

**Following the Plan**  
**Report on the State of Priorities and Goals Identified by the 2012 Master Plan**



**Benjamin Young, Clerk of Council**  
**Prepared for City Council**  
**City of North Canton**  
**Office of City Council**  
**November 23, 2020**

Certified Final Copy by:

*Benjamin R. Young*  
Clerk of City Council

# Contents

The Master Plan .....	2
Categories of Plan Elements .....	2
Identity .....	3
Gateway and Directional Signage.....	3
Main Street Square.....	3
Special Improvement District .....	3
Special Zoning District and Requirements .....	3
Funding for the Arts.....	4
Corridors and Connections .....	4
Improving Walkability of Core.....	4
Calming Main Street Traffic.....	4
Improving Bicycle Access .....	4
Development Potential.....	5
Control of Development Sites.....	5
Parking Plan .....	5
Development RFP's .....	5
General Economic Development .....	5
Specific Development Sites .....	6
Priorities Moving Forward.....	7
Possible Plan Changes .....	8
External Initiatives.....	8
Internal Initiatives .....	8



## **The Master Plan**

In 2012 City government and the North Canton Chamber of Commerce contracted with the Kent State Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative to produce the 2012 North Canton Master Plan. This plan identified a number of priorities for the future development and improvement of the City. In February 2012 City Council adopted a resolution supporting the plan, wherein they made a non-binding pledge to review the plan in January of each year. Reviews were to consider what progress had been made, any necessary changes, and identify goals for the coming year. This report has been written to provide for such a review. The last comprehensive update was given as a presentation to City Council on April 15, 2018.

### **Categories of Plan Elements**

The 2012 Master Plan separated priorities into three broad categories: Identity, Corridors and Connections, and Development Potential. Each category identified specific goals and priorities to be pursued primarily by the City government, with support from the Chamber of Commerce and private individuals and institutions, such as Walsh University or DeHoff Development. This report details the goals that were outlined in each category and the City's efforts to achieve them as of August 31, 2020. This report builds heavily on the 2012 Master Plan Section titled "Action Steps and Priorities for Implementation" that begins on page 83 of said document.



## Identity

The Identity category established design ideas and development guidelines to reinforce and highlight North Canton's identity as a local and regional destination by leveraging historical, recreational, and commercial attractions. The plan proposed a system of wayfinding and directional signage throughout the City and particularly at major gateways to identify important attractions and districts for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike.

### Gateway and Directional Signage

Perhaps the simplest of the Master Plan's goals was the installation of gateway signs at major entry points to the City and directional signage for City assets.

This goal has been largely achieved with the installation of stone/brick gateway signs along most major entry routes, and black and white directional signage along Main Street in the City's core. These projects will need continual updates and more signage installed as the City continues to develop and more community assets are established.

### Main Street Square

The Master Plan called for several improvements to the City's main square, the intersection of Main and Maple Streets, including the beautification of the Hoover Factory lawn, renovation of the area outside City Hall, and improvements to Bitzer Park including an amphitheater.

In 2018 the City renovated the areas surrounding City Hall adjacent to Main Street as well as a small park-like area in between City Hall and Huntington Bank in conjunction with repairing water damage issues in City Hall's portico. In mid-2020 the City passed the necessary legislation to begin the Bitzer Park amphitheater project. The Hoover Factory lawn is currently under private control and the City has had little success in convincing the owners to fast track development. So far the City has succeeded in getting the entire front lawn covered with grass and all windows presentable on the front of the building. The Hoover District is discussed in greater detail on page 6.

### Special Improvement District

The Master Plan advocated for the creation of a Special Improvement District (SID), referred to as a Business Improvement District (BID). A SID is a special area designation under Ohio law wherein the covered business pay a special fee for the improvement and beautification of City streets, sidewalks, etc.

While a SID has not been pursued directly, as of 2020 the City is pursuing the creation of a Downtown Redevelopment District (DRD) which will include similar improvement-oriented special fees. The DRD and other special development districts are discussed further on page 5.

### Special Zoning District and Requirements

In order to protect the unique identity of North Canton and the vision for the downtown's core the Master Plan proposed the establishment of a special zoning district(s) to preserve accessibility to pedestrians, the aesthetics of downtown, and on-street parking. In addition, the plan called for a design review process or board to oversee compliance with new Main Street zoning.

Prior to the 2012 Master Plan, the City had already established a Main Street Business District (MSB) in pursuit of similar goals. In late 2018, it was determined that the MSB, and the entire Zoning Code, required improvement. Starting in 2019 the Department of Administration began the process for a zoning re-write. The final versions of regulations will be presented to Council as phase 1 of the larger zoning rewrite tentatively titled



“the Second Century Zoning Code”. The proposed zoning regulations establish a vision for the future of the downtown core in line with the vision of the Master Plan. At this time there has been no significant consideration of establishing an architectural review board to accompany the new zoning.

### **Funding for the Arts**

As of the writing of this report the City had not applied for any special funding for the arts such as the Ohio Arts Council funding proposed by the Master Plan. Such funding would likely be dependent on the completion of some related projects such as the amphitheater in Bitzer Park.

## **Corridors and Connections**

The Corridors and Connections category proposed streetscape enhancements for primary corridors and strategies to enhance connectivity between key City assets. The proposed strategies encompassed improving the accessibility and function of the City’s street network to transform downtown into a commercial, shopping, and recreational destination by calming traffic, improving pedestrian accessibility, and connecting to wayfinding systems. In addition to the priorities identified by the Master Plan, in 2020 the City has undertaken significant projects to improve the major connecting streets identified by the Master Plan including work on Portage, Main, Applegate, Easthill/55<sup>th</sup>, and East Maple.

### **Improving Walkability of Core**

The Master Plan proposed a series of improvements to the City’s downtown core including street trees, improved crosswalks at the intersections with Maple and Charlotte, street furniture, and integral greenery such as flower beds.

Little progress has been made on this goal. The downtown core still lacks a meaningful number of street trees or furniture and the City has not pursued any additional greening. These beautification projects would require room in the City’s narrow right of way and are likely dependent on the narrowing of Main Street discussed in the next section. The only noticeable improvement has been the improved crosswalk, per the Master Plan, at the intersection of Maple and Main Streets.

### **Calming Main Street Traffic**

The Master Plan called for a major traffic study of Main Street to consider effective traffic calming, reducing the speed limit, and narrowing lanes to provide for on-street parking, improved accesses and visibility for businesses, and increased pedestrian safety.

As of the writing of this report, the City has not completed a major traffic study of Main Street or taken any significant steps to calm traffic or reduce speed. As a result, no efforts have been made to propose placing parking along Main Street or narrowing it. The process for pursuing this priority is discussed further on page 8.

### **Improving Bicycle Access**

The Master Plan suggested the creation of bicycle-friendly streets by adding bike lanes or shared bike and car lanes called “sharrows” on major routes through the City.

As of the writing of this report, the City has not completed any new bicycle lanes or “sharrows” as proposed by the Master Plan possibly due to the narrow rights-of-way in the City.



## **Development Potential**

The Development Potential category identified development guidelines and potential development sites as well as proposed site plans and programming ideas for strategic sites that have the highest development potential. The plan focused on seven strategic development sites and how they could be developed in the future. The primary economic goal is to encourage capital investment and create high job density with a priority on high wage jobs.

### **Control of Development Sites**

The Master Plan called for the City to secure control of key development sites through land banking or specified zoning regulations to ensure future development in a way that will best benefit the City.

At the time of writing the Master Plan, the City had already acquired the Arrowhead Golf Course and in early 2020 the City Acquired 1447 N Main Street, known as the old Kmart lot, and is in the process of acquiring the adjoining developable lots. The status of each key development site is discussed in further detail on page 6.

### **Parking Plan**

In anticipation of significant downtown development, the Master Plan proposed the creation of a comprehensive parking plan for the downtown core.

As of the writing of this report, no comprehensive parking plan has been written. Parking for the Hoover District has been expanded behind YMCA by the developer, and St. Paul's church has recently completed repaving of their additional parking. In addition, the potential locations for public parking identified in the plan are still, theoretically, available.

### **Development RFP's**

After securing control of key development sites the Master plan calls for the City to issue Requests for Proposal (RFP) to developers for the future of these sites.

Currently, the Department of Administration is working on an RFP or similar document for the Kmart property.

### **General Economic Development**

The final priority identified by the Master Plan was for the continued general economic development of the City. In the pursuit of this priority, the City has begun efforts to establish several special development districts and initiatives within the City to encourage economic development.

#### Community Reinvestment Area (CRA)

In June 2020 the City reestablished a CRA for the first time in four years. The citywide CRA provides property tax incentives to property owners who improve their property value. The CRA applies to both commercial and residential properties. While the commercial incentives are designed to promote economic development the resident incentives were specifically crafted to target under-valued and/or blighted housing and encourage land assembly into larger parcels to boost property values as was proposed by the Master Plan.



### Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA)

In Fall 2020 the Administration will request City Council consider the creation of a DORA along Main Street. The DORA would allow customers to purchase alcoholic beverages, such as a Pav's milkshake, and take it with them as they continue to explore and patronize the downtown core. The DORA would also include areas to stop and enjoy the City such as Bitzer Park.

### Community Entertainment District (CED)

The Administration is also working on a proposal for a CED to cover the Main Street Corridor. The CED would allow the City to help businesses obtain liquor permits. The District will make it easier for developers to allocate space for restaurants and bars, and make moving to North Canton a more profitable investment for businesses. Presently development requiring liquor permits is limited by North Canton's status as a dry City. The City is also considering asking voters to change this status in the 2021 election.

### Downtown Redevelopment District (DRD)

The DRD has been in development for several years. City leadership delayed the implementation of the program in order to take full advantage of the incentives which only last for a set period. The eight proposed DRDs, covering much of the Hoover District and the downtown core, and would offer significant property tax incentives for development. In exchange, property owners would pay property tax deferrals towards the maintenance and improvement of the DRD area to make it more accessible and appealing to customers via City infrastructure. The DRD will likely return to Council for consideration in late 2020 or 2021.

### Rental Registration

In addition to special development districts, the Department of Administration is also working on creating a rental registration ordinance to ensure the proper maintenance of rental properties which have been steadily increasing in the City. This legislation has been in progress for over a year, having been initially introduced and then retracted in 2019. Rental registration has currently been put on hold due to concerns surrounding COVID-19 and in-home inspections.

## **Specific Development Sites**

### The Hoover District

The Hoover District, anchored by the old brick factory, is privately owned and has been awaiting redevelopment for more than a decade. The project has, at various times, encountered problems and setbacks including air quality concerns from the EPA and the loss of grants and tax credits. As of the writing of this report, the EPA has given permission for development to proceed, but there has been no significant progress and no clear indication from the developer of when the project will proceed. The property is included in the CRA, and the proposed DORA, DRD, and CED boundaries in an effort to encourage development. The site will also be included in the new Main Street zoning districts.

### North Main Parking Lots

Two large parking lots located off the intersection of Charlotte and Main are part of the Hoover District. The lots are currently undeveloped and partially used by Diebold-Nixdorf who occupied the former Suarez Corp. building in 2019. The site is included in the CRA and the proposed DORA, CED, and DRD as well as Main Street zoning districts.



### North Main Former Spitzer Auto Lot

Across Main Street from the North Main Parking Lots is a former car dealership that has sat vacant for more than a decade. The property is still privately owned and undeveloped but is included in the CRA and proposed DRDs, zoning districts, DORA, and CED.

### Charlotte Former Middle School

The Master Plan proposed several uses for the former middle school located just behind City Hall on Charlotte Street including green space, parking, and retail development. The site is still owned by the North Canton School district and is currently green space utilized by both the community and the nearby YMCA child care as, essentially, a park. In early 2020 North Canton Schools passed a construction levy in order to construct a new kindergarten through second-grade school building on the site. The site is included in the CRA and the proposed DRD and new Main Street zoning.

### Arrowhead Golf Course

Arrowhead Golf Course was acquired by the City in the early 2000s and has remained a golf course. The City currently operates the course and facilities through a management agreement and no actionable plans to alternatively develop the property have been discussed. Any alternative development would require rezoning the property from its current designation as park/institutional. The course is located in the CRA and is expected to be profitable for the year 2020.

### Waterside Center

No significant progress or effort has been made to develop the former Waterside Center although the developer, Waterside Development Company of Stark County, set up by Bob DeHoff and Bill Lemmon, has expressed some interest in proceeding. Both the City and State invested in the site in 2008, prior to the Master Plan, helping to create improved road access. The site is included in the CRA and new zoning districts.

### Kmart and Surrounding Undeveloped Parcels

The Kmart property (1447 N Main St.) was acquired by the City in early 2020 as part of land banking efforts. The City is also looking to acquire the two adjacent parcels identified in the Master Plan for development: 10002818 and 10002584. The site is included in the CRA and may be included in the new main street zoning. At the present no significant development has taken place although it has become home to the North Canton Farmer's Market and the Department of Administration is in the process of developing an RFP, focusing on capital investment and job growth, as suggested by the Master Plan.

## **Priorities Moving Forward**

The highest priorities for the City moving forward should be those initiatives in line with the master plan and started but are yet to be completed including; the zoning rewrite, DORA, CED, DRD, and RFP for the Kmart property. These initiatives are already well underway and would require little to no additional resource dedication. Most if not all of these programs are very achievable by the end of the calendar year.

Looking further forward into 2021 the most significant proposal from the Master Plan that should be deeply considered is the narrowing, calming of traffic, and creation of on-street parking for Main Street. The City should seriously consider if this is still a priority to be pursued. Making such changes to Main Street would certainly make the area more pedestrian-friendly and on-street parking would make it much more attractive for businesses and easier for residents to take advantage of the downtown core. The first step towards this project would be to complete a traffic study and, using the data collected, begin the design process. In addition, pursuing the physical alterations would take a significant amount of funding City leadership should consider setting aside resources to accomplish the project either in the next budget cycle or saving funds over several years. However,

