197, 1975, as amended).
- **Review by HTDDA of development plans, zoning and ordinance changes and related capital improvement proposals within the HTDDA boundaries.** The Township, by making such reviews an automatic step, can use HTDDA to screen or "vet" proposals, determining in advance if they are in step with the mission, vision and core principals of HTDDA and its downtown constituency. First, Highland Township would require projects to seek advice and recommendations from the DDA, which should serve to help developers navigate the governmental process and provide an opportunity for HTDDA to examine and investigate the project for the Township in advance of its review processes. In turn, the HTDDA and its Design Committee would make formal recommendations on any specific proposal to the appropriate governmental body. . Such an MOA will also help to determine whether the

development has garnered a level of community consensus and acceptance early on in the approval process. A time limit and deadline for any review period should be included in the memorandum.

- **Board member selection and nomination process.** It is recommended that the MOA describe a formal HTDDA board member nomination process. Ideally, nominations to the board should emanate primarily from the HTDDA board but be approved ultimately by the Township. Nominees should be made and selected based on the particular needs of the HTDDA and how these individuals can make significant contributions to achieving the organization's long-term vision and plan of work. An application and accompanying job description, along with information about HTDDA itself, should be given to each potential board member. Doing so will ensure that incoming board members are aware of their responsibilities and the level of commitment required to participate. It would be the Organization Committee's on-going responsibility to collect names and profiles for prospective board members for review when appointments need to be made. Solicitation for the board membership should be sought actively through announcements on the local access cable station, in the Township's and HTDDA's respective newsletters and web pages, through email updates, and announcements at Township and DDA board meetings and other venues. If additional ex-officio members to the board are sought, the distinction between the roles of an ex-officio and a full voting board member should be outlined in the memorandum of agreement. One or two board member positions might be reserved for direct appointment by Highland Township.
- The MOA should outline the Township's expectations for ongoing communication between the Main Street program and the Townships elected and appointed positions. These may include regular written or verbal presentations to the Township Board of Trustees by HTDDA on a regular basis or it may require the production and distribution of a HTDDA annual report. The MOA may also require that annual work plans, Executive Director reports, or other additional reports should be presented or submitted to the Township on specified deadline dates.

***Recommendation #20: Encourage interaction and communication between HTDDA and Highland Township leadership.***

There is value in more intentional but informal and regular interaction between the HTDDA and Highland Township leadership. For example, bi-weekly or monthly breakfast or lunch meetings that include the DDA Board Chairman and Executive Director, and the Township Supervisor and other staff should be encouraged. Over time, the need for such meetings may be reduced to monthly, but it is anticipated that during the early years, frequent meetings can be used to advance projects or discuss urgent or pressing issues. Weekly meetings may be especially important when large public improvement initiatives such as the sanitary sewer installation project are underway. Of course, other stakeholders can be invited to these meetings on an as-needed basis.

***Recommendation #21: Investigate and apply for affiliation status with the Keep America Beautiful Program.***

It is recommended that Highland Township and the DDA should investigate and apply for affiliation with the Keep America Beautiful Program ([www.kab.org](http://www.kab.org)). Keep America Beautiful is a national non-profit public education organization, which is dedicated to engaging individuals and communities to take greater responsibility for improving local community environments and their appearance. The program's national affiliate network involves more than 565 towns, city, and county affiliates and 22 statewide programs, and there are many things that affiliates learn from each other in terms of beautification strategies.

***Recommendation #22: Form a master planning task force for Highland Station.***

Utilize the upcoming master planning process to interview as many stakeholders and potential allies, partners, and volunteers as possible. This interview process must be included as part of the written RFP requirements. During the process, a comprehensive list of "movers and shakers" and other potential partners and stakeholders should be devised and each stakeholder should be personally interviewed for their input. These

interviews will provide valuable information, guidance and a measurement of the public's interest in downtown Highland Station. They will also serve to identify additional volunteers, linkages, partners, sources of sponsorships and sources of funding for the organization. Part of the consultant's planning process should be to "take good notes" with each interviewee while maintaining confidentiality of the specific comments made by individuals. A volunteer application form, as well as information about the HTDDA\Main Street program should be left with each interviewee at the conclusion of the interview. As a word of caution, a disclaimer must be made by the consultants that the master plan is a *component* of the Main Street revitalization efforts but *not the Main Street program itself*.

## PROMOTION

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The early efforts of the Highland Township DDA\Main Street Promotion Committee are serving to draw attention to the Highland Station downtown area and possibilities for its future. Promotion Committee strategies, projects and events are likely to evolve in much the same way that the downtown area is envisioned to evolve to feature a larger concentration of development, activities and uses.

Prospects for the downtown area's development, while exciting to many, will be feared by others that want desperately to maintain the downtown area's small town "hamlet" environment and hometown, character-defining features that make Highland Township a great place to live, work and raise a family. Highland Township DDA marketing and promotion strategies, projects and events can effectively serve to promote development, progress and a strong sense of community ownership in the community's downtown development initiatives by:

- Highlighting and capitalizing upon character-defining features, historic resources and community assets that help to identify Highland Station as a special place;
- Engaging area residents of all ages in events and activities that celebrate the community's culture and heritage;
- Communicating positive messages about the downtown area's future and framing progress and successes as "glimpses" of the community's vision unfolding in Highland Station

For the short term, Highland Township DDA marketing, promotion and image enhancement efforts should continue to emphasize and nurture a strong sense of the Highland Station downtown area as a center for community activity, culture, entertainment and commerce.

As development occurs in the district, long-term marketing and promotion efforts should incorporate a stronger retail promotion component to support and capitalize upon existing and evolving clusters of retail and service businesses. A long-term, comprehensive marketing and promotion program then would include a mix of the following:

- **Special Events.** Efforts to develop an identity for the Highland Station downtown area as a "hometown stage" for community festivals and events – and a center for culture and entertainment – will be critical to long-term development strategies and gaining the community's "buy-in." Annual festivals and events, like the Summer Concert Series and the Street Square Dance held in conjunction with the "Horsin' Around in Highland" campaign, help to generate activity in the downtown area and to reinforce a strong sense of Highland Station as a special place that embraces and celebrates community values, heritage and culture.
- **Retail Events.** Retail promotion opportunities for Highland Station, in the short term, will predictably be limited by the existing lack of a critical mass or concentrated core of retail-oriented businesses within the downtown area. The most effective retail-oriented promotional activities might be introduced as smaller, complementary components of special events and through ongoing retail-oriented marketing efforts and materials. For example, "feed bags" containing information, coupons or novelty items from downtown merchants might be distributed at various "Horsin' Around in Highland" campaign events. Retail events and activities should be designed to increase awareness as to the breadth and depth of retail products and services found within the downtown area, particularly as development occurs and new businesses are added to the downtown mix.



- **Image Enhancement Activities and Events.** Image enhancement efforts are intended to create and reinforce a positive image of Highland Station in the minds of residents, visitors and investors. Festivals and special events staged in the Highland Station area will be important components of image enhancement efforts. Examples of marketing materials, public relations and special features that can work effectively to enhance the image of a downtown district include:
  - Marketing materials that emphasize unique features and experiences, such as historic walking tour brochures or a commemorative poster series;
  - Public relations materials and activities that highlight progress and special features, such as ribbon-cutting ceremonies staged at new businesses or a news series highlighting multi-generation owned local businesses in the downtown area;
  - Community goodwill activities staged in the downtown area, such as a food collection drive to support a local shelter or a tree-planting ceremony staged at a downtown park to commemorate Arbor Day and show support for community environmental concerns;
  - Special features incorporated as part of the district’s built environment such as interpretive plaques posted at historic sites and structures and special décor to celebrate the holidays or significant community events and initiatives (i.e., high school state championship, yellow-ribbon awareness campaign, etc.).

A well-planned and executed marketing and promotion program that incorporates a balanced mix of special events, retail events, and image enhancement activities can, in fact, help to promote and catalyze development, investment and entrepreneurial opportunities that are consistent with the community’s vision for Highland Station by:

- Generating traffic and increasing the level of activity in the downtown area necessary to support development and business opportunities;
- Supporting existing downtown businesses and possibilities for their expansion;
- Promoting consumer awareness as to the range of goods, services and experiences in the downtown area;
- Enhancing confidence among prospective investors and entrepreneurs.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

- The Promotion Committee is in need of a committee chairperson due to the recent resignation of the past chairperson; committee and work plan options and alternatives that would alleviate the scope of chairperson’s responsibilities and help to facilitate a task-driven volunteer enlistment strategy should be considered.
- The Promotion Committee is working effectively with other community organizations and groups to produce larger-scale events and campaigns than what could otherwise be produced by the Main Street Promotion Committee acting alone.
- The 2006 Summer Concert Series and Street Square Dance events, by most all accounts, were considered highly successful and effective as first-year events that are beginning to promote a sense of the Highland Station downtown area as a family-oriented center for community arts, entertainment and commerce.
- The Promotion Committee has demonstrated a professional approach to planning, staging and evaluating events and using “lessons learned” to enhance and expand upon activities in the future.

- The Promotion Committee is taking a professional approach to attracting sponsors to support Main Street events, as evidenced by the recent publishing of the “2007 Highland Station Events Sponsorship Package” publication.
- The Promotion Committee 2007 Work Plan is generally well detailed and thought-out; simple modifications to the structure could be helpful for organizing efforts and assigning responsibilities.
- Highland Township DDA and the Main Street Promotion Committee are using and experimenting with a variety of media and communications tools to publicize and advertise events, including newsletters, postcards, newspaper and the Internet.
- The location of the Huron Valley Council for the Arts (HVCA) offices and gallery in the downtown area and the associated activities and events staged in the downtown area by HVCA and other community organizations provide a basis for promoting and pursuing an identity for the downtown as a center for community arts and culture.
- The downtown business mix, though somewhat limited in terms of numbers and density, is evolving as a specialty retail and personal services district with possible opportunities for the expansion of a personal services cluster and an “outdoors/wilderness” retail cluster that capitalizes on the area’s demographic/lifestyle profile and surrounding features.
- Several persons interviewed indicated that Milford’s downtown is generally identified as Highland’s downtown, and some suggested that Highland Township residents are skeptical as to the possibilities for “creating” a Highland Station downtown area. Of course, Highland Station is much smaller in scale and its size and density will purposely remain as such.
- Cooperative advertising opportunities, listed among projects in the committee’s 2007 work plan, have, to date, generally been limited to cooperative publicity and advertising efforts involving Highland Township DDA/Main Street and other area organizations and civic groups.
- Further definition of the Promotion Committee’s role and responsibilities may be necessary, particularly as it applies to the roles of the Promotion Committee and the Organization Committee. For example, projects currently included in the 2007 Promotion Committee Work Plan to “Create a new logo for Highland Township DDA” and to “Update HTDDA brochure” are examples of corporate image building and public relations activities that are performed, more typically and appropriately by a Main Street Organization Committee.
- The 5,900-acre Highland Recreation Area state park neighboring the Highland Station downtown area, by local accounts, attracts an estimated 195,000 visitors annually. Long-term Highland Township DDA/Main Street Promotion Committee strategies should consider possible possibilities for recreational, cultural and heritage tourism opportunities that could capitalize on the park and its visitor traffic.
- The Highland Township DDA internet website ([highlanddda.com](http://highlanddda.com)) features a relatively simple to navigate layout, fresh and up-to-date content, and links to other community organizations and features.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Recommendation #1: Appoint a Promotion Committee chairperson.***

The Promotion Committee is in need of a committee chairperson due to the recent resignation of the past chairperson. The committee chairperson plays a critical role in providing leadership for the committee, oversight for committee Work Plan projects and activities, monitoring of committee and project budgets,

facilitation of committee meetings, delegation of volunteer assignments, and communications between the committee, staff, and the Highland Township DDA board of directors.

*Actions:*

- The Promotion Committee, in consultation with the Highland Township DDA board of directors, as may be required or appropriate, should act swiftly to elect and/or appoint a chairperson for the committee. The committee chairperson's role ("job") should be well-defined and, preferably, an existing committee member or experienced Main Street volunteer who understands the role and responsibilities of the position and the Promotion Committee within the DDA\Main Street organization would be identified and recruited to serve a defined term (i.e., one year) in the position. The consideration of candidates for the position might also include consideration of relatively simple modifications to the committee's operating structure and work plan that could help to alleviate the level of responsibility and commitment of time required of an individual serving as Promotion Committee chairperson (*see Recommendation # 2*).

***Recommendation #2: Consider modifications to the Promotion Committee operating structure.***

The 2007 Promotion Committee Work Plan is generally well planned and detailed, but simple modifications to the committee's operating structure and Work Plan format might help to distribute responsibilities, engage new volunteers, and measure results. While the success of Promotion Committee projects suggests that such changes need not be considered necessary or required, the timing for considering such changes could be opportune given the current vacancy in the chairperson's position and the committee's desires to recruit and involve more volunteers.

*Actions:*

- Consider assigning a "Project Team Leader" for each Promotion Committee Work Plan project. The project team leader would assume responsibility for organizing volunteer team members and monitoring their performance toward the completion of the respective project. Such a modification, in essence, could resemble a transition to a committee/subcommittee structure and serve to alleviate the promotion committee chairperson's overall level of responsibility and commitment of time. The Promotion Committee, then, would serve as a steering committee of sorts with Promotion Committee members (consisting of the chairperson, project team leaders and others willing to serve in that capacity) monitoring and providing any necessary direction, guidance, assistance and resources to the project teams. Project Team Leaders would be responsible for delegating tasks detailed in the work plan to project team members that could include volunteers not otherwise involved with the Promotion Committee or in any other area of the DDA\Main Street organization. This provides opportunities to recruit and enlist the services of individuals to volunteer on a project-specific or even task-specific basis and, ultimately, will help to grow the ranks of Promotion Committee and DDA\Main Street volunteers.
- Consider adding an "Expected Outcome" or "Measure of Success" entry to each Work Plan worksheet. Including this entry on the worksheet serves to remind the project team of the project's purpose, provides guidance for planning each project, and provides a way for the committee and DDA\Main Street to measure and evaluate results. For example, the Summer Concert Series worksheet might include an entry stating a "Measure of Success" as being, "Attract an average crowd of 50 persons for each concert" while a project to develop a downtown logo might include an entry stating, "Finalize logo and incorporate on website by July 1, 2007."
- See the worksheet example incorporating the modifications described above, included as Appendix I to this report.

***Recommendation #3: Determine the nature and intent of the project to create a new logo and act accordingly (re: Promotion Committee 2007 Work Plan Project No. 1).***

The 2007 Promotion Committee Work Plan identifies and details Project No. 1 as, “Create a new logo for the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority.” As a first step and before work commences, clarification is needed to determine whether the proposed logo is for the purposes of identifying and promoting the Highland Township DDA\Main Street organization (corporate identity) or the Highland Station downtown district (downtown image/identity). Additional consideration should be afforded the process proposed for the logo’s development.

*Actions:*

- Determine whether the logo to be created is for the Highland Township DDA\Main Street organization or for the Highland Station downtown district. If for the DDA\Main Street Organization, consideration should be given to re-assigning the project, along with Promotion Committee 2007 Work Plan Project No. 4, “Update HTDDA brochure” to the Organization Committee – the committee responsible for promoting the Highland Township DDA/Main Street organization. Consideration might include proposals to create two distinct logos – one for the DDA organization and one for the downtown district – or for creating a design that can be adapted in at least two images/logos to represent the two distinct entities.
- The process detailed in the work plan proposes a contest, purportedly inviting local elementary and high school students to submit entries. While the intent may be good, the creation and design of the logo – whether it is for the organization or for the Highland Station downtown district – is deserving of an investment in a graphic artist or marketing professional. As an alternative, consideration might be given to organizing a “competition” among college or university students in respective areas of study, provided the competition clearly specifies that Highland Township DDA is under no obligation to accept any of the entries submitted.
- Follow-through on steps detailed in work plan to incorporate logo(s) in print materials, website, advertising, etcetera.

***Recommendation #4: Follow-through on plans to stage the 2007 Summer Concert Series and Street Square Dance projects detailed in the 2007 Work Plan, and continue to work to expand and enhance those events as the committee’s capacity allows, and where appropriate.***

The 2006 debut of the Summer Concert Series and the Street Square Dance were, by most all accounts, a huge success. With the successful staging of each event and activity, the Promotion Committee may feel increasing pressure to simply “do more” and may be approached with proposals to introduce still more new activities and events. Particularly during its initial years of operation, the Promotion Committee should resist the pressure and temptation to simply “do more.” Rather, the first priority should be focused on efforts to enhance and continue the Summer Concert Series and Street Square Dance projects, introducing new or improved components to these events where appropriate and as the capacity of the committee allows.

*Actions:*

- Follow-through on tasks detailed in the 2007 Work Plan for the Summer Concert Series and Street Square Dance. The “evaluation” of 2006 events, included as the first task for each project, should be compiled in writing so that it can be referenced in the course of planning for future events. As an added tool for planning events, see the “Event Planning Checklist” included as *Appendix D*, page 51 to this report.

- Continue to work in partnership with other organizations producing events in the Highland Station downtown area and/or as part of community-wide events that feature downtown activities (i.e., Horsin' Around in Highland).
- Over time and as the capacity of the Promotion Committee continues to expand, introduce new events to fill gaps in the Highland Station events calendar, or add new components to expand existing festivals and events. Examples of “new components” that could serve to expand existing events include:
  - Introducing a “Summer Film Series” to complement the Summer Concert Series and, essentially, create a “Summer Entertainment Series.”
  - Introducing a “Celebrity Horses” component (i.e., horses decorated/dressed like the “cows” in Chicago, horses dressed to resemble celebrities, famous horses film series at the HVCA building, etc.) to the downtown Street Square Dance activities that are part of the larger “Horsin’ Around in Highland” campaign.
  - The seven-page “2007 Highland Station Events Sponsorship Package” publication is well done and demonstrates a professional approach being taken to develop the financial resources necessary to continue, enhance and expand Main Street-produced events. These efforts should be continued. Additionally, consideration should be given to producing a one-page flyer for high volume distribution and posting on the Highland Township DDA internet website (See “*Annual Sponsor Flyer Example*” included as *Appendix E, page 52* to this report).
- Explore and pursue opportunities to use and experiment with other media to promote Highland Station downtown events. Examples include:
  - Public Service Announcements (PSA’s) on area radio stations;
  - Postings and features produced for airing on local Cable Access television stations;
  - Postings and links on michigan.org and other regional tourism and event-related websites;
  - Cooperative advertising-supported features and publications (See recommendation No. 5)

**Recommendation #5: Continue cooperative advertising efforts and work to identify, encourage and facilitate new cooperative advertising opportunities (re: Promotion Committee 2007 Work Plan Project No. 5)**

The Highland Township DDA\Main Street Promotion Committee has worked with other community organizations to produce cooperative advertising promoting community-wide and downtown-centered events. For example, the “Horsin’ Around in Highland” website features events and activities produced by various organizations and stage in locations throughout the community, and a number of organizations cooperate with reciprocating website links and newsletter listings of events produced by other organizations. These efforts should be continued, and opportunities to involve businesses and to experiment with new media sources should also be considered and pursued where appropriate.

*Actions:*

- Continue to work in cooperation and in reciprocating fashion with other organizations to promote events staged in the Highland Station downtown area.

- Consider opportunities for creating a single “community events calendar” compiling listings of all events held in the downtown and throughout the community, made available at a single source (i.e., Highland Events Internet website)
- Work to involve downtown businesses in cooperative advertising-supported features and materials to promote Highland Station events and commerce. For example, a newspaper tabloid or an event brochure with editorial content provided by Highland Township DDA\Main Street and advertisements from event sponsors and downtown businesses might be produced and distributed in advance of the Summer Concert Series.

***Recommendation #6: Capitalize on opportunities to introduce new events and promotional activities as the capacity and resources of the Highland Township DDA/Main Street Promotion Committee expand and/or as new partnerships are created.***

While the efforts of the Highland Township DDA\Main Street Promotion Committee should remain focused enhancing and maintaining events included in the committee’s 2007 Work Plan, opportunities in the short- and long-term to introduce new events and activities should not be overlooked, particularly as the capacity and resources of the committee expand and new partnerships are forged.

*Actions:*

- Continue to compile ideas and suggestions for events and activities that might be introduced in the future, and pursue their implementation as opportunities allow. Examples of ideas and suggestions that could be considered for implementation in the future include:
  - Creation and promotion of a self-guided “Fall Colors Tour” capitalizing on the Highland Recreation Area state park and incorporating activities, events or features in the downtown as part of the tour.
  - Opportunities to capitalize upon the location of the Huron Valley Council for the Arts (HVCA) location as could include production of a wintertime “Wine, Cheese & Jazz” or “Arts & Entertainment” benefit event featuring visual and performing arts entertainment.
  - Expansion of the annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony produced by the Highland Business Association to include activities that extend throughout the downtown district, such as a luminaries stroll, entertainment at the HVCA building, and “Open House” specials and entertainment at downtown business locations.

## ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

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The Highland Township Downtown Development Authority and its Main Street program has made some important strides in the past year in not only establishing itself within the local community but also in determining the long vision for its compact and hamlet-like downtown district. It has organized the Main Street committees with volunteers from the community, it has hired staff to manage program operations and it has already become active with initiatives to plan for future Milford Road improvements. It has also received significant training and technical expertise from Main Street Oakland County. Combined, these elements bode well for Highland Station's future.

Highland Station's most important short-term economic restructuring challenge is to understand how to best implement business and real estate development activities that encourage the reuse of existing historic commercial buildings, improve the performance of existing downtown businesses, and promote the attraction of new business enterprises that meet local and regional consumer needs. Since Highland Station is a compact business district with relatively few commercial buildings, undertaking these activities can be fairly straightforward and, if implemented in an effective manner, can have high impact and change the downtown economy substantially. It will be incumbent on part of the Economic Restructuring Committee to have enough volunteers to undertake a work plan of activities and be energetic in its execution if it wants to achieve long-lasting economic change in its downtown.

In the long-term, the Highland Township DDA's most critical challenge is to balance downtown economic growth while maintaining its distinctive physical setting. In some ways, the DDA has taken on this challenge by developing a vision statement, which should serve as a starting point for making decisions on the kinds of physical and economic development the community would like to see happen in the future. This is an excellent first step but the community will need to develop a more comprehensive plan for the downtown that will explore in more detail how future physical improvements and new development could be accommodated in the hamlet-like environment that is Highland Station. Undertaking an effective and successful planning process will take commitment on part of all stakeholders, and while it may appear daunting, tremendous opportunities for creativity and for local leadership development. Most importantly, along with the plan, the consistent application of the Main Street methodology can ensure consistent and incremental economic progress in the revitalization and development of downtown Highland Station.

## OBSERVATIONS

- Highland Station is unlike most traditional downtown districts. Its physical setting, with only a few commercial buildings in between residential buildings, resembles more of rural hamlet than a suburban downtown district found in most other Oakland County communities. Most if not all of the existing commercial buildings within downtown Highland Station are occupied with successful business enterprises and, it appears that all of the residential structures, with the exception of one or two building, remain in residential use. It is this unique hamlet setting that the greater Highland Township community is trying to maintain yet grow in a manner that is appropriate to the scale and character of the existing district.
- Though there is a small number of retail and commercial businesses in Highland Station, several appear to be quite successful and are able to serve customer retail and service needs especially in regards to the local equestrian community. Other businesses offer automotive repair and farm and feed services. Office and institutional uses exist in downtown Highland Station as well and are located in converted residential and religious buildings such as the Highland Station House, which at one time was the Highland United Methodist Church. The main administrative building for Highland Township is located in Highland Station, though a new civic center campus has been planned and built across State Route 59 (Highland Road).

- At the time of the Resource Team visit, new construction was underway for new office condominiums, the first new construction project in Highland Station in some years. The project is not only designed appropriately for Highland Station’s setting, it will also prove to outside investors that new infill development can take place in a place where scale and design have to be considered. The larger questions of how much new development, what it will look like and where it should go in Highland Station have yet to be answered, in fundamental terms, by the community even though some planning and visioning activity has taken place. There is a strong need to conduct additional planning and vision-building exercises to determine these answers.
- Downtown Highland Station is located adjacent to the Highland State Recreation Area and other facilities, which provides it a unique strategic advantage. Most Highland Station stakeholders recognize that the downtown district could be positioned to capitalize on its location by recruiting businesses that could serve outdoor enthusiasts, equestrians and nature lovers. For instance, the new bicycle store, along with the existing equestrian and feed stores, could be the beginning of a cluster of such businesses. Highland Station demographics also demonstrate that local income and purchasing patterns of local demographic groups can possibly support such activities along with restaurants and other retail needs.
- A majority of the historic downtown Highland Station buildings have been had their front facades and building exteriors modified, and in some situations, the modifications have not made them desirable spaces for retail businesses. Clearly, a priority for both the Design and Economic Restructuring committees is to encourage appropriate exterior building improvements, according to commonly accepted historic preservation standards and, to facilitate, perhaps, various enhancements to interior spaces to make them more suitable for new retail and other commercial uses. It is common for many Main Street communities to establish financial incentives to promote building improvements; at the time of the Resource Team visit, the HTDDA had not developed a financial incentive program.
- The Economic Restructuring Committee has been formed and its members are quite energetic and anxious to undertake initiatives and achieve results. The Committee will need a few more volunteers to take on an annual work plan that includes activities in business and real estate development, the establishment of incentives and downtown master planning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The economic restructuring effort led by the Highland Township Main Street program and its volunteers is a critical component to the overall revitalization and development of Highland Station. Within the Main Street program, the Economic Restructuring Committee has the following responsibilities:

- Learning about the downtown district’s current economic condition and identifying market opportunities;
- Strengthening existing businesses and recruiting new ones;
- Finding new and economically viable uses for traditional downtown buildings;
- Developing appropriate financial incentives for building rehabilitations and new business growth;
- Monitoring the district’s economic condition over time.

Fundamentally, economic restructuring work is about responding to downtown market opportunities in the broadest sense. The HTDDA Economic restructuring Committee should begin its work by understanding what market opportunities there are and then implementing business and real estate development activities that capitalize on those opportunities.

### ***Recommendation #1: Recruit additional volunteers to the Economic Restructuring Committee.***

While existing committee membership is active and enthusiastic about undertaking its work, the Economic Restructuring Committee will need to recruit a few additional volunteers to complete its work plan. To



recruit additional volunteers, the Committee should look towards its work plan to determine where project tasks occur and who can be asked to take on those tasks.

***Recommendation #2: Develop and follow an annual work plan of activities.***

The current committee work plan is well done and it includes a realistic number of activities that could be accomplished within the year ahead. Ensure in the year ahead that the Economic Restructuring Committee develops the work plan itself and includes new volunteer names within the task assignment column, rather than just the DDA Executive Director/Main Street manager.

***Recommendation #3: Complete building and business inventory.***

A building inventory is currently being completed but the Economic Restructuring Committee should ensure that the inventory collects as much information as possible from each of the properties located in the Highland Station District. This would include information on the exterior condition of the building as well as the interior spaces, including the number of vacancies, rental and leasing rates, and an assessment of the appropriateness of the space for conversion to retail if necessary. A draft historical survey has been recently completed by a DDA volunteer, which is well done, but the survey is missing information on whether any buildings in the downtown are eligible for the National Register for Historic Places. For consideration, the Economic Restructuring Committee should look towards developing a database that combines both the building inventory and the historical survey.

***Recommendation #4: Determine the eligibility of Highland Station or individual buildings in the National Register of Historic Places.***

In the year ahead, the Design and Economic Restructuring committees should explore whether downtown Highland Township, including the adjacent residential areas, are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. With the Highland Methodist Church already listed in the National Register, the remainder of the downtown area might have enough historic resources with high integrity to allow downtown Highland Township to be eligible for listing as a district. However, this is not certain and eligibility can only be confirmed by the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (MSHPO). The National Register of Historic Places, which is the nation's official list of historic and cultural resources worthy of preservation, is maintained by the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior. The National Register does not place restrictions on the use and appearance of building but it does make some historic commercial properties eligible to receive the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit and other incentives. However, listing in the National Register could provide some eligible residential structures along Milford some protection against a road expansion project at some point in the future. Since this should be an important work plan initiative, the design and economic restructuring committees should contact the Michigan SHPO for additional assistance.

***Recommendation #5: Develop a small business development/façade improvement grant program.***

A small façade grant program, capitalized on an annual basis at \$10,000.00 to \$20,000.00, can help to encourage various building rehabilitation and improvement projects within the Highland Station downtown district. By far the most common form of Main Street building improvement incentive, façade grant programs require far less time to establish and administer, and is more effective in achieving visual results sooner than low-interest loan programs. Without an incentive program in place, private-sector building improvements most likely will take longer to occur. Both the Design and Economic Restructuring committees should explore how a local façade grant program can be funded. Generally, grant amounts should range from \$500.00 to \$2,500.00, or even higher, and be awarded on a matching basis. Before grants can be disbursed, design proposals for façade improvements should be subject to design committee review and approval first before disbursement. The adoption of some interim set of downtown design guidelines will be needed to make appropriate decisions regarding façade rehabilitation and restoration.

Consideration should also be given to developing a separate grant program to pay for some interior building improvements, or proceeds from the grant program to pay for some interior improvements, especially for

spaces that need to assistance in converting to retail.

***Recommendation #6: Conduct business development activities.***

The downtown market study will provide information about those types or categories of businesses that can be potentially successful in downtown Ishpeming. In current and future work plans, consider undertaking the following activities

- **Highland Station business resource guide.** Publish a short pamphlet on available business development resources within Highland Township, Oakland County and the State of Michigan. In specific, listed resources could include the small business consultation services offered through Oakland County’s Small Business Development Center. The business guide could also be produced as a tri-fold brochure, placed on the DDA website as downloadable PDF publication, and distributed to prospective entrepreneurs and business owners.
- **Develop partnerships.** Related to the partnership effort, identify programs or organizations that can provide ongoing assistance to new business owners. In Highland Station, the Economic Restructuring Committee should join forces with the Highland Business Association, the Huron Valley Chamber of Commerce and Oakland County’s local Small Business Development and Technology Center to provide business plan advice and counseling for new and existing businesses choosing to locate in Highland Station.
- **Provide counseling to prospective start-up businesses.** The Economic Restructuring Committee should work to ensure that prospective businesses receive counseling on business planning and financing. Certainly, this service could be delivered through partnerships with Oakland County’s Small Business Development and Technology Center. In addition to business planning and financing, consultation services could be provided for merchandising and marketing.
- **Provide counseling to existing businesses.** Again, in partnership with Oakland County’s Small Business Development and Technology Center, the Huron Valley Chamber, or the Highland Business Association, the Economic Restructuring Committee could provide one-on-one consultation services, or regular training workshops or seminars, to existing Highland Station businesses to assist them in becoming more competitive in the marketplace. Some of the one-on-one consultation services that could be offered include the following:
  - Merchandise presentation
  - Merchandise selection
  - Customer service
  - Inventory control signage.
  - Website development
  - Advertising and marketing
  - Accounting and record keeping.
- **Recognize downtown business successes.** The Highland Station DDA Economic Restructuring Committee should develop a plan to recognize downtown business openings, anniversaries, ownership changes and expansions in the area media. This can be done through ads, press releases, or interviews. This type of public relations effort is great for the business and for downtown. In downtown Evanston, Illinois, this program is a routine part of the overall public relations effort.

***Recommendation #7: Undertake market analysis activities***

It is essential to have a comprehensive knowledge of downtown Highland Station’s retail market to serve as the basis of a successful businesses development efforts, including retention and recruitment activities. The market analysis will help to determine what kinds of new businesses could be supported in the downtown or what current businesses could expand product lines or reposition themselves by changing inventory or

merchandising. However, since there are a limited number of storefronts in Highland Station, the Economic Restructuring Committee can probably make some insightful and accurate decisions about potential new businesses without the need for a comprehensive market analysis study. Perhaps, all that might be needed is to understand and determine local consumer needs in terms of new businesses and whether or not they can be supported by local and regional shopping patterns and household incomes. Therefore, the Economic Restructuring Committee should undertake at least one consumer survey to measure and assess local consumer shopping preferences and conduct some demographic analysis to understand the household characteristics of the people who live in or near Highland Station. Consider the following:

- **Demographic analysis.** Understanding local demographic characteristics is important component to analyzing local business and real estate opportunities. The data can also be used in business recruitment to demonstrate why a given business could succeed in downtown Highland Station. Some of the demographic characteristics to be examined by the Economic Restructuring Committee should include total population and number of households, income, age, education levels and occupations, ethnicity and the number of homeowners. Examining local demographic data can serve to answer many questions the local community may have about the area's population. For example, does the Highland Station trade area population consist more of homeowners or renters? Are there more Baby Boomers than Gen-X'ers? If they are home owners, how likely are they to purchase home furnishings, renovate their homes, or spend leisure-time landscaping their yard? Most if not all of this information can be gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau American Factfinder website (<http://factfinder.census.gov>). Private demographic firms can also supply detailed lifestyle and market segmentation data, which provides more in-depth interpretation on the way consumer groups live and what influences their purchases. Factors that influence purchasing patterns among consumer groups include where they live, their age, income, and occupation. Lifestyle data also measures people's *interests, opinions, and activities* and the effect these have on buying behavior in a market analysis. Lifestyle data can be purchased from a number of private firms including Claritas (<http://www.claritas.com>) and ESRI (<http://esri.com>). A sample of Highland Station's lifestyle profile provided by Claritas documents its major consumer group called "Country Squires":
  - *Country Squires.* The wealthiest residents in exurban America live in Country Squires, an oasis for affluent Baby Boomers who've fled the city for the charms of small-town living. In their bucolic communities noted for their recently built homes on sprawling properties, the families of executives live in six-figure comfort. Country Squires enjoy country club sports like golf, tennis and swimming as well as skiing, boating and biking.
- **Consumer survey.** Consumer surveys explore how trade area consumers shop, where they shop, why they decide to shop in one commercial district as opposed to another, and what products and merchandise they desire or need. While census data and other demographic reports provide aggregate figures about the entire community, consumer surveys reflect habits specific to a downtown commercial district. Mail and telephone surveys are the two major types of consumer surveys: Both are randomly distributed to sample a cross-section of the entire market area to find out who does or does not shop regularly downtown. They also uncover shopping habits, household characteristics, and attitudes about downtown Highland Station. The advantages to conducting a mail survey are that it will yield information on consumers who use and do not use the downtown; fewer workers are required to conduct it, and they are easy to analyze. The advantages to conducting a telephone survey is that it may generate a potentially most random sample and it is often cheaper than undertaking a mail survey. Sample consumer surveys can be secured from Main Street Oakland County and the National Trust Main Street Center.
- **Trade Area.** Before conducting a demographic analysis and consumer surveys, the Economic Restructuring Committee must first determine Highland Station's trade area. Defining Highland Station's trade area is an important first step in any market analysis since it defines the boundaries that will serve as

the basis for further study. For instance, the collection of demographic information will be based on the trade area, not the municipal or township boundaries. In simple terms, a trade area is simply the geographic area that generates the majority of the customers for a community, business district or downtown. In essence, knowing the boundaries of the trade area defines the number of potential customers that may patronage the downtown district. A trade area often extends beyond the municipal boundaries of a community so it is also necessary to recognize how a trade area can vary. In other words, a downtown district may have a number of different trade areas depending on a variety of factors. Often, the variability can be attributed to either different types of products and businesses or different market segments of customers.

- For additional information on determining the trade area and conducting demographic analysis and consumer surveys, consult the National Trust Main Street Center *Market Analysis Handbook* or the University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Extension Service's *Market Analysis Toolbox* (<http://www.uwex.edu/CES/cced/dma/index.html>).

From the information garnered through the demographic analysis and consumer surveys, the HTDDA Economic Restructuring Committee should be able to make good judgments on the types of businesses that could be successful in downtown Highland. When all the data is collected, the committee should take time to study and interpret the findings and then draw some definite conclusions. From there, the committee can draw up a "prospect list" of businesses that have the potential to succeed in downtown Highland Station and which would then be the focus of active recruitment and real estate development efforts.

***Recommendation #8: Consider other strategic business recruitment initiatives.***

Due to the lack of good retail spaces, Highland Station will be somewhat limited in recruiting new retail businesses. Clearly, business recruitment activities should concentrate on reusing existing spaces and converting some non-retail first-floors into usable retail commercial spaces. For the latter, the Economic Restructuring Committee will most likely need to relocate non-retail businesses, if feasible, to other parts of the community, which will take time and effort to accomplish. In undertaking business recruitment activities the Committee should look at the following:

- **Develop business development plans for downtown buildings.** Since there are only a handful of existing downtown Highland Station buildings that house existing retail uses or have the potential to house them. Over the next year, the Economic Restructuring Committee could devote time to developing building/business development plans for each building in Highland Station, which would outline building interior and exterior rehabilitation costs; potential economic uses, retail conversion issues. These plans should be developed with assistance from a professional architect and/or a business development professional.
- **Sharpen competitiveness of existing/prospective businesses.** Provide technical or financial assistance to those existing or incoming businesses in Highland Station. Assistance could again be focused on business planning but also on design improvements, merchandising, store planning and marketing.
- **Relocate auto-related uses.** As a long-term objective, relocate any auto-oriented uses from Highland Station so that the vacated space can be converted use. Perhaps only one or two buildings in downtown Highland Station can be converted to retail use.
- **Recruit new retail activity and economic uses.** Given that Highland Station has a limited number of storefronts and building spaces conducive to conducting retail, the Economic Restructuring Committee will have to be strategic in deciding what new retail and economic uses could be brought into Highland Station. That is one important reason why business development plans should be considered for each individual building. Decisions on what type of business should be recruited should also be based on a

sound understanding of the Highland Station market place. However, perhaps the Economic Restructuring Committee should look into the following a potential strategic direction for developing new retail in downtown.

- *Outdoor sports niche.* With relatively average household income and demographic lifestyles pointing to a Highland Township population that spends money on outdoor related activities, perhaps a small-scale outfitters store could be recruited to Highland Station. Efforts should also be made to develop/promote the mountain bike trail system near downtown Highland Station and to reposition, perhaps, the soon-to-open bike store to be a premier and primary retailer and service provider in mountain bikes in Highland Township. The store could offer special services and even bike rentals and lesson in mountain biking. The store could offer alternative products and services during the winter.
  - *Outdoor sports apparel.* As a compliment to the outdoor sports niche, perhaps a store could specialize in sporting apparel but local consumer surveys should determine whether a stand-alone store or other sporting stores with some apparel would be most likely to succeed.
  - *General store.* Perhaps, the downtown liquor store could be expanded to provide additional goods and products such as small food items.
  - *Restaurant.* Highland Station demographic profiles suggest that a restaurant could be supported in downtown Highland.
  - *Arts-related incubator.* As a long-term objective, perhaps an arts incubator space could be developed in a separate building beyond its current space in the Highland Station House. This could be a showcase space or building in the downtown that could allow for gallery, exhibition and sales spaces, and studio space for local and area artists. The HTDDA could partner with the Huron Valley Council for the Arts on undertaking this initiative.
  - *Bed and breakfast operation.* Encouraging such an operation seems a logical business and real estate development pursuit for Highland Station. The Economic Restructuring Committee should explore this potential opportunity with properties that are nearby the Highland Station core.
- **Explore residential homes to retail uses.** This is not an ideal strategy for encouraging additional retail activity in Highland Station for at least two primary reasons. For one, residential spaces are not entirely conducive to retail uses and secondly, retail uses can put stress on and deteriorate historic properties. They can also potentially disqualify historic residential properties from being listed in the National Register of Historic Places if significant structural and/or exterior alterations take place. However, as a last resort, if there are some residential properties that retail conversion can be feasible and benefit the downtown economically, the Economic Restructuring committee could explore that option but under careful consideration.
  - **Construct new retail spaces.** Only after the development of a Highland Station master plan can the DDA determine if there are suitable sites to place new retail development. However, these sites may be few. If sites are determined, then the Economic Restructuring Committee should work to ensure that the new development is conducive to retail with boarder and more appropriate storefront openings.

***Recommendation #9: Keep Highland Township office and administrative complex in Highland Station.***

At the time of the Resource Team visit, no definitive decision had made regarding the future location of the Highland Township office and administrative complex. However, preliminary plan have been made to move the facilities north to the new civic center complex where the new Highland Township library has been

recently constructed. The Highland Township DDA should advocate keeping the administrative complex in Highland Station where it already serves as the predominant anchor and activity generator. Moving the complex would be a substantial loss to downtown Highland Station in both symbolic and economic terms; community residents would view downtown Highland Station as less than the community center as it should be if the complex were to remain. Perhaps, a thorough discussion and examination of the issues of keeping Highland Township offices in the historic core should be conducted during a master planning process, as discussed in detail in the Design section of this *Highland Station Resource Team Report*.

***Recommendation #10: Encourage the use of covenants or easements to protect historic properties in downtown Highland Station.***

Both the Design and Economic Restructuring Committees should encourage key downtown property owners to secure easements or protective covenants on their properties. This would ensure long-term preservation of Highland Station's historic resources, especially against unwanted development and encroachment. Easements in particular can be donated to the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, which is Michigan's statewide preservation organization, which can hold protective covenants on historic properties. The Mobil Station (former) property would be a perfect first candidate as would the United Methodist Church building (former). Placing protective covenants on such properties ensures that they will be preserved and maintained in perpetuity.

## DESIGN

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It would be suggested that what exists in Highland Station today is not viable, from economic, political, and physical perspectives, and that in today's world, there may not be an effective way of creating a place like Highland Station. Most communities seeking to create a "center" would opt for something more intensively developed, with a greater mass of building and the attendant issues of parking and traffic. It is the scale of such a "town center" that would make it viable to start from scratch. That may leave a place like Highland Station, a place that other communities would not seek to replicate, as one of just a few of its kind. Moreover, that might suggest that preservation of its unique character is a priority, and that a plan for its evolution may require a process designed specifically for this place.

Preserving a sense of place and developing a plan for its future evolution is not an easy task. Preserving worthy places is far more difficult than creating something new. It requires a deeper understanding of what makes it special and demands that a process be formulated that accommodates that kind of understanding. Contemporary ideas about regulating the kinds of change that might occur here may not work, since those ideas were not the genesis of this place. "New rules" are likely a better path, using a process orchestrated to protecting something truly worthy. Foremost among these "rules" would be a vision articulated by stakeholders.

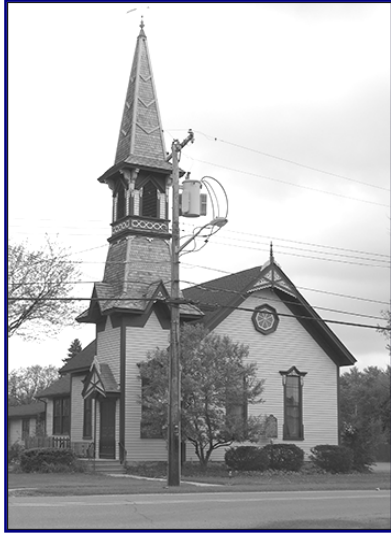


The design section of this *Highland Station Resource Team Report* is organized around a series of observations about the physical character of Highland Station and recommendations for the steps the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority might take to achieve the vision it has determined for Highland Station. Specifically, it is recommended that the Highland Township DDA undertake the following:

- Begin to think about Highland Station in a new way as it begins its design process;
- Breathe life into the vision by using tools that sharpen the understanding of Highland Station's future;
- Seek designs that build upon Highland Station's unique character; and,
- Develop a process that engages stakeholders as a first step in designing Highland Station.

## OBSERVATIONS

- **Understanding how to design a place like Highland Station is more important than the design itself.** The qualities of Highland Station can easily be viewed as unique and rare. As a result, the community cannot simply apply a process that would work in any place — it really has to be founded in a process that celebrates what Highland Station is intrinsically. A master plan can certainly be developed and adopted by following other approaches, but it seems that a better reflection can be gained by framing a process that is based first in a thorough understanding of the place, as opposed to starting headfirst into undertaking the physical design of the place.



*A former church, now a senior and arts center, and offices for the Highland Township DDA is probably the most significant built element of Highland Station.*

- **Plans with any integrity are guided by a commonly held vision of the future.** It is often times difficult to have people agree on the details but it is unusual to find a group that cannot find agreement around some set of common purposes or goals. Highland Station stakeholders have already come together to frame a vision for their common future, and it will be the single idea that binds their efforts as their place evolves. Expanding upon the ways in which that vision works will help build support for their cause and understanding of their purpose.
- **Highland Station’s “hamlet” like character is its primary distinguishing feature.** If one looks at the character of places being created as “town centers,” or even at those places that already have a fabric that suggests a town center, they all really begin to look alike at some point. There are, in fact, few elements that really cause one place to be distinguished from another, and when there is something, it is more likely a natural feature. Highland Station is blessed with a particular kind of character that other places cannot replicate, choosing instead to focus on more town-like features and buildings that attempt to recall or re-establish traditional commercial storefronts.

- **The key to finding the right answer, not merely the expeditious one, is the path to follow to achieve the best design.** There are any number of planning processes that might be pursued to prepare a Highland Station master plan, some certainly easier than others. However, the only way to make certain that Highland Station’s master plan is a fair reflection of the desires of the community, the physical character of the downtown district and the opportunities currently present is to orchestrate a process that brings these factors together as a plan is shaped.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Recommendation #1: Think creatively in designing and planning the future Highland Station.***

To design Highland Station, the community needs to prepare itself to think in new ways about its downtown district. The community needs to only at a few other places to understand what contemporary master planning methods have left for them. A strong suggestion for Highland Station is to create its own way of creating a plan, a method that recognizes what the community desires, what the landscape offers, and the very real aspiration to make positive and lasting changes while critical features are preserved and enhanced.

- The focus of design may be directed more toward ***creating spaces and shaping experiences*** than drawing objects. Too often, our efforts in design are directed toward the definition of objects — usually buildings. The best that can be achieved from this effort is a series of well-designed and hopefully well-crafted structures, which certainly add value to a place. In a place like Highland Station and, in fact, in most downtowns, buildings are largely background elements and the greater focus is on what is not a building. Streets, gardens, courtyards and other exterior spaces become important, shaped by the ways the

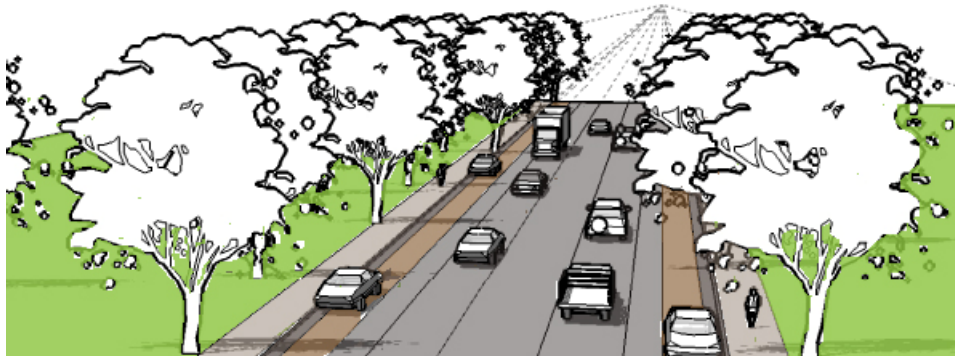


*Even quick sketches can help to demonstrate the experience that might be desired in Highland Station, and can stimulate a progressive dialog about what’s right for its future.*



landscape and buildings come together. These spaces and the ways they are connected form the experience of the place, a feature that most often etched in people's memories than even a collection of attractive buildings.

- “Planning rules” will likely be guided by a *sense of what feels right* — often using notions of sensibility to achieve the community's goals, not legislation. It would be no surprise to learn that ordinances meant to guide development are relatively new tools in Highland Township. Beyond platting of the land, there were probably few rules to dictate the form of development. Still, people understood the ways that buildings would be placed to support their function, and they fashioned buildings that would serve their purpose without reliance on many or any rules. The sensibility people brought to Highland Station as they built homes and commercial structures can be seen today. The difference is that the community now relies upon ordinances to direct a result that earlier generations framed by their sense of what felt right, and the community largely values that result. The community cannot dismiss the need for ordinances in contemporary society, but the community might also think about guidance that gives latitude to create a place that still feels right.



*A direction for Milford Road was demonstrated during a workshop in June 2006, using the notion that a design that “feels right” for Highland Station is more important than a set of standards that do not really apply here.*

- The community will be employing a *new language for design*, one that uses words like vision, character, principles, and process — and even words like memory and hope, at the same time it thinks about scale, mass and fenestration. Memory and hope are experiential words and what the community is striving for is a future that resonates with what already exists in Highland Station. Since the community wants to be guided by a sense of what feels right, design words, like scale and mass, need to be set into a language of experience. To resolve design words into formulas for character probably will not work in Highland Station; however, design words that are tied to an experience will likely result in patterns, buildings, and features that resonate with Highland Station's special character. For example, building heights are often characterized with measurable dimensions in ordinances or design guidelines, but the experience of Highland Station is so directly tied to its surrounding landscape that building heights should be framed to allow the landscape — especially the trees — to dominate. Windows or fenestration is another area where quantitative specification is common in design guidelines but, in Highland Station, windows should be set into facades to create connections between the activity of people walking past a building and the activity occurring within it.

***Recommendation #2: Refine the downtown Highland Station vision statement with guiding principles and imagery.***

Breathe life into the Highland Station vision statement by crafting new tools that sharpen and enhance stakeholders' understanding of Highland Station's future. Using the good work that has already been created, the vision statement can be enhanced by adding a few key elements. It is certainly not a process of undoing the current vision statement but rather one that forges stronger support and better understanding among community stakeholders. Consider the following:

- Early work should include the creation of **imagery** that allows people to see themselves in Highland Station’s future. The vision statement allows people to understand the dream in one way, but having sketches that portray the experience they would have in a future Highland Station builds a greater commitment to make it happen. It almost never ends up exactly like an initial sketch, but a sketch creates a positive dialog about potential directions for the design of buildings and the spaces that are so vital to Highland Station’s character. It is probably important that the imagery is sketch-like, so that dialog is encouraged, as opposed to imagery produced with high resolution and virtual simulations that reactions are limited to liking or not liking what has been illustrated.



*Imagery should portray a “walk down Milford Road”—a real experience for someone who lives in Highland Station or might choose to visit here.*

- As good as the existing vision statement is it can still be improved. It might attempt to illustrate the experience people will have with **words that resonate** with their souls. Like poetry, it moves beyond the words that might describe the future Highland Station as a physical place to creating an actual image in people’s minds and thoughts. Perhaps a few words might be added as a prologue to the existing vision statement as a more succinct message about the kind of place Highland Station might be and reinforcing its connection to a particular kind of experience: Perhaps the prologue might be: the following:

*...imagine a stroll in the dim light of evening under sheltering branches that overhang the street, anticipating the routine or the serendipitous events of your journey, past homes, shops, and gardens that await the life of a new day...*

- Beyond the vision statement, it might be wise to articulate **guiding principles** and defined goals as the primary filters to steer your efforts and gauge what is most appropriate. As suggested already, it is difficult to conceive of a future for Highland Station that uses existing ordinances as a proper guide. The vision statement is a more suitable filter to gauge the appropriateness of a proposal for change against the dreams and desires of stakeholders. A set of principles or goals would essentially be a corollary to the vision, filtering in a *qualitative* way any proposals for their fit to Highland Station before the *quantitative* ordinances are used. Already, stakeholders have framed some important ideas and potential guiding principles about the kind of physical changes that should be encouraged and the kind of place that might result:

- a people-oriented place;
- “stick-built” architecture representing a variety of styles;
- smaller and separated buildings;
- gathering places;
- less traffic with parking located largely behind buildings;
- a place that is bicycle- and equine-friendly;
- a place with historic appeal;
- a place where it is easier to walk than to drive;
- walkable, outdoors oriented, and healthy.

***Recommendation #3: Recognize Highland Station’s character-defining features and build on its collective character.***

The Highland Station community should seek designs that build on the character of place by first recognizing Highland Station’s character-defining features. In historic preservation planning, one of the first steps is to

establish a palette based on a building's or a site's character defining features — those elements that typify its status as preservation-worthy. Highland Station can do the same, even if some of the elements and resources are not necessarily historically or architecturally important. By directing attention to these features, for preservation, perpetuation, or re-establishment, the community can create critical links to the character that sets the place apart from others. None of these features is more important perhaps than its hamlet-like character, which might be defined according the aggregate of these features:

- The **landscape** is a critical defining feature of Highland Station, with trees visible over rooftops, the closeness of real and expansive nature, and the looseness of the physical elements. The larger landscape of Highland Station forms a most favorable first impression and incises people's memories about Highland Station more than any set of buildings. The tall trees and the closeness of nature are easily sensed from the intersection of Milford and Livingston Roads, especially as the road dives toward an expanse of wetland and the Highland Recreation Area. The planted landscape here is without a regular or repeating rhythm.



*Landscape*

- Its **architecture** is one that finds a real beauty in its simplicity and its utility. Most towns look to celebrate their architectural gems and there are a few buildings in Highland Station worthy of attention. However, at the same time, there are buildings that are beautiful in their simplicity and utility and, it is the combination of the utilitarian buildings and the more architecturally refined ones that lend character to Highland Station.



*Architecture*

- The **spacing and density** of its buildings, with a certain imprecision in the ways they have been placed on their sites, and where the spaces between become as important — maybe more important — than the buildings themselves. As opposed to most town centers, there is no consistent “street wall” here; instead, there is a certain imprecision in the ways buildings line Milford and Livingston Roads; in fact, it is the character of spaces between buildings that might be as important — maybe even more important — than the buildings themselves.



*Spacing and Density*

- In its **scale**, significant structures only subtly dominate their neighbors, and just as significant, the landscape is left to dominate the buildings. Highland Station is not a big place, and the scale of its buildings seem to fit nicely — none are too big or too tall. Most importantly for this study, Milford and Livingston Roads do not dominate the buildings or the landscape. Simply stated, it is the landscape that dominates and defines Highland Station's character and scale.
- It is Highland Station's **walkability** and its compactness that allow people the real option of walking. This is the best way to appreciate the real character of the place. Size can be measured in absolute terms



*Walking distance advantage (left); downtown neighborhood (right)*

but it can also be relative. In Highland Station, walking time can be as important as a measured distance and all of Highland Station can fit within a zone defined by a five-minute walk; for this feature, an issue of mobility becomes critical. If a person cannot readily cross Milford Road, the walking distance becomes irrelevant.

- Downtown Highland Station’s **neighborhoods** so closely surround “downtown” that the two are sometimes indistinguishable. In some cases, the neighborhood extends to the core of Highland Station, where a walk down Livingston or Milford Roads will likely encounter homes as often as businesses. In addition, it is this degree of mixing that is an important component of character in Highland Station. An evolution might suggest that homes are replaced by businesses within the core of the area but residentially scaled and styled buildings might be used to maintain this point of character even as the area evolves.

- Downtown Highland Station has a **sense of the casual and simple**, recognizing that what Highland Township people cherish is not fancy, not overly designed and not elaborate or fussy. As places evolve and grow, new ways of organizing development that might be anticipated are needed, and ordinances, design standards and other rules should then be formulated. In Highland Station, however, the visible development patterns likely resulted from the sensibilities of the people than from any legislation. The layout of buildings, sidewalks, parking, and the landscape is casual and characteristically simple; materials are similarly simple, with sidewalks of concrete where they exist, and nothing more formal at times than an improved gravel path. Improvements might be expected, but they should not be overly designed, elaborate, or fancy, or they risk becoming foreign elements inserted into the fabric of Highland Station.



*Casual relationship between buildings and landscape.*

- Highland Station’s **closeness** allows people to recognize one another from across the street, and it is this proximity that creates engagement. In his seminal treatise, *A Pattern Language*, Christopher



*Closeness and intimacy in Highland Station*

Alexander discusses the critical relationships needed to create a comfortable social space in a community, noting that people can only recognize the details of another's face at distances less than 75 feet. As Highland Station evolves, the ability to recognize a neighbor across a street, and in some cases even greet them, is a critical character-defining feature. An expansive roadway, where sidewalks are so far from one another that people can no longer greet one another as they stroll along Milford Road, would be contrary to the character of Highland Station.

It is important to understand that not every project will have these features but that they cannot be lost. Again, recalling the standards used in historic preservation, the community should seek a "tout ensemble," literally, the whole massed together or the general effect. However, without recognition of these several character-defining features, they will most certainly be lost as Highland Station evolves.

***Recommendation #4: Undertake a sensible planning and design process that allows stakeholders an active role and places emphasis on exploration and discovery.***

The Highland Station community should design and institute a planning and design process that allows stakeholders an active role. It should also place emphasis on exploration and discovery, not presentation and reaction, which, in the end, should forge a bond with the community's vision and Highland Station's character-defining features. It is more challenging, and probably more time consuming, to create a plan just for the act of creating one. Highland Station is a place that deserves that kind of attention but framing an appropriate process is key. Several components are necessary but the most important are the ways in which stakeholders are brought into the process, their continued input is sought, and their attitudes taken about how ideas are shared and refined. Most often, these processes are promoted in the language of the designer. Here, with the input of the community being a necessity, the process should be organized according to a language that will be understood by those who choose to participate. This is important for two reasons: they will better understand how they fit into the process and what kind of input is needed at various times throughout the process. As suggested above, this process should be founded on a principle of exploration and discovery — and extended to sharing and learning. Eventually, it will be necessary to gain the approval of the DDA board of directors and Highland Township trustees in a process based in presentations that are more formal. First, a more engaging process is needed.

This work should be guided by a task force composed of representatives of the Design Committee, business and property owners, and others with an interest in how Highland Station might evolve. The Task Force would host meetings, open houses and other events related to the master planning process, and provide guidance by interpreting input from the community and ensuring the plan evolve in ways that support the vision statement. While the task force might be asked to take on certain assignments, their more significant role is providing balanced evaluation of the ideas and directions that emerge from the planning process. The outline of this kind of process might follow these steps:

***[one] Define the desired experience in a commonly held vision for Highland Station.***

Working together to articulate a vision that is shared among stakeholders should be the most appropriate first step. In Highland Station, that step has largely been completed. It might be expanded as indicated above with a more seductive introduction.

Our vision for the Highland Station district is one of a charming modern hamlet where attractive historical homes, vibrant small businesses and healthy lifestyle amenities appeal to people of all ages, returning Highland Station to its place as the center of our community and a destination within the region. Highland Station will be an active place that promotes health, fitness and an appreciation for the natural environment as well as a center for the expression and enjoyment of the arts and a meeting place for exchange of ideas and information. As the "western gateway to Oakland County," Highland Station will be an oasis and sanctuary from the intense automobile-driven development along the M-59 corridor and will exude a tangible feel and flavor that uplifts the body and soul.



The Highland DDA will endeavor to maintain a balance between retaining the sense of a historic rural community and promoting economic vitality. Improved infrastructure, including streetscape enhancements, water, sewers and underground utilities, where possible, will exemplify the types of public-private partnerships that support preservation and economic development activities. We will encourage and nurture small businesses that serve local and regional needs, creating a stable and economically viable downtown. A variety of small shops will serve the community and provide activity throughout the day and evening, making Highland Station a safe, fun and desirable place to live, work and play. People will recognize Highland's identity, be inspired by its heart, and be proud to live and work here.



*Highland Station's character-defining elements.*

***[two] Identify Highland Station's character-defining features.***

Like the first step, this step may have been largely completed by the community. Character-defining features were initially shaped with input from stakeholders during an on-site workshop that dealt with the future of Milford Road, and those ideas have been restated in this *Resource Team Report*. It is worth re-visiting these features to make certain they are characterized fairly, and that they are confirmed by stakeholders.

***[three] Frame the logical limits of downtown, most likely based on walkability and natural boundaries.***

A place like Highland Station might encourage walkability more than most — people will seek the opportunity to walk in a comfortable environment, particularly one where the environment can change so dramatically, from homes to businesses to the recreation area within only a few blocks. Interestingly enough, the environment feels somewhat unified even as it changes. Most able-bodied adults will walk about one-quarter mile, which is a five-minute walk, before they feel the need to drive between destinations. Features of Highland Station will focus the walkable center to an area defined by the railroad to the east, the highway to the north, and the curve in Milford Road to the south. However, a westerly boundary is less discernable through physical features; perhaps the schools and township buildings form an edge but it is not as clearly defined as the railroad corridor.



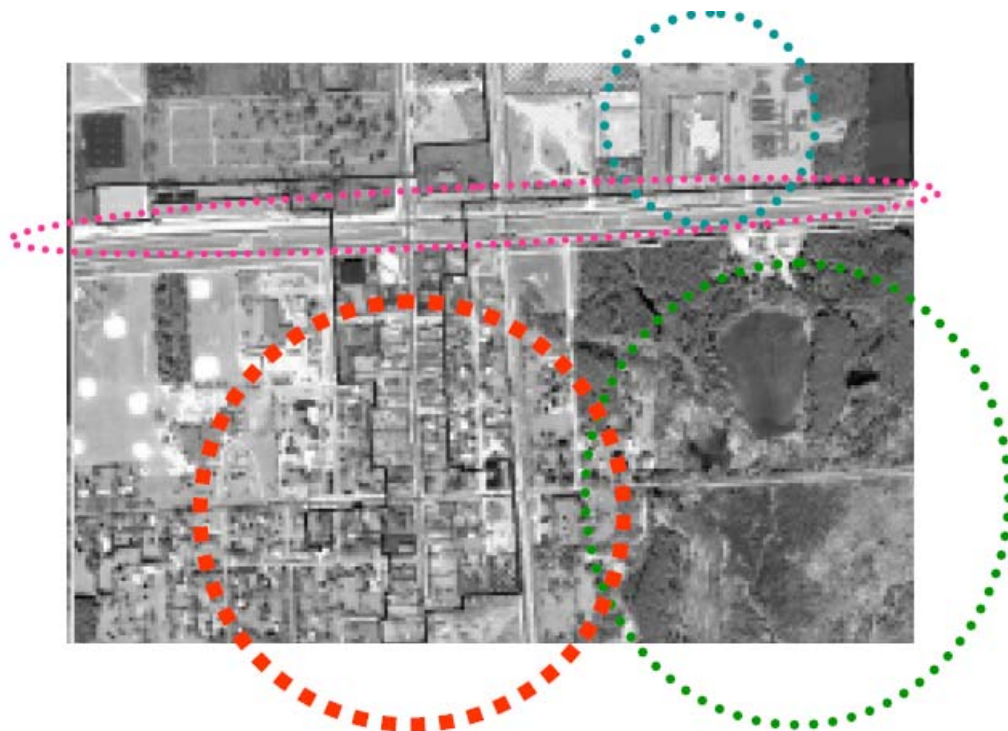
*Highland Station is very compact which increases its walkability.*

Highland Station It is more than a walkable distance. Recognizing this distance suggests an inherent physical size to Highland Station. Additional commercial activities and buildings may increase residential density within this area but should align with the compact nature of Highland Station, since its character-defining features and the vision that has already been shaped by stakeholders.

***[four] Set downtown in the context of the community, especially with regard to connections to other districts in Highland Township.***

Highland Station does not exist as an island. In fact, one of the character-defining features suggests that it is inextricably linked to the neighborhood that surrounds it — even the community and recreation area that surrounds it. As a master plan is formulated, it would be prudent to consider what else is going on in

Highland Township, how those activities might influence the future of Highland Station, and even how connections between those activities and the Highland Station area might be created or reinforced. This might be particularly important for Milford Road, as it exists as the primary north-south route through the community. Directions for its evolution were framed, but not necessarily agreed to by all parties, during an on-site work session in June 2006. Trails and other roadway connections should be recognized as a part of the master planning process for Highland Station, to ensure that it remains the spiritual center of the Highland community.



*In defining a future vision for Highland Station, the community must take into consideration how it relates to other district and nodes within the immediate area.*

***[five] Analyze the susceptibility to change of parcels in Highland Station.***

It is understood that things will change in Highland Station, but the extent of change is a bigger question. An analysis might be performed, using the insights of the task force and selected other individuals, to better understand whether buildings or parcels might be considered stable or whether they are susceptible to change. Factors to consider might include:

*Stable*

- service-able structure and infrastructure
- property not on the market or not in transition
- business not on the market or not in transition
- conforming use
- use supports the vision
- historically significant (or potentially significant) structure
- architecturally significant structure
- no negative nearby influences

*Susceptible to change*

- obsolete structure and infrastructure

- property for sale or in transition
- business for sale or in transition
- non-conforming use
- use inconsistent with vision
- historically insignificant structure
- architecturally insignificant structure
- negatively impacted by adjacent or nearby influences

Other factors might also be used. However, it is the interpretation of the results that is more important: a “stable” ranking is not a guarantee that a parcel or building will not change, and a “susceptible” ranking is not a mandate for change. As the master plan is assembled, look for patterns where grouping of “stable” or “susceptible” buildings or parcels are found and look for ways to maintain their stability or to guide their evolution consistent with the community’s vision.

***[six] Understand the potential of the market as a way of keeping the plan grounded in economic reality (but still, allow yourselves the chance to dream a bit).***

Not everything that a community dreams will happen just because it has been made a part of a master plan. A thoughtful master plan recognizes both the opportunities and the limitations of a local market, seeking realistic and economically feasible directions. It does not mean that dreams cannot be a part of a master planning process; in fact, dreams are necessary. When a market analysis suggests a direction might be more of a challenge, the master plan process should lay out the options that might allow that dream to have greater potential for implementation. Usually what this means is locally contributed funds, or a write-down of the costs of acquisition, or the application of other incentives may have to be undertaken or developed. Again, the task force will play a central role in defining how far the master plan pushes to make dreams become reality.



***[seven] Set direction for the resolution of functional concerns.***

A master plan has to consider the breadth of issues related to the place, not just those related to aesthetics or economics. These issues may include sanitary sewer service, storm water management, parking, and overhead electric facilities. Maybe even more so in a place like Highland Station, the inter-relatedness of function, aesthetics, and economics must be considered. It might be that resolution of one of these factors finds its direction as another is shaped. In the end, each of these factors, and others, possibly, are considered at the same time, not as independent exercises.

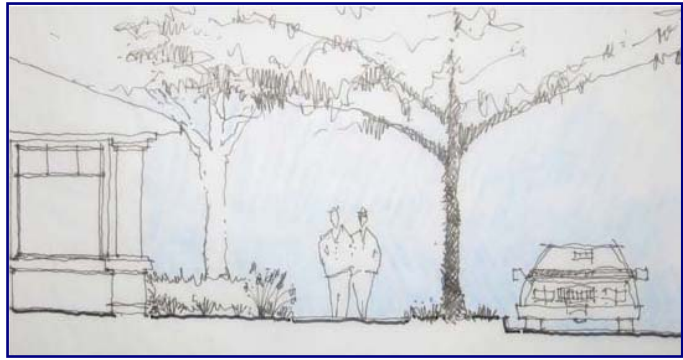
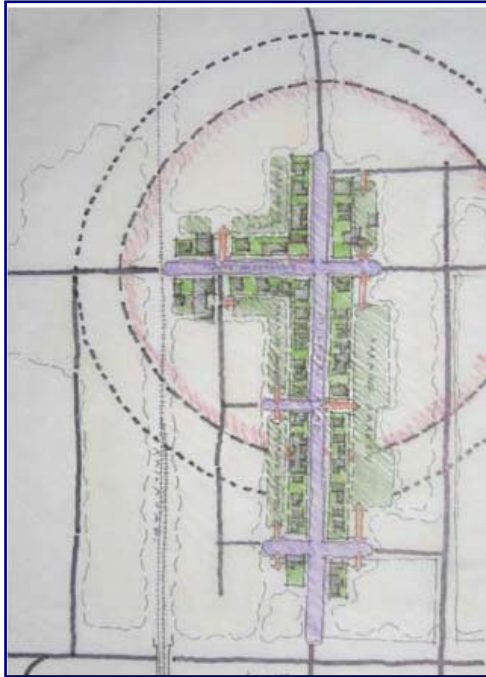


***[eight] Explore patterns that support the vision and the desired experience, while they resolve functional considerations***

*Sewer installation, 1940's. Source: National Clay Pipe Institute; [www.sewerhistory.org](http://www.sewerhistory.org)*

There is a tendency to move to define the desired details early in the process and shape a plan around those details. However, the character-defining features tend more toward patterns than details, so it makes sense to frame plan alternatives around patterns first. More than one pattern might be explored where no clear direction is evident, using the task force and the community to





*Plan making in Highland Station should focus on existing patterns rather than specific details. The details come later in the planning process.*

help guide an appropriate solution. Even when a pattern is largely agreed upon, there will be some honing and sharpening required. In addition, that is where a successful combination of a function, aesthetics, and economics results in a plan compelling enough to add supportive details.

***[nine]* Define the details, such as streetscape design, design guidelines, sign ordinances, parking requirements, and service district potential.**

It is only at this point in the planning process that details make sense, because they can be framed in the context of appropriate design patterns found within Highland Station. Continued guidance from the task force and community is needed, through informal reviews, open houses, and other events aimed at gaining the insights and opinions of stakeholders. Due to the kind of place that Highland Station should be, a real focus should be placed on creating imagery that demonstrates the place from a pedestrian's perspective. It is probably the best way to make certain the details resonate with the vision and the existing design patterns.

***[ten]* Formulate the process for implementation, including both first steps and sustained actions.**

The drawings and words of a master plan mean nothing if no one is willing to step forward to make something happen. A critical piece has to be a plan for implementation and assigning parties to assist in implementation for each of the critical elements of the master plan. In addition, each initiative outlined in the master plan should have defined timelines for implementation, costs for implementing those elements, an explanation for how each planning element relates to the others, and what degree of design effort remains for each initiative. Since people want to see results from a master planning process, highlighting a first action step should be a part of the implementation plan.

***[eleven]* Agree to move forward, together.**

Up to this point, the process has been wrapped in efforts to explore and discover, but soon the point will come where real agreement must be pursued. However, agreement should be more readily achieved since a task force and process for guiding and encouraging frequent interactions with stakeholders at key points would have been in place. It is not a formality, but agreement should not be a hurdle at this point in the process. In fact, it might be more of a celebration of the start of moving forward toward Highland Station's common future.



*A process for interaction and community should help the community reach consensus and proceed to implementation.*

***Recommendation#5: To design Highland Station, the community should think in new ways.***

There is a great sense of *spirituality* about what the community about to undertake but the community is not really doing it for themselves. It involves a sense of stewardship toward what has been left to the community and a sense of legacy about what will be created for future generations. It is a worthy undertaking and one with great rewards. It is one where success can be better guaranteed by following a process that is tailored to respond to the unique qualities and features of Highland Station.

*Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.—John Milton, Areopagitica (1644)*

## CONCLUSION

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Main Street revitalization is always an incremental and evolving process; quick results are not guaranteed, nor are they realistic. Board members, volunteers, the municipal government, and other stakeholders always desire immediate results, but for the Highland Station DDA/Main Street program, the most important immediate goal is to develop and build a strong Main Street organization that can undertake a wide range of downtown revitalization activities. Without a strong organization, implementing active business development efforts, downtown design improvements, and promotions and marketing activities will be a challenge to make happen successfully.

With this in mind, the resource team would like to emphasize that Highland Station has many assets, including its committed and energetic board of directors, with its wealth of talent, skills, and experience. This is where the program starts and, when implementing the Main Street approach, the community's commitment, vision, and hard work will most assuredly result in a successful revitalization process, placing Highland Station in the vanguard of communities that implement the Main Street approach within the downtown development authority framework.

## APPENDIX A: BACKGROUND

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Highland Station, Michigan, is one of 12 communities participating in Main Street Oakland County, a downtown revitalization program offered by the Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Division. The following sections provide background information regarding the Main Street Oakland County program (MSOC), the National Trust Main Street Center (NTMSC), and the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority, the organization designated to receive MSOC and NTMSC technical services in Highland Station.

### MAIN STREET OAKLAND COUNTY

In February 2000, the Oakland County Department of Planning and Economic Development Services established Main Street Oakland County as a program to help local communities revitalize their traditional commercial districts. Main Street Oakland County's mission is to assist towns and cities through the delivery of technical services and local implementation of the comprehensive Main Street Four-Point Approach, and to maximize the economic potential of traditional commercial districts while preserving their unique heritage and sense of place. In addition to its mission, Main Street Oakland County seeks to achieve several objectives:



- Empower Oakland County communities to establish and maintain successful, comprehensive, ongoing revitalization programs;
- Build a greater awareness of the importance of revitalizing traditional commercial districts;
- To provide technical assistance and training resources;
- Facilitate networking and communication about downtown revitalization among Oakland County communities; and
- Offer advice and recommendations regarding project-specific financing when needed.

To guide its work, including its delivery of technical services and its relationship to participating communities, Main Street Oakland County will also seek:

- To encourage the adoption of local downtown economic development strategies that support Oakland County's overall Planning and Economic Development Services objectives;
- To promote commercial district revitalization as integral to the local comprehensive planning process.
- To encourage good downtown development practices that utilize smart growth methods; and
- To support the use of existing Oakland County programs and resources in conjunction with supplemental professional services.

Communities participating in MSOC were selected through a competitive application process. All MSOC communities receive a set of intensive technical assistance services designed to help them build their local Main Street programs as well as to address specific downtown revitalization issues. The NTMSC and MSOC will deliver these services over a period of three years, after which the level of technical assistance provided

will be reduced. However, ongoing technical services will be offered by MSOC to help communities with specific organization, design, and business and real estate development issues.

## THE NATIONAL TRUST MAIN STREET CENTER

The NTMSC is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Created by a Congressional charter in 1949, the National Trust is a leading advocate of historic preservation in the United States. The preservation movement involves more than saving historic buildings. The Trust addresses economic growth, urban revitalization, and the creation of new jobs through the rehabilitation of historic buildings and structures. Established by the National Trust in 1980, the NTMSC has worked in 43 states and Puerto Rico. Through these efforts, 206,000 net new jobs have been created, \$15.2 billion has been reinvested in Main Street commercial districts, 52,000 new businesses have been created, 79,000 buildings have been rehabilitated, and 1,633 communities have built strong organizations to revitalize their commercial districts. The NTMSC also sponsors the National Main Street Network, a professional membership program for organizations interested in commercial district revitalization. It produces publications, newsletters, and special reports on revitalization and preservation issues and serves as a clearinghouse for information on community redevelopment issues. The NTMSC accomplishes its mission through the Main Street Four-Point Approach™.



## THE MAIN STREET FOUR-POINT APPROACH™

The Main Street Four-Point Approach™ is a comprehensive strategy that provides merchants, commercial property owners, and community residents with tools and information to establish approach consists of four points:

- **Design** takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in downtown Highland Station by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays, and promotional materials. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all of these areas, to educate people about design quality, and to expedite commercial district improvements.
- **Promotion** takes many forms, but aims to create a positive image of downtown Highland Station in order to rekindle neighborhood pride. Promotion seeks to improve retail sales events and festivals and to foster an image that attracts investors, developers, and new businesses.
- **Economic Restructuring** strengthens downtown Highland Station's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is accomplished by retaining and expanding existing businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, by converting unused or underutilized space into productive property, and by sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of neighborhood business people.
- **Organization** establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in downtown Highland Station. This will allow the Main Street revitalization program to provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy of the commercial district. Diverse groups from the public and private sectors (Highland Township, local bankers, merchants, property owners, community leaders, and others) must work together toward a successful program.

## THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF MAIN STREET

While the Main Street approach provides the format for successful revitalization, implementation of the methodology is based on eight principles that pertain to all areas of the revitalization effort.

- **Comprehensive.** Business district revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished by a single project. For successful long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach must be used.
- **Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help to develop skills so that complex problems can be addressed and ambitious projects undertaken.
- **Self-help.** Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the project successful. Main Street Oakland County, the NTMSC, and Highland Township will provide direction, ideas, and training, but continued and long-term success depends upon the involvement and commitment of the community.
- **Public/Private Partnership.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical viability of downtown. Each sector has a role to play, and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations so that an effective partnership can be forged.
- **Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities — like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.
- **Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies equally to each element of the program, from storefront design to promotional campaigns to educational programs.
- **Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.
- **Implementation-oriented.** Activity creates confidence in the program and ever-greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger activities as the revitalization effort matures.

## METHODOLOGY

In cooperation with Main Street Oakland County, the NTMSC assembled a resource team consisting of five commercial district revitalization professionals who visited Highland Station on September 13-16, 2005, to develop an integrated set of downtown revitalization recommendations based on the observations and expertise of each team member. This Highland Station Resource Team Report is a summary of these observations and recommendations. Each resource team member was selected based on their particular background, qualifications, and work experiences as judged appropriate for the objectives and purposes of this visit to downtown Highland Station.

During the first two days of the visit, the team reviewed relevant reports, studies, and materials including the Highland Station Needs Assessment Report, and interviewed various downtown stakeholders, including DDA board and staff members; city officials, including the mayor, council people, and various department personnel; the staff of local organizations and institutions; and a variety of downtown business and property owners, cultural and social service associations, church members, and local residents. The purpose of these

interviews was to determine and assess attitudes and opinions regarding the downtown Highland Station revitalization effort, the actions and progress of the DDA, obstacles facing the DDA/Main Street program revitalization agenda, and the current level of human and financial resources available to the Downtown Development Authority.

On the third day, the team scheduled a meeting with the Highland Station community to present its preliminary recommendations to downtown stakeholders and the general public. This report, written by the resource team members and prepared by the NTMSC, details all recommendations made by resource team members.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Special acknowledgments are given to those Highland Station Main Street board members, volunteers and other individuals who participated in the resource team interview sessions and other activities. Additional thanks are given to those who assisted Main Street Oakland County and the NTMSC in preparing the on-site visit schedule and all logistics.

## APPENDIX B. RESOURCE TEAM PERSONNEL

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**W. Ted Alexander**, a native of Morganton, North Carolina, is currently the Executive Director of the Uptown Shelby Association, Inc. in Shelby, North Carolina. Ted obtained a B.A. in Political Science from UNC-Charlotte in 1982 and a Master's Degree in Historic Preservation Planning from Cornell University in 1985. Mr. Alexander has over 20 years of experience in historic preservation and downtown revitalization having begun work as an intern with the NC Division of Archives and History and the New York State Senate's Housing and Community Development Committee. In 1985, he was hired as the Executive Director for the Bedford Main Street, Inc. in Bedford, VA where he assisted the City with a \$2.5 million public improvement project in the downtown area. In 1988, he, along with his Patti and son Will, moved back to North Carolina to head the Uptown Shelby Association, Inc. In 1993, he was asked to serve as the statewide coordinator for the Virginia Main Street Program assisting downtown revitalization across the State. In 1996, Mr. Alexander assumed his former position of Executive Director of the Uptown Shelby Association. He is also the immediate Past President of the Historic Shelby Foundation; current President of the North Carolina Downtown Development Association serves on the Board of Advisors of Preservation North Carolina and is Shelby's Rebuild America Energy Conservation Coordinator. In November of 2003, Ted was elected the Mayor of the City of Shelby and he was sworn in on December 1, 2003.

**Nicholas P. Kalogeresis, AICP**, has been a program officer with the National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street Center (NTMSC) since March 1998. At the Center, Mr. Kalogeresis is a specialist in nonprofit organization management; downtown and community comprehensive planning; historic preservation planning; and downtown design management. In his tenure with the NTMSC, he has worked with the City of Chicago (Ill.) Main Street Initiative; the Wright-Dunbar neighborhood in Dayton, Ohio; the Fond du Lac/North Avenue commercial corridors in Milwaukee (Wis.); and now the Main Street Oakland County (Mich.) and Michigan Main Street programs. Additionally, Mr. Kalogeresis has completed assignments in Detroit, Mich.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and for state Main Street programs and local communities in Kentucky, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. Mr. Kalogeresis has been a frequent contributor for the NTMSC's *Main Street News* and has written several articles on topics such as visioning processes, downtown planning, and zoning and land use regulations. Before joining the Center, he was the suburban coordinator with the Illinois Main Street Program for two years. During that time, he developed and delivered technical services to 15 Main Street communities in the six-county Chicago metropolitan area. Before joining Illinois Main Street, he led a Main Street program in Ottawa, Illinois, for four years. A Chicago native, Mr. Kalogeresis holds a bachelor's degree in history from Elmhurst College (Ill.) and a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is also currently a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and a sitting commissioner of the Village of Oak Park (Ill.) Historic Preservation Commission.

**Jay Schlinsog, CMSM**, is currently a principal of the Downtown Professionals Network, a downtown revitalization and consulting firm based in Batavia, Illinois. Mr. Schlinsog has over 10 years experience in downtown revitalization and has provided technical assistance services to local, state, and national downtown organizations, including Main Street programs and other nonprofits and private businesses around the Midwest. He specializes in nonprofit management, organizational development, grant writing, marketing and promotion, marketing products development, and community forum facilitation. His years in the field include tenures as executive director for several organizations including the Walla Walla Chamber of Commerce (Was.), the Downtown St. Charles Partnership (Ill.), Old Town Pocatello (Idaho), and Main Street Marshfield (Wis.). Mr. Schlinsog is also a graduate of the NTMSC's Certification Institute in Washington, D.C.

**Michael Schroeder, ASLA** is currently the director of design for Westwood Professional Services, Inc., where he is responsible for providing design direction on a wide range of projects, as well as the development of conceptual designs for urban design, site design, and master planning projects. He has worked extensively



with small communities in Minnesota and across the United States through an ongoing relationship with the National Trust Main Street Center. His background includes community planning and design projects such as the Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan for the City of Minneapolis, which looked at land use patterns for more than 300 acres of downtown Minneapolis; a strategic guide for the Taylor Falls Economic Development Commission, as well as a current effort to create “A Plan for Conservation and Development,” which is resulting in the definition of a new model for comprehensive planning based on Taylor Falls’ small town historic character and its natural scenic beauty. Mr. Schroeder also completed the *Downtown Strategy Plan* for St. Charles, Illinois, which was awarded one of Illinois’ first “Governor’s Tomorrow Awards” for its work in defining a sustainable future for a “Great American Main Street” community. He has experience in historic preservation, including work at the Minnesota State Capitol, the repaving of the last granite cobble-paved street in Minneapolis with salvaged pavers, and a historic landscape preservation master plan for the University of Minnesota’s Morris Campus. Michael was previously the director of Urban Design and Planning at HNTB, a national engineering and planning firm, as well as vice president of Hoisington Kogler Group Inc., a small planning and urban design firm in Minneapolis.

# APPENDIX C • WORK PLAN WORKSHEET WITH TEAM LEADER/TEAM MEMBERS STRUCTURE

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<b>Committee:</b>				
<b>Objective:</b>				
<b>Project:</b>				
<b>Team Leader:</b>				
<b>Team Members:</b>				
<b>Tasks Necessary to Complete Project:</b>	<b>Responsibility:</b>	<b>Start Date:</b>	<b>End Date:</b>	<b>Budget:</b>
<b>Anticipated Results/Measure of Success:</b>				

# APPENDIX D • EVENTS PLANNING CHECKLIST

## EVENTS PLANNING & LOGISTICS CHECKLIST

ACTIVITIES & TASKS	DATES	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
<b>Insurance:</b>		
- Consult insurance professional(s)		
- Determine sponsor/participant liability coverage needs		
- Determine needs for special coverages (i.e. weather, alcohol, prizes, key person, etc.)		
- Issue Request for Proposals		
- Procure coverage as necessary		
- Other:		
<b>Set-Up &amp; Staging:</b>		
- Map entire promotional area		
- Check sites for acoustics		
- Ensure proper and adequate electricity, staging area and mechanical system screening		
- Ensure all sites are handicapped accessible		
- Execute contracts with all individuals involved in set-up		
- Ensure adequate (excessive) volunteer coverage for set-up		
- Other:		
<b>Fire Codes/Ambulance/Medical Provisions</b>		
- Research applicable fire codes and verify compliance		
- Discuss plans with Fire Department and provide a copy of promotional area map		
- Locate and identify (sign) secondary/emergency exits for indoor or contained events		
- Determine needs for on-site ambulance, first aid station, EMT and/or RN		
- Notify ambulance of location and time of event(s)		
- Provide ready access to communications equipment		
- Other:		
<b>Security &amp; Crowd Control</b>		
- Discuss plans with Police Department and provide a copy of promotional area map		
- Determine need for private security firm personnel		
- Determine need for volunteer security personnel; provide adequate training		
- Provide adequate signage for all areas - both private and public - as needed		
- Walk through entire promotional area and note special features on locational map		
- Other:		
<b>Parking</b>		
- Identify all lots on promotional area map		
- Ensure all lots are lighted and cleaned prior to event		
- Provide adequate security to patrol & monitor lots		
- Identify and sign available handicapped parking spaces		
- Install adequate signage leading to and out of lots		
- Install "disclaimer" signs at all parking areas		
- Other:		
<b>Traffic Control</b>		
- Provide volunteers/security/police for directing traffic		
- Provide adequate signage for all entries, exits, one-way patterns, etc.		
- Conduct several "drive throughs" prior to event		
- Other:		
<b>Handicapped Issues</b>		
- Research all applicable local, state & federal regulations		
- Ensure compliance throughout entire promotional area, including indoor sites		
- Provide adequate signage both as required and appropriate		
- Ensure adequate provision and accessibility of parking for all events in promotional area		
- Other:		
<b>Music</b>		
- Execute contracts with all performers, specific as to time, place, duration, fees, etc.		
- Research applicable copyrights with ASCAP (ascap.com) and BMI (bmi.com)		
- Ensure all performers are properly ensured		
- Verify and provide adequate electrical systems, sound systems, acoustics, etc.		
- Other:		

APPENDIX E • ANNUAL SPONSOR FLYER EXAMPLE



# DOWNTOWN SUMTOWN *Celebration 2000*

**Choices:**

Promo Partner Marketing Packages are available at four levels:

**HEADLINERS**

Our premier package will keep your business in the spotlight throughout the year and comes with special VIP event privileges.

**PRODUCERS**

Our major sponsorship package will send a strong message that just keeps echoing throughout the Greater Sumtown trade area.

**DIRECTORS**

Put your name on the special events of your choice to enhance your presence as a member of the Greater Sumtown business community.

**STARS**

Our low budget promotional package will stretch your marketing budget by reaching new audiences and customers.

**Sign up today!**

Call today for details and a complete copy of the 2000 Promo Partner Prospectus  
(321) 555-1234

Or visit our web site to get the scoop and sign-up today:  
[www.downtownsumtown.com](http://www.downtownsumtown.com)

*This is gonna be fun!*

Downtown Professionals Network  
Marketing • Management • Planning

