

PONTIAC RESOURCE TEAM REPORT
OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN
APRIL 15-17, 2003

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
GENERAL DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION ISSUES	6
ORGANIZATION.....	9
OBSERVATIONS.....	9
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	11
PROMOTIONS	19
OBSERVATIONS.....	19
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	21
ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING.....	24
OBSERVATIONS.....	25
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	26
DESIGN	34
DESIGN COMMITTEE	34
OBSERVATIONS.....	35
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	37
CONCLUSION.....	47
APPENDICES.....	48
APPENDIX A. BACKGROUND.....	49
APPENDIX B. RESOURCE TEAM PERSONNEL	53

§ I. HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Main Street Oakland County (MSOC) and the National Main Street Center (NMSC) coordinated a resource team consultation in Pontiac, Michigan, on April 15-17, 2003. This consultation is a service provided to Main Street New Jersey communities engaged in comprehensive downtown revitalization according to the nationally recognized Main Street Four-Point Approach™ developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The resource team, comprising five commercial district revitalization professionals, evaluated the progress of Pontiac's Main Street program, presented observations of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the downtown district, and made recommendations for strengthening the downtown to ensure the Main Street organization continues to move forward in the right direction. The team's recommendations for implementing long-term, historic preservation-based revitalization and management goals for the downtown business district are presented in this report.

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 the City of Pontiac, the Pontiac Downtown Development Authority (DDA), the Pontiac Growth Group (PGG), local organizations, volunteers, and other significant stakeholders. The resource team bases its observations and advice on years of field experience with many different communities, but the citizens of Pontiac know their community best. Therefore, the selection of local revitalization projects and activities should be based on the community's priorities and what can realistically be accomplished.

The resource team report should be distributed at least to all Pontiac City Council members, appropriate city staff, and the DDA board of directors. Relevant sections should be distributed to each of the DDA Main Street committees, other volunteers, and to all resource team interviewees as deemed appropriate. The NMSC and MSOC will also distribute the report to various other city officials and staff. It is strongly recommended that all DDA board and Main Street committee members read the report, discuss the recommendations, and develop or adjust their annual and long-term work plans accordingly. At minimum, DDA staff and the board president should fully review this document and use it to guide the committee's actions and assess the DDA's progress in developing its Main Street program.

This report should not supplant the recommendations already provided in both the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report* and the *Preservation Development Initiative's (PDI) Pontiac Assessment Report*. These preceding reports provide important recommendations regarding the organization of the Main Street effort in Pontiac and how existing incentives and other community resources could be used more effectively in revitalizing the downtown. The *Pontiac Resource Team Report* supplements prior recommendations with advice on how to develop and build the other critical aspects of a truly comprehensive Main Street revitalization program.

Finally, it is important to note that MSOC and NMSC assistance does not end with this report. The resource team strongly encourages the DDA board of directors, committee members, and staff to contact MSOC and the NMSC, to discuss the contents of this report.

§ II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A resource team, assembled by the NMSC in partnership with MSOC, a program of the Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Division, visited downtown Pontiac on April 15-17, 2003. The team, comprising five commercial district revitalization professionals, recorded their observations and recommendations to assist the Pontiac DDA to formulate appropriate and comprehensive, historic preservation-based downtown revitalization strategies.

The following are the key recommendations presented to the Pontiac community during the on-site visit. The following sections of this report expand on these and related issues in further detail. All recommendations are based on the conditions and opportunities evident in downtown Pontiac at the time of the resource team visit.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Exercise DDA vested powers to the fullest extent to implement the Main Street Four-Point Approach™.** Although the Pontiac DDA has been operating for many years, it has yet to completely exercise its vested powers, as determined and granted by state law. For many years, the DDA has been organized essentially as a department under the Pontiac Growth Group, which for better or worse, often viewed the DDA as a funding mechanism rather than as a true operating authority. For the Pontiac community to have a favorable chance in using the Main Street methodology to revitalize its downtown, it must insist the DDA operates with full autonomy. Emphasis must shift on shaping and managing downtown Pontiac's future through the Main Street Four-Points before enacting public improvements projects.
- **Involve the community.** In addition to achieving autonomy, the DDA must encourage and solicit community involvement in all levels of its organization. Recent decisions regarding downtown infrastructure and building projects were made with little participation from the public, or from the DDA board. Perhaps one major reason why past development plans and projects were not implemented is because downtown and other community stakeholders were not engaged in the process. The DDA now recognizes that successful implementation of the Main Street approach relies on active community participation, including all racial and ethnic groups, residents, and business and property owners, in DDA/Main Street committee work and decision-making.
- **Develop strategic partnerships.** As the Pontiac DDA transitions to full autonomy and embraces the Main Street approach as its revitalization methodology, it should also remember the importance of forming strong and effective partnerships with the City of Pontiac and other critical organizations and agencies like the Pontiac Downtown Business Association. Dynamic partnerships are crucial since the DDA will rely on other players to help implement the revitalization program. Of course, without leadership and enthusiastic support from the City of Pontiac for the new Main Street effort, chances for successful implementation will significantly diminish. Last, the DDA, the city, and the Pontiac Growth Group must determine which specific roles and relationships each entity will have as the DDA moves toward full autonomy.

- **Build a comprehensive downtown promotions program.** One of downtown Pontiac's particular strengths is its current line-up of successful special events like the Arts, Beats and Eats Festival, which is a regional attraction. With this current slate of promotions, the DDA and the community has the opportunity to add new events to the calendar, especially ones that appeal to other segments of the Pontiac consumer market. In addition, the DDA should begin working with its downtown stakeholders to develop other aspects of promotions that involve branding, marketing, and advertising programs.
- **Implement the 2001 Downtown Development Plan.** As already discussed in the National Trust's *Preservation Development Initiative Pontiac Assessment Report*, the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* is a thorough and comprehensive document that provides rational and appropriate recommendations regarding downtown's future land use and other infrastructure improvements. The DDA can choose to follow some or all of the plan's recommendations, but it should be cognizant that many of its land use and design recommendations cannot be entirely supported by Pontiac's current zoning regulations. These regulations must be reexamined and revised.
- **Improve downtown Pontiac's physical environment.** Even with a fair amount of building rehabilitations that have already occurred in downtown Pontiac over the years (some financed through the existing façade improvement program), the DDA should continue to find new ways to encourage more private-sector improvements. The *PDI Pontiac Assessment Report* suggested using TIF monies as part of a financing package to encourage large-scale building rehabilitations. A variety of financial incentives (federal, state, county, and local) are available for redevelopment projects. Finally, while there is substantial public support for developing underused spaces in and around downtown Pontiac, the DDA should initially concentrate on facilitating other small and large-scale historic preservation projects.
- **Fill vacancies and diversify the business mix.** Make forming an effective business development program a highest priority in the next work plan. Since Pontiac is located in the middle of one of the wealthiest areas of Oakland County, there is no doubt new businesses downtown can capture some of that spending power. Also think about how to attract minority businesses to serve existing markets inside Pontiac.

§ III. GENERAL DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION ISSUES

- **Consolidate downtown revitalization and management responsibilities.**

Already mentioned in the *PDI Pontiac Assessment Report*, downtown revitalization and management responsibilities are dispersed between several different agencies within the City of Pontiac and the Pontiac Growth Group, in particular. Successful implementation of the Main Street program requires giving the DDA control, with additional degrees of influence, over all aspects of managing downtown Pontiac—including parking, special event management, financing public improvements, and facilitating real estate development.

- **Transition to a working DDA board of directors and fully operating Main Street committees.**

The DDA Main Street committees are becoming fully-operational with their own volunteers and detailed strategic work plans. Despite this, the level of activity and commitment of each board director remains uncertain. Only approximately half of the DDA board members fully participated in the resource team visit and in other technical assistance visits in the past year. Strong leadership of a fully committed board of directors is absolutely critical to the Main Street effort.

- **Secure additional dedicated sources of operating revenues.**

One of the most complex organizational issues facing the DDA is to secure additional financing mechanisms to support its growing list of activities and projects. It still must be decided if the DDA should establish a new TIF district corresponding to expanded DDA district boundaries and if that new TIF district would co-exist and operate within the established TIFA #2 controlled by the Pontiac Growth Group. Transitioning all TIF within a new, expanded DDA district, as provided for in the DDA law, is vital for success.

- **Improve communication and public relations for the Pontiac DDA.**

In the past, the DDA has not actively communicated its deliberations and activities with the public. The structure of the Pontiac Growth Group hampered the DDA's ability to conduct its own public relations. Effective public relations and external communication will be key to garnering public support and participation in the revitalization process.

- **Conduct additional downtown market research.**

Recruit new businesses to fill the vacant storefronts in downtown Pontiac; this is a priority for the DDA, the Pontiac Downtown Business Association (DBA), and the City of Pontiac. While the Economic Restructuring Committee is anxious to begin recruiting, no appropriate business development strategies, based on market research, have been developed to guide the process. Market research already provided in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* can help the committee begin formulating strategies, but the committee will need to supplement that work with additional consumer surveys and other analyses.

- **Make historic preservation projects a priority.**

Pontiac's recent acceptance into both the MSOC program and the National Trust's Preservation Development Initiative demonstrated the community's recognition that historic preservation can play a significant role in downtown revitalization. However, it appears that

community leaders are more concerned with encouraging and influencing new development in and around downtown rather than promoting the rehabilitation of existing historic buildings. Improving and finding adaptive uses for existing buildings is the first step in showing the development community that downtown Pontiac is a worthwhile place to invest. In the long run, this will encourage developers and investors to build the new infill development when it is needed and appropriate.

- **Establish an effective downtown Pontiac design management and incentive program.**
Encouraging good downtown building façade and storefront improvements requires effective design management and incentive programs. The Pontiac DDA already has a relatively new façade grant program; but, it is unclear if the program has funded many projects and if applicants are required to obtain design assistance prior to grant approval. For the highest-quality end results, it is necessary to provide design assistance for both large- and small-scale projects. The DDA should provide the funds for the façade grant program, which now come from the Pontiac Growth Group/TIFA, once it is empowered and funded with all TIF within the DDA district.
- **Establish a simple and open development process.**
In the past, development deals were often done behind closed doors and out of the public view, which often resulted in projects that were not in the best interest of downtown Pontiac. Therefore, the process for recruiting and securing developers and shaping the use and design of new development must be open and transparent to protect the downtown’s best interests. Secondly, simplify the process for prospective developers and investors to prevent delays and cost overruns, which can jeopardize a project’s implementation. A confusing and convoluted permitting process was often mentioned as a significant obstacle to new development.
- **Revise current downtown zoning district regulations.**
Downtown Pontiac, as defined in the *2001 Development Plan* as the Woodward Avenue Loop, consists of two zoning districts. Both districts have similar use-restrictions, but the C-3 district allows auto-oriented and “dirty uses” downtown like drive-throughs and car maintenance facilities. These uses in the C-3 district contradict the development plan’s goal for a more pedestrian-friendly environment. A solution could entail phasing out the C-3 district for a single new zoning district to promote and meet the development plan’s land use goals.
- **Build and maintain effective partnerships for staging downtown events.**
As the Pontiac DDA consolidates its authority over managing and implementing a downtown promotions calendar, it must also work diligently to establish good working relationships with merchants, sponsors, community organizations, and other entities that will be developing or participating in events with the Promotions Committee. Ultimately, the Promotions Committee will become the coordinating partner for staging all downtown activities.
- **Create an effective downtown Pontiac marketing program.**
There is a lack of ongoing downtown Pontiac marketing efforts, with the exception of the Arts, Beats & Eats; Woodward Dream Cruise; and other music/entertainment events, which provide great publicity for the community. The DDA will need to develop and implement a

wide-range of marketing activities, some which should be associated with events and others that are not associated with events, to highlight downtown Pontiac's unique assets and attract new customer markets.

- **Change the perception of high crime downtown and address the homeless problem.**

Recent statistics from the Pontiac Police Department show a decline in the downtown district crime rate in the past year; however, most resource team interviewees claimed crime is still a significant factor for the lag in new downtown investment. Other interviewees maintain that the persistent presence of homeless people and panhandlers also deters shoppers from coming downtown. While the resource team observed that these issues are not as severe or problematic relative to other concerns facing downtown Pontiac, the DDA hasn't made any attempt to team with organizations, like downtown social service agencies, to deal with the problem.

- **Make the Woodward Avenue Loop pedestrian-friendly.**

Undoubtedly, the Woodward Avenue Loop is a significant impediment to promoting pedestrian circulation from the surrounding neighborhoods to the downtown. The *2001 Development Plan* outlines the introduction of a landscaped median as one possible physical enhancement scheme. Regardless of which improvement scheme is adopted, redeveloping the Woodward Avenue Loop should be a top priority.

§ IV. ORGANIZATION

The Main Street Four-Point Approach™ is not only a methodology for revitalizing traditional downtown commercial districts, but it is also, more importantly, a process of building consensus and involving the community in making the most appropriate decisions for the downtown's future. The Main Street methodology stresses a grassroots-level involvement where the Pontiac DDA's board of directors works with the community to develop a compelling vision for downtown Pontiac, and establishes a mechanism, like volunteer committees, to adopt and implement strategies to turn vision into reality. An aspect common to all successful Main Street programs is they are volunteer-driven and community-supported. Indeed, downtown Pontiac belongs to many stakeholders in and outside the downtown district, including its citizens. If the DDA does not engage the community now, the unique opportunity to transform downtown Pontiac may be squandered. The DDA is challenged to rise above its past and become the leaders of the revitalization process.

To lead the revitalization of Pontiac, the DDA has to build a strong and efficient organization. It will need to improve its organizational structure and assume the additional responsibilities of program administration, personnel supervision, volunteer recruitment, public relations and communication, and budget management. These latter activities will be handled by both the DDA board of directors and the Organization Committee. Although every committee is important, the success of the other committees relies on the effectiveness of the Organization Committee and the DDA board.

Also, note the DDA's overarching mission is inherent in its name: To be the single organization and authority that leads the revitalization effort for downtown Pontiac. The DDA's lack of autonomy to execute its proper roles and responsibilities has already been discussed at length within the *PDI Pontiac Assessment Report* and the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report*. The DDA exists to properly manage and facilitate the revitalization process on behalf of downtown Pontiac. A number of tools and techniques, like tax-increment financing (TIF), have been provided by the state of Michigan, but the DDA, unlike the majority of downtown development authorities in the state, has no direct access to use all TIF revenues in the DDA district. For the DDA to be in the right position to implement a successful Main Street program, it needs access to all available tools and techniques on behalf of downtown Pontiac.

OBSERVATIONS

- **A detached and disengaged DDA board of directors.**

Board member attendance and participation in resource team interview sessions and other activities was relatively weak. In fact, a distinct and noticeable segment of the board has not actively participated in most of the training and orientation sessions offered by MSOC since Pontiac was accepted into the Main Street program. It is uncertain whether some board members are disinterested in Main Street or could not attend the training sessions during the times offered. However, others more involved board members disproportionately shoulder most of the responsibility of Main Street program development.

- **Board meeting times and attendance requirements.**

Related to the above observation, full attendance at regular board meetings has apparently been an ongoing problem. Members of the DDA board want to include new attendance requirements within the DDA's corporate by-laws to improve operations and provide more accountability to the public. It should be noted, however, that the board generally meets twice a month, according to the by-laws requirement, which is quite different from most other Oakland County DDAs that meet once a month. The Pontiac DDA board is also investigating changing the regular meeting time to accommodate people who can only meet after 5:00 p.m. Board meeting times can be changed by majority vote of the Authority at the meeting immediately preceding the regular meeting. The by-laws are unclear regarding whether the board of directors meets at 3:00 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month, or if the total membership of the Authority meets at those times.

- **Boundaries of DDA and TIFA districts.**

From the resource team members' perspective, it is hard to understand how the DDA and TIFA districts work with each other and which agency has the authority to use the revenues they generate. Another more straightforward observation is that there are too many separate and overlapping taxing districts operating in downtown Pontiac. The downtown development districts, known as DDA #1 and DDA #2, coexist with one of the Tax-Increment Financing Authority's (TIFA) districts, known as TIFA #2, which considerably overlaps DDA #1 in downtown's southern sector. The resource team also examined two maps of all the taxing districts downtown—a City of Pontiac map and an Oakland County map—each from roughly the same time (summer 2002), but with different district boundaries.

- **Phoenix Plaza improvements and the DDA/Main Street budget.**

According to the *Special Report on Tax Increment Financing*, as part of the *PDI Pontiac Assessment Report*, the two downtown development districts, DDA #1 and DDA #2, generated a total of \$2,344,768 in revenue for fiscal year 2002-2003 for the Pontiac DDA. However, the DDA is currently paying off debt for the new Phoenix Plaza improvement; in fiscal year 2002-2003, this amounted to \$1,445,000, which will be paid from DDA #1 funds. Approximately \$17,800 from DDA #2 funds will be used in debt service payment. In short, a total of \$881,968 remains from both downtown development taxing districts. It was made clear to the resource team that the "less surplus carry-forward" in DDA #2 was a one-time arrangement, so the \$539,068 listed will actually be available to the DDA board in fiscal year 2003-2004 (hence the discrepancy between this total and the total listed in the *Special Report*).

- **Politics**

There were conflicting reports from observers within Pontiac that the DDA was persuaded by political influences outside the board of directors to sign an agreement pledging its revenues to pay for the Phoenix Plaza improvements, even though the community had not identified such improvements as a priority. Nevertheless, the Pontiac DDA cannot realistically be expected to take on a full revitalization agenda if it is paying for unessential projects of other agencies—especially those that do not meet specific priorities set by the community. With an operating budget of approximately \$880,000 to leverage on behalf of a large urban downtown, the DDA must control the revenues it lawfully generates.

- **Proposed expansion of TIFA #2.**

The resource team had learned that the Pontiac Growth Group has tried, or will continue to try, to expand the TIFA #2 boundaries beyond most of DDA #2 boundaries toward the downtown's northern sector. This expansion could prohibit the DDA's ability to establish its own TIF district in the future. The downtown area north of Michigan State Route 59 (Huron Street) and within the Woodward Loop and its fringe, other than what is currently part of DDA #2, has been approved by the Pontiac Growth Group and the Pontiac City Council as an expansion of TIFA #2 capture area. However, final action and implementation on TIFA #2 expansion has not occurred yet since adequate property descriptions and signed resolutions have not been provided to Oakland County. The Growth Group's initiative to expand TIFA #2 started before the completion of the *PDI Assessment Report* and the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report*, which offer a primary recommendation to expand the DDA boundaries and establish a new DDA/TIF district that would extend to and throughout those new boundaries (the Woodward Avenue Loop and Fringe). As previously noted, a transition plan is necessary to eventually place all TIF within the DDA district under the jurisdiction of the DDA as soon as possible. Use of TIF funds will be critical, if not mandatory, for tangible results from a variety of private investment and public infrastructure projects coordinated by the DDA. Other communities have successfully developed a legal agreement to accomplish that objective.

- **The DDA executive director.**

The current director of the Pontiac DDA is an excellent asset of the organization and downtown Pontiac. The director thoroughly understands the Main Street approach; is eager to work with the community; and has excellent rapport with downtown merchants, property owners, city officials, residents, and other stakeholders.

- **Committees established.**

The four Main Street committees have been long established and working to finish work plans and executing actual projects. The Downtown Business Association (DBA) played an important role in first organizing the committees when Pontiac applied for designation from MSOC. However, it is unclear if the DBA has any continuing administrative or organizing role with the committees now that the DDA has been formally accepted into MSOC and taken over committee supervision. More volunteers and more detailed work plans are needed for each committee.

- **Strong working relationship with DBA.**

Besides the committees, the DBA has become a strong ally and has worked with the DDA for Main Street designation as well as advocate the interests of downtown business and property owners. Many DBA board and general members are on each of the DDA's Main Street committees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation One: Consolidate downtown management authority.

Both the *Main Street Needs Assessment* and *PDI Assessment* reports make the central recommendation for the Pontiac DDA to consolidate, and in some cases, expand its authority to

handle and coordinate all downtown revitalization activities. Both reports document how different downtown management functions are spread among various agencies and that not one organization assumes full responsibility for implementing a revitalization agenda for downtown Pontiac. Almost all successful downtown revitalization programs, downtown development authorities, and nonprofit Main Street programs alike, have directly attributed their success to a distinct sense of autonomy. Achieving full autonomy, as allowed to extent under Michigan state law, will take some time as DDA leaders work with the Growth Group, the City of Pontiac, and other entities to craft agreements and transition plans necessary to achieve autonomy. This change will involve issues that include revenue control, budget management, the Parking Commission, special event management, and infrastructure improvements. Such issues should be resolved early so that they will not severely impact the progress of DDA revitalization projects later. (For more information, refer to the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report*, pages 10-11 and the *PDI Pontiac Assessment Report*, pages 21-22.)

Recommendation Two: Expand DDA boundaries and create a new TIF capture area under DDA control.

It should be noted that it is a common practice for DDAs to have their own dedicated TIF revenue stream. As previously recommended in the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report*, the DDA is strongly encouraged to expand its downtown development district boundaries to the remainder of the Woodward Avenue Loop and fringe area as documented as the “Green Zone” in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*. In turn, ideally, the DDA should establish its own dedicated TIF district concurrent with the expanded DDA operating boundaries. Before this can be implemented, TIFA should agree to rescind its proposal to expand TIFA #2 and resolve which agency will pay the outstanding obligations under TIFA #2 within the DDA’s current boundaries. At the time of the resource team visit, there have been no proposed projects to be funded under the TIFA #2 expansion. Therefore, it is feasible to proceed with the DDA boundary expansion and establish an entirely new TIF encompassing the “Green Zone.” The DDA should retain its own legal counsel to create the transition plan (legal agreement) for the DDA to receive all TIF within the DDA district, which would include honoring the payoff of all agreed upon existing bonded projects within the DDA district.

Another possible scenario to secure a permanent source of TIF revenues is to request and lobby for control of TIFA #2 revenues generated within the current DDA boundaries. In return, the DDA would then be responsible for the debt repayments of outstanding projects located in its boundaries—most notably is the Phoenix Plaza improvement project. The latter scenario is currently being pursued as a solution to the TIF funding issue by the Pontiac DDA. However, an expanded “Green Zone” TIF is in the best long-term goal.

Recommendation Three: Revise DDA corporate by-laws to achieve operation efficiency.

The DDA board recognizes it needs to revise its corporate by-laws to operate more effectively, particularly regarding board member participation. Clarify key aspects of DDA/Main Street organizational policy to emphasize having an informed, working board. Consider implementing the following recommendations:

- **Include new by-laws for board directors.** Dedicate a new article to the operations of the DDA board of directors. It should address several items, including the number of board members; roles, responsibilities and expectations; how to remove board members and fill

vacancies; terms of office; and meeting policies regarding dates, times, constitution of quorum, issuance of agenda, and so forth. The current Pontiac DDA by-laws do not thoroughly address these issues in Articles II and III.

- **Set the number of DDA board members.** According to the Michigan state law governing downtown development authorities, no less than eight but no more than 12 members can be appointed to a DDA board of directors. State law allows corporate by-laws to establish a fixed number of board members within the range given above. The total number of directors, including officers and non-officers, should be an odd number in order to break ties, ensure quorums, and control board size.
- **Add attendance requirements.** By-law revisions should address how many meetings a board member can miss each year. Perhaps between two and four excused or unexcused absences could be allowed each year.
- **Committees.** A new by-laws sections should be included describing the roles of the Main Street committees in the operations of the DDA. Specifically, this section should stipulate a chairperson will manage each committee, and require each committee to develop a work plan and have a line-item in the DDA’s budget.
- **Personnel requirements and supervision.** Generally, by-laws about staff should at least include the requirements as mandated by the DDA state law and stipulation that the executive director be bonded. Also, staff should be evaluated yearly by the board according to an accepted job description and agreement. In addition, board officers can be removed by no less than 75 percent of the entire membership of the Authority as opposed to a quorum of the board. The board should clarify what “entire membership of the Authority” actually means in the context of this issue. Does the board of directors actually represent the “entire membership of the Authority”?

Recommendation Four: Sponsor community forums within the coming year.

Improving communication among the DDA and stakeholders will be critical in the coming year. Active communication and public relations helps build a constituency and support for the DDA’s agenda. To accomplish this, sponsor and organize two community forums—schedule one within six months from the publication of the *Pontiac Resource Team Report*, and schedule another 12 months after.

Use the first community forum to invite the Pontiac community to offer input about their vision for the downtown’s future since a true community visioning session was not part of developing the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*. In addition, the DDA board should provide a more in-depth explanation of the Main Street Four Points, repeat the resource team presentation, and describe the DDA’s current work in downtown revitalization and its first-year work plan. Last, present volunteer opportunities for projects currently listed in the work plan.

For the second forum, invite the community back to showcase the progress in work plan implementation. Show them how their participation in the first forum has translated into actual projects, volunteer opportunities, and progress. It is important to hold these forums in the immediate term to take advantage of the momentum generated from the resource team and PDI projects.

Recommendation Five: Complete work planning process.

The Pontiac DDA, the downtown businesses, and all downtown stakeholders should work together to complete an annual work plan, a process that was started one month before the resource team visit. The importance of good work plans cannot be underestimated. They outline the necessary steps the Pontiac DDA/Main Street program must take to complete them and estimate how much money and volunteer resources will be needed. Furthermore, work plans are the road maps to strategically addressing the revitalization priorities in downtown Pontiac.

At the time of the resource team visit, the committee work plans were not thoroughly completed. Work plans need to list each activity and corresponding task assignments for volunteers, timelines for implementation and completion, and project cost estimates. Each committee should now focus on finishing these remaining details. Once completed, forward a final draft to the DDA board for review. The review should focus on whether committee activities will meet the revitalization goal(s) the board has established and if they will meet the overall vision the community has established. The DDA board should be mindful that the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* includes worthwhile projects that can be included in future work plans, especially for the Design Committee.

A typical Main Street program should not take longer than four months to finish and formally adopt a work plan. For the timely completion of work plans, projects and activities without assigned volunteers or funds from a dedicated committee budget line item should be marked as low priorities until resources to complete them are located. These projects should be marketed to the community through volunteer orientation sessions and other program marketing efforts.

Recommendation Six: Undertake volunteer development activities.

Seeking new volunteers requires innovation and creativity to attract new people, especially since many other responsibilities or even other organizations compete for busy peoples' time. However, the same volunteer core cannot do all the work so a strong and committed level of involvement and neighborhood participation must be built now. Reach out strategically to find people who can and are willing to volunteer. Consider the following:

- **Committee chairs as volunteer recruiters.** Though almost everyone involved in a Main Street revitalization effort is responsible for recruiting new volunteers; committee chairs can also have the responsibility of finding volunteers as they manage their committee's work planning process.
- **Partner with other organizations/agencies.** Think strategically how other community organizations can assume work plan projects using their volunteer pools.
- **Create a job list.** Use the work plan to create a list of volunteer jobs. This list should be distributed to everyone so that they can always be thinking about matching jobs with volunteers. Print the job list in the regular newsletter, newsletters of other organizations, or other local media outlets.
- **Explore volunteer partnerships with Pontiac religious institutions.** An alliance between the DDA and the Ministerial Fellowship, an existing network of Pontiac area religious institutions, may be mutually beneficial since some of the local religious leaders are already involved with downtown Pontiac's revitalization. The DDA Organization Committee should target a few meetings of the Ministerial Fellowship as well as the bulletins and sentinels of individual religious institutions.

- **Work with neighborhood block clubs.** Encourage any neighborhood block club, particularly those in neighborhoods adjacent to downtown Pontiac, to participate in Pontiac DDA activities.
- **Ask!** Too often, committee leaders rule out potential volunteers because they believe the person is busy, involved with other organizations, or too tired. Some people never get the opportunity to say yes because they were not asked. Ask friends, professional colleagues, neighbors, and members of social and civic clubs.

Once new volunteers are recruited, the Organization Committee should consider later developing a cycle of managing volunteers that may include activities such as conducting volunteer job interviews, writing job descriptions, orientations and training sessions, and recognition for their participation and good work. These activities will help develop a strong Pontiac DDA volunteer program in which volunteers can continually be attracted for projects and current ones retained.

Recommendation Seven: Begin aggressive public relations activities to promote the Pontiac DDA/Main Street Program.

Main Street program development is a never-ending task of keeping the community informed about issues facing downtown Pontiac. An effective outreach program will greatly aid in developing lasting financial and volunteer support. The Organization Committee should consider the following suggestions:

- **Speakers' bureau.** Pontiac DDA should try to make monthly presentations to different neighborhood groups like social and civic organizations, schools and youth organizations, government entities, and other neighborhood associations. While the DDA executive director may be the primary speaker at all engagements, a board member may want to go along as evidence that it is truly a volunteer organization. These neighborhood groups should be engaged on a yearly basis to hear updates of work plans.

A possible speaking engagement might include taking an organization on a familiarization tour of projects in the downtown district. Contact all community groups first by sending them a letter of introduction with a survey—highlight Pontiac DDA goals and presentation availability. Ask them to complete the survey about their organization's goals, programs, meeting schedules, and officers. These surveys can form the beginnings of a volunteer database.

- **PowerPoint slide shows produced by the NMSC.** NMSC slide shows can help make these presentations visually interesting. Be sure to incorporate Pontiac slides to tell the story of progress. Tailor your talks to your audience—discuss projects of specific interest to them.
- **Newsletter.** An attractive newsletter can effectively communicate the Pontiac DDA's activities and progress. The staff has already started developing the graphic template for the newsletter. At some point, newsletter production can be turned over to the Organization Committee. Use the newsletter for:
 - education about the Main Street approach to commercial district revitalization
 - updates on Main Street members, contributors, work plan progress
 - event promotion
 - volunteer and contributor recognition
 - mailing lists for future activities
 - worthwhile technical information to property owners and merchants.

- **Community special events.** Information booths at highly attended events provide an opportunity to educate many new people about Main Street. Attract people’s attention with audio-visual displays and eye-catching materials that document the program’s progress.
- **Promotional items.** Buttons, t-shirts, shopping bags, and other promotional items can promote the Pontiac Main Street program in a fun way. Volunteers and storeowners can wear buttons to help spread downtown Pontiac pride.
- **News media.** Good media relations starts with writing good press releases, but does not end there. A potential work plan activity can be to develop a short file on neighborhood volunteers and residents, historic resources (historic photographs in particular), and Main Street activities. The story file can be used for a recurring Main Street column or radio show, or for feature stories. The DDA executive director and the board of directors should get to know the local newspaper publishers and radio program producers to learn their needs and perspectives. Once Main Street knows what the media needs, it can respond quickly and appropriately.
- **Volunteer education.** Develop an ongoing educational program for Main Street volunteers—they are public relations ambassadors.
- **Main Street brochure.** To provide neighborhood residents with more information than someone can give personally, create and distribute a general Pontiac DDA information piece. It doesn’t have to be a traditional, three-fold brochure—use whatever formats works best. It should at least contain a list of the entire board of directors, the standing committees, a membership form and the program’s overall goals.
- **Annual meeting and report.** A celebratory annual meeting is a great opportunity to show off progress. The event should be open to anyone in the neighborhood in addition to contributors, volunteers, and members. In addition, a brief report could be produced to summarize year-to-date accomplishments.
- **Use Pontiac DDA logo.** Aggressively use the DDA “Phoenix Rising” logo everywhere to way to brand the organization as the leader of the revitalization effort. The logo should be on all official organizational documents, marketing materials, and outreach publications to downtown stakeholders.

Recommendation Eight: Seek long-term DDA funding resources.

In the future, the Pontiac DDA will need to look at other funding mechanisms in order to finance more complex downtown revitalization and management activities such as marketing and streetscape maintenance. Implementing funding mechanisms such as a Business Improvement District (BID) or a Principal Shopping District (PSD) will take time and probably will not occur until substantial reinvestment occurs in downtown Pontiac; however, they remain the best options to pay for more sophisticated downtown management activities. This was also a recommendation in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*.

Recommendation Nine: Address community perception of downtown crime and the homeless.

Crime, safety, and the homeless were mentioned by several interviewees as significant issues for downtown Pontiac. However, information gathered by the resource team from the Pontiac Police Department show that actual crime incidents in downtown Pontiac have declined the last several

years. While the resource team believes that this is not a major obstacle for downtown revitalization, it is important, however, for the DDA to actively promote an image of safety to the community. This is an issue that must be addressed by all Main Street committees in terms of actual project implementation.

There are two reasons why residents, visitors, and stakeholders feel unsafe in downtown Pontiac. One is the appearance of the physical landscape, which was observed as unfriendly and devoid of consistently clean, up-to-date, well maintained pedestrian amenities. Vacant buildings and poor lighting also contribute negatively to the harsh environment. The upcoming implementation of a streetscaping project should enhance the appearance of the street and landscape and thus partially improve the image of the downtown. Secondly, many shoppers feel threatened by people who are not like them. The homeless, the mentally ill, transients and pan handlers, and youths are often perceived threats to safety and comfort.

In the last several years, however, many communities have successfully reduced downtown crime rates by forming partnerships with police and several community organizations. Main Street programs and community development corporations have been at the forefront in developing strategies to reduce and prevent crime. Their secret to success is not only the critical partnerships needed to get sufficiently organized and guarantee the participation of police and others, but also education efforts to inform downtown merchants and property owners about how to prevent crime on their own and specific initiatives to deter crime, such as graffiti control and “beat meetings” to exchange information on crime activities in the area. Examples of such activities include:

- **Police on bicycles.** Officers who patrol streets and public spaces on bicycles have proven to be successful crime deterrents. They are more mobile and can effectively conduct surveillance of the commercial district and rapidly pursue criminals down streets and alleys.
- **Police Substation.** The DDA should accept the invitation to partner with the Pontiac Police Department to build a downtown substation. Funding it seems to be the only obstacle to implementation.
- **Spare Change Campaigns.** Placards and flyers help educate people about the consequences giving panhandlers money. These campaigns also help reduce intimidation by panhandlers.
- **Special events.** Night Out events are often galvanize the neighborhood to participate in crime reduction activities and educate and update shoppers and residents on the status of crime and crime reduction activities. Pontiac already has a well organized Night Out celebration that should be continued and enhanced however possible.
- **Security network.** Main Street programs can work to develop a security network among police, Main Street, in-store security guards, and private security contractors that work with property owners and retailers. The purpose of the network is to exchange information on crime incidents and issues and to coordinate efforts. Of course, the security network could be expanded to include all stakeholders and other neighborhood groups as a corridor-wide watch meeting.
- **Additional police and security.** Several urban Main Street communities have adopted PSDs or BIDs to payroll additional police and private security personnel dedicated to the commercial district. Main Street organizations that have the benefit of PSD or BID revenues hire extra personnel to augment the level of municipal police presence, especially at night.

Besides these activities, Main Street programs can assume critical roles in addressing crime, some of which are simple and cost little. Suggestions include:

- **Coordinate communication.** Facilitate the development of the security network and develop new strategies for cooperative measures.
- **Educate downtown retailers and workers.** Print information and offer seminars on shoplifting, panhandling, graffiti, and theft to help retailers and their employees deal with these issues.
- **Project a positive image.** Enhance the corridors' appearance through improved cleanliness of public areas, encouraging building rehabilitation, quick removal of graffiti, dressing up vacant buildings, and better lighting of the street.¹

The communities listed below have downtown and neighborhood Main Street programs with effective crime reduction programs:

- **St. Paul, Minnesota.** Payne Avenue Main Street Program has teamed with the St. Paul Police Department and local businesses to make crime reduction one of its top priorities. The Payne Avenue Main Street program is a partnership between the Payne Arcade Business Association and the East Side Development Company.
- **Oakland, California.** Oakland's Fruitvale district is the home of the Unity Council, an economic development corporation that has been working in the predominately Hispanic-American neighborhood to provide affordable housing and other community development initiatives. One of its initiatives is the Fruitvale Main Street program, which has worked aggressively to implement the Main Street Four-Point Approach. It has added another point to the Oakland program: Cleanliness and safety. Activities have included forming strong partnerships between Oakland Police and the Public Works departments, implementing an aggressive litter and graffiti abatement program, reducing the number of pay phones in the commercial district, and providing workshops to merchants and property owners on securing buildings and measures to reduce shoplifting.
- **Algiers Point, Louisiana.** In 1998, Algiers Point produced its first "Night Out Against Crime" event as a way to raise people's awareness and involvement efforts in the community to fight crime. The event was organized in the form of a small festival with Zydeco music and food and drinks. Government officials participated in the event—including state senators, city council members, and police officers. The event has been successful over the last couple of years, and reduced the community's crime rate by 20 percent.

¹ Excerpts taken from *Main Street News*, December 1990

§ V. PROMOTIONS

Downtown Pontiac’s physical characteristics—historic buildings of various eras, construction, and scale; relatively large parking structures and plazas; wide streets and a high-volume traffic “loop” surrounding the downtown district; and examples of adaptive use projects—are consistent with other large city and urban environments that reflect an evolution from historic beginnings, through urban renewal, to today’s downtown. The existing downtown business mix features a concentration of offices, restaurants, and bars and nightclubs. There are less retail establishments and the existing stores are largely undefined in terms of collective niches or clusters. By night, downtown Pontiac is transformed into an entertainment destination primarily for older teens and young adults.

One strength of downtown Pontiac is it continues to serve as the community’s “center stage” for festivals and special events. Major festivals, including the annual Woodward Dream Cruise and Arts, Beats & Eats events, attract tens of thousands of people. Smaller-scale events, including several ethnic celebrations, draw smaller crowds throughout the summer months.

An effective marketing and promotions program for downtown Pontiac will recognize the district’s assets—and its limitations—and will effectively evolve to capitalize on changes stemming from ongoing downtown revitalization and redevelopment efforts. In its current state, downtown Pontiac’s best opportunities to establish and nurture a strong position in the marketplace appear to revolve around promoting the downtown as a fun, safe, and exciting place to work and visit. This strategy points to marketing and promotion efforts that build on the existing calendar of events, which introduce smaller-scale events for daytime employees and Pontiac residents of all ages, and public relations to publicize positive changes.

Long-term marketing and promotions strategies should evolve with positive changes occurring in the downtown. The successful implementation of Pontiac DDA design and economic restructuring strategies, for example, could work to create and promote a more robust retail environment and increased downtown residential population. As these types of changes occur, DDA marketing and promotion strategies should incorporate appropriate retail events and image-building efforts. The recommendations in this *Resource Team Report* section are intended to strengthen the downtown Pontiac district’s market position based on the resource team observations and a preliminary determination of the district’s best opportunities to compete within the marketplace. A market analysis, discussed in the Economic Restructuring section of this report, will provide additional information relevant to the district’s position in the marketplace and keen insight into particular consumer market segments that might be targeted as part of the Pontiac DDA’s long-term marketing and promotion plan.

OBSERVATIONS

- **Events calendar.**

The downtown Pontiac promotional calendar features a number of quality events and festivals, concentrated primarily during May to September, produced by promoters and other organizations and highlighted by the Woodward Avenue Dream Cruise and the Arts, Beats &

Eats events. The new JAMbalaya event adds a third major event to the annual events calendar. Cultural and ethnic festivals and events round out the overall calendar.

- **The Promotion Committee.**

The committee has made a relatively smooth transition from a Downtown Business Association entity to an operation within the organizational framework of the Pontiac DDA/Main Street Program. The committee meets regularly and actively works to support existing events and is developing a strategy for new promotional activities and coordinated marketing downtown.

- **Disconnect.**

Residents, business people, and city officials acknowledge a level of disconnect between the downtown business district and the Pontiac community—resulting from the lack of community “ownership” and limited participation from various segments of the community.

- **Untapped workers downtown.**

A relatively large employee base in the downtown district has not necessarily been captured to support existing and new business opportunities in the downtown area. *The 2001 Development Plan*, prepared by the Smith Group, estimates that over 37,000 daytime employees are located within a five-minute drive of downtown Pontiac. Yet, during the day, the downtown is relatively quiet and lacks pedestrian traffic.

- **The downtown area is transformed in the evening.**

Nightclubs and related businesses create a lively nightlife that primarily attracts older teens and young adults. The business mix and environment, however, are not conducive to attracting other market segments.

- **Safety perception.**

Most people generally consider the downtown area safe, particularly those that currently work in or patronize the downtown area. However, panhandling and similar activities associated with a homeless population are recognized and likely contribute to the negative perceptions held by the larger community.

- **Locations for events.**

The Phoenix Center Plaza, currently under renovation, and Lot Nine in the downtown area serve as major stages for downtown festivals and events. To a lesser extent, pocket parks and smaller public spaces are used for small-scale activities and events, such as the Lunch Time Music in the Park series.

The existing business mix, dominated primarily by restaurants and offices during the day and by nightclubs at night, limits the extent to which retail events and activities can be successful.

- **The Pontiac Downtown Business Association web site.**

The web site (www.pontiacdba.com) includes information about DBA meetings, available properties, a business guide, links to other community organizations and sites, and other corporate information. The downtown events calendar is currently not included or featured on the web site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Pontiac DDA/Main Street Program has an opportunity to play a key role in producing and staging a comprehensive marketing and promotion strategy that capitalizes on highly successful annual events and festivals already being staged in the downtown. This helps to communicate positive changes and build an image of downtown Pontiac as an exciting place to live, work, play, shop, dine, entertain, and do business.

Recommendation One: Continue to develop and improve the current calendar of downtown events.

Support existing and ongoing special events and festivals in the downtown area by assisting producers, promoters, and downtown businesses in coordinating communications, publicity, and advertising to manage event logistics and help businesses capitalize on event traffic.

The DDA, not the TIFA or Pontiac Growth Group, should coordinate and/or contract for all activities on the Phoenix Center Plaza and other public- or DDA-owned property or parking lots within the DDA district.

Negotiate and procure necessary agreements that will provide for the DDA/Main Street program's management and use of event staging areas within the downtown district, including the Phoenix Center Plaza, as a means of coordinating a comprehensive marketing, promotion, and events strategy.

Ownership of the Strand Theater should be transferred to the DDA (as should all legal agreements). The DDA should be responsible for coordinating ongoing nonprofit Management Board & Staff for the theater operations.

Recruit additional Promotion Committee members in order to build the Pontiac DDA/Main Street program's capacity to develop and stage new events and activities that will help to round-out the downtown events calendar and extend activities into the winter holiday season.

Recommendation Two: Establish and maintain strong partnerships and ongoing communications with other community organizations staging events in the downtown area.

Assist coordinating event logistics, publicity, and business involvement.

Negotiate and procure necessary agreements that will enable the Pontiac DDA/Main Street program to effectively operate as a management entity and "one-stop shop" for downtown activities, special events, and festivals.

Work with local organizations and through local media and communications vehicles to emphasize festivals and events that appeal to the daytime workers and Pontiac residents.

Aspire to hiring a Pontiac DDA/Main Street marketing and events coordinator, which the DDA executive director would supervise, to help organizations with their events and bring new events and activities downtown.

Recommendation Three: Devise an ongoing publicity program for the full range of downtown promotional activities, events, and festivals.

Use the web site, newsletter features, table tents, restaurant placemats, e-mail, posters, brochures, local access cable television, and other ways to publicize and promote all downtown festivals and events.

Use a mirror web site and/or re-directed domain for the exclusive promotion of downtown happenings: examples of domains currently available include www.PontiacEvents.com, www.PontiacFun.com, www.SeePontiac.com, and www.GoDowntownPontiac.com.

Promote events and festivals that complement overall marketing and branding strategy goals. Consistently use graphic(s), messages, or slogans in all advertising and print materials to build a quality image of downtown and to reinforce its identity as a community stage for festivals and events (See Recommendation Number Three).

Use news releases, local access cable television, the Internet, newsletters, community forums, and other public relations vehicles to celebrate and draw attention to downtown successes.

Recommendation Four: Develop and implement a downtown marketing plan and branding strategy that capitalizes on existing assets and effectively targets downtown workers, neighborhoods surrounding the downtown area, and Pontiac community residents.

Create a downtown logo and slogan as the consistent element in all downtown-related marketing, promotion, and publicity efforts.

The Promotion Committee plans to hold a contest to solicit ideas and designs for the downtown logo, which can be helpful in collecting ideas and could produce a winning concept. However, DDA/Main Street should procure professional services to refine a winning contest entry or to create a professional campaign concept and graphic that is appropriate and advances downtown Pontiac marketing goals, objectives, and strategies.

Consider buying novelty items and merchandise with the downtown logo and slogan to distribute or sell at events and festivals. Give items away at events and festivals that attract local market segments and during special events for employees. These could include refrigerator magnets, balloons, buttons, hats, or lapel pins.

Involve the downtown business community in cooperative advertising and cross-marketing efforts. Support cooperation that capitalizes on existing traffic generators and that helps promote all the products and services available from downtown businesses. Cross-marketing examples include:

- Free beverage at restaurant with Strand ticket stub
- Discounted haunted house admission with purchase of musical instrument
- Coupon for a free cup of coffee at café with filled prescription from hospital pharmacy.

Develop a “Downtowner” e-mail update to target downtown employees and local residents. Collect e-mail addresses at events and online subscriber option to develop the distribution list. Send monthly e-mails to promote upcoming activities and events and to provide news about downtown happenings and business moves.

Recommendation Five: Introduce a series of new, small-scale, family-oriented activities and events that appeal to downtown employees and the local market area and that extend the events calendar into the winter holiday season.

Introduce a series of new weekday, daytime, and early evening events and activities that play on the lunchtime music series to promote Downtown Pontiac as a fun place to live and work. Examples of activities that might be considered include:

- “Office Olympics” to engage teams of employees from various downtown businesses in participating in fun, creative competition stages on the street, e.g. desk chair races, water cooler relays, telephone shot-put, etc.
- A “Downtown Sampler” progressive tour featuring sample items and product demonstrations at participating businesses.

Introduce new, small-scale activities and events (produced as stand-alone activities or as new elements of existing events and festivals) that actively involve children and appeal to residents from surrounding neighborhoods and the local market area. Examples include:

- Sidewalk Art events with participation from local students and even a “professional category” as part of a larger arts-oriented festival celebrating local heritage and culture.
- “Look Up Pontiac” contest and scavenger hunt using photos of unique downtown features and architectural elements. It could possibly be incorporated as part of local history elementary school curriculum or as a community-wide activity for the annual National Historic Preservation Week.
- Wagon rides during the winter holiday season that could include stops along a route of holiday “open house” specials and visits with Santa at participating businesses.
- Pet parades and bicycle parades that involve children of all ages to celebrate holidays or as components of ongoing festivals and events.

§ VI. ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Downtown Pontiac has experienced periods of reinvestment and disinvestment, just like many other American cities over the last four decades, and has lacked a consistent management entity over its economy. As some businesses have opened and others have closed, regional shopping malls and other strip commercial centers have had a substantial impact on downtown merchants. However, downtown Pontiac's major assets are still its significant commercial building stock, which is in relatively good condition and can be preserved and re-used. Nevertheless, the Economic Restructuring Committee will need to mature fast and become the catalyst for fostering good business and real estate development. The most successful Main Street programs get involved in these activities. It is imperative that the Economic Restructuring Committee enthusiastically and diligently assumes this critical role.

There are several tools available, or could be made available, that will be critically important in realizing projects, especially new real estate development. These tools include the state and federal historic preservation tax credits (HPTCs), the Obsolete Buildings Tax Credit, tax-increment financing, and the New Markets Tax Credit. As most of these tools have already been explained in the *PDI Assessment Report*², a central goal of the Economic Restructuring Committee is to effectively use these tools and to access and control other resources that are currently not accessible to the DDA directly. In particular, as already mentioned in this *Resource Team Report* and the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report*, the DDA needs access to TIF revenues to develop an overall incentive package for new real estate development, historic building rehabilitation, and adaptive use projects. A central message of the *PDI Assessment Report* is that current TIF revenues could be packaged with other incentives and more effectively used to spur downtown revitalization than what is presently taking place.

Although business and real estate development will be important activities for the committee in the coming year, it must thoroughly understand the downtown's market strengths and weaknesses. This critical information can only be obtained by conducting a comprehensive retail market analysis. It will be a powerful tool for determining the future business mix and will help developers and property owners fill vacancies with businesses that will have the best chances to succeed. Some of the market analysis has already been completed through the 2002 Downtown Development Plan but more data and research will be needed to modify and confirm the conclusions made in that report.

Completing the market analysis, conducting necessary surveys, and implementing effective business and real estate development activities are clear priorities for the coming year. Packaging development deals and shaping the development process are important objectives as well. Last, but not least, it is extremely important to have a sufficient pool of well-managed volunteers ready for hands-on economic restructuring activities. The committee's talented and ambitious leaders will no doubt pursue and implement good economic restructuring strategies.

² Please consult the *Pontiac, MI Preservation Development Initiative Assessment Report* (March 2003), for further information regarding real estate and economic development opportunities in downtown Pontiac. The *PDI Assessment Report* should be read in tandem with this section.

OBSERVATIONS

Downtown Pontiac benefits from retaining much of its historic commercial building stock, though much of it is underutilized. Downtown Pontiac as a whole, including parking lots and other empty spaces, upper-floor vacancies, and the Phoenix Office complex, has a high rate of underused space compared to other nearby downtown commercial districts. However, the underutilization rate presents significant opportunities for the community to reshape the downtown's economy with new businesses and uses.

- Pontiac's trade area average household income is significantly higher than most other communities in Oakland County. It is 11 percent higher than Rochester, 30 percent more than Birmingham, and 39 percent greater than Royal Oak³. This reveals relatively large untapped trade area purchasing power.
- Active business recruitment and retention activities have not been consistent, ongoing priorities of the Pontiac DDA, the Growth Group, the city, or the chamber of commerce. There had been some successful recruitments of art galleries and other associated establishments, but that was done prior to learning about Pontiac's retail market and if these businesses could have long-term success. Effective and continuing business development is sorely needed.
- Community concern also focuses on the need to recruit more African-American and other minority-owned businesses. There is sentiment among African-Americans in Pontiac that the downtown does not meet their retailing, dining, and entertainment needs.
- The partially completed market analysis in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* should give the DDA get a head start in developing a business recruitment and retention program. However, conduct additional research, surveys, and analyses to fully understand how to support new businesses downtown by attracting appropriate target markets.
- The DDA, the PGG, and other agencies have advocated for the adoption of an Obsolete Property and Rehabilitation Tax Credit district zone for the downtown. The Tax Credit zone was recently adopted by the City Council.
- The Pontiac Public Library, City of Pontiac (City Hall), and District Court are currently conducting research and planning for future facilities. The DDA should advocate for optimum facility scenarios in the interest of downtown. After the resource team visit, discussions began about whether or not the City of Pontiac should build a new facility on Lot Nine to jump-start new development in that area.
- Downtown Pontiac has two slightly different land-use zoning districts within the Woodward Avenue Loop. One zoning district, the C-3, permits typical retail and commercial activities in a downtown, pedestrian-oriented business district. The other C-4 district allows for more intensive, auto-oriented uses, especially near the Woodward Avenue Loop. This zoning may allow land use that conflicts with the pedestrian orientation of most of downtown Pontiac and also presents unattractive, car-oriented development along Woodward Avenue—downtown's prime thoroughfare.

³ Taken from the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*.

- Downtown Pontiac has a strong historic preservation ordinance that protects most of the historic buildings in the downtown development district. However, it is difficult to determine if current zoning allows for mixed uses in these historic buildings.
- The rehabilitation of the Strand Theater is important. Once completed, it should become an excellent anchor that complements other business development activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation One: Complete committee work plan.

At the time of the resource team visit, the Economic Restructuring Committee's work plan was the most complete among the four Main Street committees. However, more information needs to be included to make it more comprehensive and complete. A work plan should include how many activities are planned for the year, who will implement them, start and completion dates, and the cost of the projects to the committee and the DDA. The committee should realistically plan its projects and let the work plan to dictate the budget, not vice versa. Refer to the Organization of this report as well as the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report* for more information concerning the development of committee work plans.

Recommendation Two: Supplement the 2001 Downtown Development Plan market analysis.

It is essential to have a comprehensive knowledge of downtown Pontiac's retail market to serve as the basis of a successful businesses development effort, including retention and recruitment activities. Find out what kinds of new businesses could be supported in the downtown that will meet consumer needs. What current businesses could meet those needs by expanding product lines or repositioning itself by changing inventory or business operations? Fortunately, the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* already contains a significant amount of market analysis data, including extensive demographic information for the committee to use when developing strategies.

In the coming year, the Economic Restructuring Committee should tackle additional components of the retail market analysis; specifically, conducting additional consumer surveys and sales potentials. In addition, consider purchasing the NMSC's *Step-by-Step Market Analysis Handbook* for a straightforward guide to conducting a thorough market analysis. The committee will need to consider the following market analysis process and components:

- *Data collection.* To fully understand downtown Pontiac's trade area strengths and weaknesses, the Economic Restructuring Committee must gather all readily available information. As mentioned above, the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* already contains much of the data; however, the following additional information must be collected to complete other aspects of the market analysis:
 - Consumer Expenditure Survey (<http://www.bls.gov/cex/>). Produced by the U.S. Department of Labor, the survey provides average expenditure data for various consumer items. This is important for calculating trade area sales potentials (see below).
 - Trade area and downtown Pontiac base maps. Trade area maps have already been included in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*; however, get additional ones that

- are appropriately scaled to delineate and understand downtown Pontiac's trade area. Downtown Pontiac base maps will be used for a business cluster analysis (see below).
- Building and business inventories. A building inventory documents vacancy rates and the conditions of all downtown buildings, including retail spaces and the upper floors. A business inventory will report the number and types of retailers downtown. These inventories should be done jointly with the Design Committee. Both inventories are currently nearing completion by the committee.
 - Sales tax reports. Currently, it appears that the State of Michigan does not officially release sales tax data to local communities. The Economic Restructuring Committee and the Pontiac DDA must find a way to secure such information, which may require an attempt to lobby the state. This is vital for market analysis calculations to ascertain whether downtown Pontiac is attracting or losing sales in certain retail categories.
 - Downtown zoning ordinance and community comprehensive plan. These documents will help the committee understand any barriers that may discourage retailers from locating to downtown Pontiac and which spaces can be zoned for future commercial development in the DDA district (see *PDI Assessment Report*, pages 19-20, and Recommendation Four in this section).
- *Market Analysis Components.* After all relevant information is collected, the committee can begin the primary research components that comprise the actual market analysis. Dissect the primary research activities into two major parts: survey work and computations and analysis.

Business surveys and *trade area descriptions* will help determine the primary downtown trade area. By surveying businesses, the committee will discover where their customers come from and when they usually shop. Certain businesses may draw from a wider, or tertiary, trade area due to their special products or services.

Consumer surveys explore how trade area consumers shop, where they shop, why they decide to shop in one area as opposed to another, and what they shop for. While census data and other demographic reports provide aggregate figures about the entire community, consumer surveys reflect habits specific to downtown. There are three major types of consumer surveys:

- *Mail/telephone surveys.* Mail and telephone surveys are randomly distributed to sample a cross-section of the entire market area to find out who does or doesn't shop regularly downtown. They also uncover shopping habits, household characteristics, and attitudes about downtown Pontiac.
- *Shopper-intercept surveys.* Intercept surveys are similar to the mail/telephone surveys, but they are conducted downtown and only gather data from respondents who already shop there. The intercept survey finds out why shoppers visit downtown, how often they visit, the stores they patronize, newspaper and other media preferences, confidential household information (e.g. income and ages of the household members), and general attitudes about downtown.
- *Specialized surveys.* Consider developing a customized survey geared toward the employees of Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital and workers in the 50th District Court. Both institutions not only provide a significant employment base for downtown

Pontiac but obviously represent unrealized purchasing power for downtown businesses. Their opinions and concerns should be measured.

Computations

- *Demographic Analysis.* Downtown Pontiac's trade area and its demographic characteristics have already been substantially measured in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*. It also includes a generous amount of information regarding downtown target customer groups and psychographics. Results from the consumer surveys should be compared with the information provided in the Development Plan's demographics. Do income and shopping habits match up? Do the shoppers' desires for new stores in downtown compare to the Plan's customer profiles? From these comparisons the committee can make the best estimates and conjectures of what new businesses might best serve the consumers in the Pontiac trade area.
- *Retail sales analysis.* Although a retail sales analysis is not an exact measurement, it helps estimate the types of new businesses downtown Pontiac might be able to support.
- *Sales potentials.* Sales potentials are measurements by how many sales and market shares are captured in retail categories in Pontiac's trade area.
- *Sales gap/surplus analysis.* This analysis calculates (approximately) the sales dollars gained (surplus) in the trade area and those being lost (leakage). Sales leakage for a given retail product is estimated by comparing actual sales of that product with its potential sales. If the potential sales are greater than actual sales, there is leakage, which may present an opportunity for recruiting new businesses to recapture a percentage of that leakage. If actual sales are greater than potential sales, there is a surplus, which indicates the downtown is particularly strong in certain retail categories. This may indicate the need to retain existing successful retailers or to recruit new ones that will even further strengthen downtown Pontiac's market position.
- *Space-demand analysis.* A space-demand analysis provides a rough estimate of how much square footage would be necessary to attract and house a new retail operation in downtown Pontiac if an attempt was made to recapture a percentage of leaking retail sales dollars. Conduct this analysis for every retail category presenting sales leakages.

Other Analysis

- *Business cluster analysis.* Once most of the analysis components have been completed, conduct a business cluster analysis to map out locations for prospective businesses. Prior to the analysis, an initial determination of the types of retail stores that could be supported should match the preferences expressed by consumers in the surveys. On a base map, plot existing ground-floor vacancies and possible retail stores that the space could support to complement the businesses adjacent to vacancy. Grouping complementing businesses together creates strong clusters of stores that can boost each other's sales. Since downtown Pontiac has a relatively high vacancy rate, this analysis may be more useful in the future when there is a higher occupancy rate.
- *Summary and market position statement.* As previously mentioned in the Promotion section, develop a market position statement to describe the downtown trade area. The area is based

on the market analysis results in addition to the community's desires for the downtown future retail environment. Include a summary of downtown Pontiac's major market groups and a description of the opportunities for market expansion. Ultimately, the statement should convey the downtown's strengths and direction for economic growth. The Promotions Committee will then be able to use the statement to guide the messages and images used in marketing and event activities.

- *Strategy Development.* After completing the market analysis components, the committee can begin to develop strategies for business recruitment and retention. The market analysis should point to the types of businesses that could be recruited based on the possibility for additional sales and if trade area consumers (as identified in the survey work or focus group interviews) would support new stores. If there isn't a large enough market to capture a new store, investigate if existing retailers offering new product lines could better service the market needs.

Recommendation Three: Conduct effective business development initiatives.

Completing a thorough market analysis and developing effective business recruitment and positioning strategies is only one step in the process of lowering downtown's vacancy and underutilization rate. The Pontiac DDA will also need to actively improve the quality of goods and services currently offered with effective technical assistance. Be sure to provide prospective entrepreneurs who want to open a new store with appropriate information and guidance as needed. Effective business development and improving the appearance of historic commercial buildings can help position downtown's economy to support more significant retail and real estate development in the future. Currently, downtown retail lease rates cannot support such development.

Elements of a Pontiac DDA business development program could include the following:

- **Pontiac DDA serves as "one-stop" business information center.** Compile helpful resources on good retail business operations (just as the Design Committee will gather similar information for building improvements). The Economic Restructuring Committee should build into its budget yearly monies to purchase these resources. Collect resources like publications, pamphlets, and photos of storefront design, retail trade associations, retail merchandising, and business operations. Also provide a list of contacts from which new entrepreneurs can access additional assistance in areas such as inventory control, business plan writing, marketing, and start-up financing. These resources will be wasted if a coordinated effort is not made on part of the City of Pontiac, the Growth Group, and the downtown community to direct prospective business owners to the DDA office.
- **Develop one-on-one relationships with DDA district property owners and businesses.** It is critical that the DDA executive director, as well as the Economic Restructuring Committee, develop good working and supportive relationships with businesses and property owners. Property owners should be made aware of the types of business development and financial assistance the DDA offers and the business development and positioning strategies so they can actively retain and recruit the appropriate retail stores.
- **Access Oakland County Business Development Services.** The Economic Restructuring Committee should routinely refer existing businesses and prospective entrepreneurs to the small business development services offered through the Oakland County Small Business

Development Center (SBDC) in Pontiac. The center provides comprehensive business technical assistance services through regular workshops and one-on-one assistance for topics such as business planning and management and marketing and accessing capital (generally on a no-fee basis). It appears that only one downtown business has accessed these services.

- **Offer workshops and one-on-one counseling.** In addition to the Oakland County services, the Economic Restructuring Committee could develop its own ongoing series of business development workshop and one-on-one assistance visits. The committee would first survey downtown retailers on the issues they would like technical assistance and then design a quarterly or biannual workshop series addressing the most common needs mentioned. The committee could seek workshop speakers from the Oakland County SBDC, the NMSC, retail trade associations, and other consultants. To add more incentive for merchants to attend the workshops, offer free one-on-one assistance sessions the day following the general workshop on a first-come, first-serve basis. Team with the Pontiac Area Chamber of Commerce to finance and produce the workshops.
- **Disseminate market analysis information.** Take relevant and cogent information from the market analysis and present it in a readable and attractive format for distribution to the retailers. Downtown Pontiac merchants need to know about the changing market and customer profiles, new developments, and trends so they can adjust their business operations to become more competitive and profitable.
- **Develop a business assistance package.** Prospective business owners should know as much as possible about available local, regional, and national financial incentives and assistance programs for business start-up and expansion. Research all possibilities, then formulate an easy-to-read brochure summarizing each program. Include information on any design and business assistance incentives that the Pontiac DDA offers on its own. MSOC has a brochure of available federal, state, county, and local financial incentives.
- **Target existing businesses for expansion.** Existing businesses are often the best first choice for expansion to fill vacancies, as they are familiar with their market, already made the critical decision to invest in the commercial district, and most often are looking for larger and more advantageous locations. When conducting the business survey, the Economic Restructuring Committee should ask businesses their future plans, including expansion needs.
- **Conduct active and passive business recruitment.** The completed market analysis should thoroughly prepare the Pontiac DDA to mount an active, effective, community-based retail business recruitment effort. At this early stage of the DDA's program development, the team recommends beginning with passive recruitment, and encourages the Economic Restructuring Committee to actively solicit new businesses from outside Pontiac. Passive recruitment activities can encompass developing a business recruitment packet, providing business assistance to walk-ins, and working with local building owners to market vacancies (for example, list those site on the Pontiac DDA web site).
- **Active business recruitment can only take place once the market analysis is completed and appropriate recruitment strategies have been established.** Actual recruitment requires assigning a recruitment team the task of compiling a list of prospective businesses and encouraging them to visit downtown Pontiac in order to sell the benefits of relocating. Recruitment candidates should fit the profiles and parameters of businesses in accordance with the overall strategies.

- **Develop a business recruitment packet.** The packet, a marketing tool, should include relevant market analysis information, demographics, available building and retail space, business improvement incentives, trade area and downtown maps, promotional calendar, and other Pontiac DDA information. Contact MSOC, the NMSC, and other nearby Main Street communities for good examples of recruitment packets.
- **Recruit and retain minority-owned businesses.** The committee should place extra emphasis on recruiting and retaining minority-owned businesses. The DDA and the committee can develop special initiatives that specifically target businesses owned by African-Americans, Hispanics, and other ethnic and racial groups. Consider the following:
 - **Work hard to get to know successful minority-owned businesses in other parts of Pontiac, other Michigan cities, and throughout the country, preferably cities comparable to the size and demographics of Pontiac.** Contacts can be initially made through the local chambers of commerce or other economic development entities. Develop lists of potential business prospects.
 - **Establish a business mentoring program specifically targeted to minorities.** This program should furnish financial management assistance and business plan preparation to minorities who already have established businesses or who want to open one in downtown Pontiac. This program could be developed as a partnership with the Oakland County SBDC, with assistance provided by professional staff, and current Pontiac minority business owners could serve as mentors.
 - **Develop a special micro-loan or grant program geared toward minority-owned businesses.** This program can help finance start-ups and assist people who want to recapitalize and reposition their existing business. The DDA and the Economic Restructuring Committee should explore whether or not existing TIF funds can be used.

Recommendation Four: Audit and revise current downtown land use district regulations.

Downtown Pontiac currently has two different zoning district classifications. The C-2 Central Business Area allows for more typical pedestrian-oriented development and uses, while the C-3, the Central Area Fringe and Thoroughfare District, permits more auto-oriented and “dirty” light-industrial uses. In light of the goal for a pedestrian-oriented downtown environment, as set forth in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*, the C-3 light-industrial permitted uses should seriously be reconsidered and allowed in other areas of Pontiac. Ideally, it is recommended that one zoning district be adopted for the entire expanded DDA boundaries encompassing the “Green Zone” as proposed in the Plan. This new district should encompass much of the permitted uses allowed under the C-3 district but less of the auto-oriented uses in the C-4 district.

Secondly, the DDA, the DBA, the City of Pontiac, and its planning commission and staff, should audit the existing downtown zoning regulations to see if they promote the goals of the Development Plan and the work plans of the Design and Economic Restructuring Committees. Specifically, zoning should permit mixed uses and incorporate as many design standards as possible to ensure the new development is pedestrian-oriented and compatible with downtown Pontiac’s existing architecture. Regulations should also guarantee that new development faces the Woodward Avenue Loop, not the areas behind buildings. Last, zoning subdistricts could be

adopted within the one “Green Zone” district to guide development in the character areas outlined in the Development Plan.

Recommendation Five: Include historic preservation element in 2001 Downtown Development Plan.

In many respects, the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* is quite comprehensive, yet it neglected addressing a historic preservation element and instead focused primarily on how new infill development should be encouraged. The DDA should work with the City of Pontiac to incorporate a new Development Plan chapter on historic preservation, including exact policies on making historic preservation a fundamental economic development strategy next to infill development. The chapter should also include a listing of priority historic building rehabilitation opportunities and a strategy of how to finance and develop these opportunities.

Recommendation Six: Develop a series of building and business improvement incentives.

The Pontiac DDA currently has a façade grant program, which has already funded several projects downtown. However, more incentives need to be developed and the existing ones should be more effectively used to develop attractive financial packages for property owners and developers rehabilitating historic buildings. New incentives could address other building improvement issues such as stabilization, interior design for new businesses, upper-story housing and office uses, more extensive façade rehabilitation projects, small business start-ups, and other forms of financing for community-initiated real estate development projects. Consider the following ideas in developing other incentives⁴:

- **Façade grants.** The Economic Restructuring Committee needs to ensure that the current façade program is renewed and recapitalized, perhaps with more DDA money and TIF revenue.
- **Low-interest loan pool.** Establish a local low-interest loan fund to use for major building improvement projects, including all exterior and interior work. In some cases, a low-interest loan pool can be used for small business development purposes. Either the local banks capitalize the loan pool by committing directly to an organized pool (in most cases), or the bank will loan money directly to an applicant. A consideration is to capitalize the pool sufficiently to provide enough loan monies at an attractive interest rate so those applicants can accomplish a reasonable amount of building work. However, in today’s low-interest rate environment, a loan pool will have to offer an exceptionally low rate or no interest at all, to be attractive enough to prospective applicants. Attach minimum design standards to the loan to ensure proper rehabilitation of the building.
- **Revolving loan fund.** A revolving loan fund is similar to a low-interest loan pool in that a pool of money is used for building rehabilitation purposes but with the restriction that the money is returned to the fund for additional activity. Again, this fund should be reasonably capitalized and have an attractive interest rate. Loan proceeds could also be used as participation equity or bridge financing for much larger rehabilitation projects.
- **TIF revenues.** In many cities, large ones in particular, TIF proceeds are frequently used as equity financing or outright grants for major rehabilitation projects. This is why the DDA should have its own dedicated sources of TIF revenues.

⁴ For additional information, consult pages 27-28 of the *PDI Pontiac Assessment Report*.

- **Inventory purchase.** Many communities have established successful grant or loan funds to help new business start-ups make their initial inventory purchases. This incentive can be an effective tool in recruiting new retail businesses.
- **Tax credits.** The *PDI Assessment Report* recommends that Pontiac stakeholders should thoroughly learn about available tax-credit incentives for downtown Pontiac, credits not extensively used. These tax credit programs include the 20 percent Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit, the 25 percent Michigan HPTC, and the Obsolete Building Tax Credit. The new Federal New Markets Tax Credit can also come into play, although a Community Development Entity (CDE) will have to be identified to pass the credit to for-profit developers. The DDA and the Economic Restructuring Committee need to take the lead in educating downtown stakeholders about the value of these credit programs. Education efforts could entail workshops and customized publications for developers and property owners. More substantial activities may include recruiting developers with experience in using tax credits to handle priority historic preservation projects.

Recommendation Seven: Build on the dining and entertainment business cluster.

Every community looking to revitalize its commercial district should ask itself, “What is our competitive advantage in the local and regional marketplace”? That competitive advantage may be determined by the presence of certain businesses in the district, the presence of workers with a certain level of education, or even the presence of incentives offered to bring in businesses. Perhaps there could be several competitive advantages for downtown Pontiac in light of its current business vacancy rate. Only after completing a comprehensive market analysis and determining some initial business development strategies can the Economic Restructuring Committee begin to understand what types of business clusters can work in downtown Pontiac. However, downtown Pontiac’s fledgling dining and entertainment cluster can be a competitive advantage over other communities. The cluster could be maintained and perhaps added to other competitive and complementary establishments in order to also attract other target markets not currently being served. This cluster can certainly grow and mature as new development brings new residents and customers to downtown Pontiac.

Recommendation Eight: Advocate for new downtown Oakland County facilities.

Pontiac is the county seat. The loss of Oakland County facilities in downtown Pontiac 40 years ago was certainly a setback. Both the DDA and the City of Pontiac should work with Oakland County to determine what new facilities could be located downtown.

§ VII. DESIGN

Downtown Pontiac’s design and historic preservation issues are simple, yet complex. In some cases, new awnings and signs can quickly renew a storefront, and can be funded by the Pontiac DDA’s façade improvement program; while other buildings need to be rehabilitated using more complex financing mechanisms, such as state and federal historic preservation tax credits. Therefore, the DDA’s downtown design improvement agenda will have to focus on both aspects of short-term and long-term improvements in the public and private sectors to accomplish a visually appealing and attractive downtown environment. While many such projects have already been identified in both the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* and the *PDI Assessment Report*, the DDA must now create and implement strategies that include those projects as well as ones recommended in this section. Of course, the Design Committee’s ultimate success will depend on how well it includes the community in the whole process.

As large and comprehensive as the design improvement agenda appears to be, it is vitally important for the Design Committee to experience success in its first years. Since a Main Street program’s first years are dedicated to organization building—tasks usually invisible to the public—downtown design improvements offer the only physical evidence that something is actually happening. Indication that private property owners are making new investments in their buildings can spur others to do so as well and boost the DDA’s credibility for being the catalyst for those improvements. Thus, many new Main Street programs focus on easily achievable design projects like new signs, storefront reconstructions, awnings, and even streetscape improvements. As the committee gains experience, it can assume more substantial and complex building rehabilitation projects.

The Design Committee’s job is to persuade, often fiercely, independent business and property owners that investing in improvements to their buildings makes economic sense...and then help make it happen. Good design has economic value—consumers like to shop in visually appealing environments and buy products that are packaged attractively. When working with businesses, the job of the Design Committee is to find the “angle” to sell the benefits of building rehabilitation to an individual merchant or property owner. Like shoppers, investors and developers also make decisions to invest in downtown real estate partly based on appearances. Last, as noted in the *PDI Assessment Report*, the DDA needs to more effectively use the historic preservation tools and financing mechanisms already available. Tax-increment financing and the historic preservation tax credits are just two tools that can make a difference in rehabilitating existing buildings.

DESIGN COMMITTEE

The Pontiac DDA Design Committee has four primary functions: educating about good design, providing design assistance to private building owners, planning the ongoing development of the downtown business district, and guiding and implementing public improvements. Furthermore, good Main Street design is based on simple and straightforward principles:

- **Start small.** One or two small façade improvements have more impact than starting an expensive public improvement project that can take years to complete. The Pontiac DDA

can initiate more small projects by promoting its façade grant improvement program.

- **Avoid themes.** Historic preservation is an ethic based on respecting the original building fabric and allowing the buildings to tell the community’s history. Much of downtown Pontiac’s historic building fabric is relatively intact and represents classic Michigan vernacular commercial architecture, so there is no need to replicate or introduce a new style not indigenous to Pontiac.
- **Create compatibility.** New construction should respect the surrounding architecture. Pontiac can pursue infill development in many areas of the downtown; but the challenge will be to blend and ensure design compatibility of new projects with existing historic architecture.
- **Stress continuity.** Demolishing buildings leaves holes in the street wall and discourages pedestrians from moving from store to store. A primary weakness is the several vacant and underutilized lots between buildings that discourage pedestrian movement and activity. Infill development can help close these holes and reform the building streetwall that once existed in all parts of downtown Pontiac.
- **Build quality.** Quality design, materials, and construction have greater impact and lasting value. Encourage and ensure a high degree of workmanship and excellence in all design improvement projects.
- **Don’t copy.** Avoid gimmicks like pedestrian plazas and malls, which do not translate well into traditional business districts. As the era of using such gimmicks may be over for downtowns across the country, the DDA should avoid using big fix schemes to look like other towns. Pontiac needs to focus on improving the downtown’s unique assets.
- **Be realistic.** Design improvements are but one component of Main Street’s strategy; however, applied comprehensively with the other three points—organization, economic restructuring, and promotion—design improvements can facilitate positive and lasting change.

OBSERVATIONS

- The Design Committee was originally formed under the auspices of the Pontiac Downtown Business Association and is now managed by the DDA board of directors. The committee has already been trained and has drafted a work plan. But, the work plan does not include actual projects with task assignments, timelines, and budgets.
- Several building façade and storefront improvements have been performed over the years with varying levels of project quality and scope. Some projects, including some of the dining and entertainment establishments, are done well.
- Most of downtown Pontiac’s historic core is encompassed within a National Register Historic District and a local historic preservation ordinance works to control and manage alterations to buildings. Pontiac’s Historic Preservation Commission, which already reviews downtown projects, can become a strong partner and ally with the Design Committee in projects and activities.

- The *2001 Downtown Development Plan* includes extensive recommendations on downtown infrastructure improvements, new land use patterns, and design guidelines for new development. While a majority of the recommendations are rational and appropriate and should be pursued, the *Development Plan* did not emphasize implementing historic preservation projects. This was a major observation of the *PDI Assessment Report*.
- Brief design guidelines, focused on new development in downtown character zones, were included as part of the *Development Plan*. However, these guidelines are inadequate in terms of educating downtown property owners on proper building rehabilitation methods and how new infill development should relate to the overall historic building fabric. In addition, the Historic Preservation Commission is not using customized design guidelines for its review activities other than the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.
- The DDA's façade grant program is a key incentive that should stimulate future building improvements. However, at the time of the needs assessment visit in November 2002, there was a backlog of approved façade grant projects. It is unclear as to the reason for the backlog and if there is any Design Committee involvement in the management of that program. It is also uncertain whether additional funding has been identified to continue the façade grant program in the coming year.
- Many interview participants remarked that the sign ordinance needs revision. Currently, it does not encourage appropriate or compatible signs in the downtown. Revising the sign ordinance and establishing a new sign incentive program may be the solution.
- Several interviewees mentioned parking as a consistent problem, though it appears there is plenty of parking with many large lots in and around the downtown district. However, the resource team observed the parking lots were usually less than half-full. Perhaps, parking is not being managed effectively. Also, as mentioned previously in the *Needs Assessment Report*, the DDA has no control or authority over the parking commission that oversees downtown parking and related facilities.
- New streetscape improvement plans are now nearing implementation. Downtown Pontiac's existing streetscape and infrastructure needs upgrading and enhancement, but it is unclear how involved the public has been with the improvements. In addition, current streetscape plans call for too many pocket parks—spaces that may be more suitable for near-term infill development.
- Even with the extensive Phoenix Plaza Park improvements, the raised platform park benefits the community little in terms of being a visually attractive open space to downtown and as a space for downtown activities and special events all year. In fact, the Plaza is only used four or five days a year according to interviewees. The *2001 Downtown Development Plan*, however, proposes the opening of the Clinton River for a new public space in the downtown's eastern sector.
- There is currently no wayfinding system in downtown Pontiac and the Phoenix Plaza, especially in the southern area, which makes it difficult to navigate the downtown district.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation One: Complete Design Committee work plan and begin implementing projects.

As mentioned in the above observations, a work plan had not been thoroughly completed by the committee prior to the visit. Before starting actual Design Committee projects, develop a work plan with details on how each project will be completed, how much all activities will cost, and the timeline. The committee should not be too concerned at this early stage with finding a large number of volunteers to implement the work plan. Start with those projects where there are enough volunteers to begin work and then ask the Organization Committee to recruit more in the year ahead. Projects that have to be tabled due to insufficient volunteers can be moved to next year's work plan.

With a coherent and achievable work plan, a skilled and dedicated core of volunteers can handle many or all of the proposed projects. At this point in the development of the Main Street program, it is essential to empower committee volunteers with the responsibility of finding the ways and means to complete work plan projects. If work plan projects are not delegated to committee volunteers by the chair, or if they are not encouraged to engage in such work, the committee risks losing volunteers as they may think there isn't anything to do.

Recommendation Two: Determine design management responsibilities between DDA executive director and Design Committee.

Typically, in most Main Street programs, whether in DDAs or in nonprofit organizations, the Design Committee is responsible for assisting property owners with the rehabilitation of their commercial buildings; developing financial incentives (with the ER committee); undertaking education initiatives; working with the City of Pontiac on streetscape and other public improvements; and participating in the production of district design guidelines. The DDA executive director's primary role is to serve as a technical service provider to the committee and will be, most often, the first point of contact for property owners and merchants regarding available services. More specifically, roles can be outlined this way:

- **Design Committee**

- Attend MSOC training sessions and conduct regular orientation sessions for new committee volunteers during the year.

- Conduct and complete a thorough building inventory (with ER Committee).

- Start and maintain a design library in the DDA office.

- Serve as the manager and administrator of design assistance and incentive programs.

- With the executive director, visit all property owners regularly to provide information and consultation regarding available design assistance services and incentive programs.

- Work in partnership with the City of Pontiac in developing short- and long-range public improvements programs.

- Develop, with the executive director, a contractor referral list.

- Serve as a design review body for projects involving Pontiac DDA incentives and design assistance.

- Conduct ongoing workshops for merchants and property owners on proper building rehabilitation and historic preservation methods.

- **DDA executive director**

Serve as a resource provider to the committee by gathering information and materials for committee projects.

Coordinate information and provide administration on design assistance and financial incentive programs for building owners.

Become the primary contact for building rehabilitation and preservation issues in the downtown.

Of course each community may have different arrangements between the Design Committee and the executive director; the arrangement sometimes depends on the executive director's skills and experiences. Regardless, the DDA executive director does not take the lead on motivating design change in the commercial district. To have a fully functional committee, volunteers must have the chance to lead projects, which in turn breeds a sense of involvement and ownership in the Main Street program and process.

Recommendation Three: Develop an effective design assistance program for property owners and merchants.

Develop an effective design assistance program to be proactive in achieving building rehabilitation and preservation successes. Although the executive director has been assisting property owners with the façade grant program, the Design Committee, however, should be working with property owners on building projects. Ways the Design Committee can have a more active role include:

- **Design assistance.** Architectural design assistance is usually the major component of any Main Street assistance program. The DDA has been allowing part of its façade grant improvement proceeds to be spent on design services from outside architects. The committee may decide to continue to use outside design specialists or to begin accessing the design assistance services offered by MSOC. The County's free services include schematics of proposed façade improvements, signs and awnings, color samples, and a suggested work program. Design assistance should first target property owners ready to start a building project and see it through completion.
- **Incentive program.** Work with the Economic Restructuring Committee to develop a set of incentives in addition to the façade grant improvement program. Perhaps develop a special revolving loan fund or a project participation fund to encourage large-scale building rehabilitation and adaptive use projects. More importantly, the committee must promote more extensive use of the federal and state historic preservation tax credits as viable incentives to local property owners. An incentive program is a critically important part of an overall design assistance program, but it takes time to develop other incentives. (See Recommendation Six on page 39, in the Economic Restructuring section of this report.)
- **Information library.** Build an information library in the DDA office to provide property owners with materials that illustrate or demonstrate proper historic building rehabilitation methods. Provide awning fabric samples, sign materials, and paint chips to people seeking façade improvement assistance.
- **Marketing pieces.** It is important for the design assistance program to be packaged under the DDA's banner and aggressively promoted. Summarize all design and financial assistance services in an attractive brochure or marketing piece and distribute it to all

property owners and merchants. Most often, downtown building and business owners are not aware of such programs or the specifics of how they can apply for and use the funds. Last, consider promoting the resources and programs of other agencies, including the MSOC, within the marketing brochures.

- **Contractor referral list.** A referral list is not necessarily an endorsement, but it can note contractors who have attended design workshops.

Recommendation Four: Emphasize simple façade improvements in the year or two ahead.

Downtown Pontiac has had several new façade improvements and signs in the last few years. In the short term, continue encouraging simple façade improvements such as the removal of inappropriate materials and coverings, simple paint schemes, and conducting overall building maintenance projects. These projects will help build enthusiasm for the overall revitalization effort and it will lay the foundation for larger, more complex projects in the future. Positive examples of new signs are also emerging throughout downtown Pontiac. Since a large part of a downtown’s retail perception is influenced by the collective image of its signs, the DDA should continue to offer grants out of the façade improvement fund for this purpose.

Recommendation Five: Develop design education-oriented projects that supplement the design assistance program.

Education is a continuous job for the Design Committee. Develop workshops on topics ranging from proper building preservation methods, storefront reconstruction, masonry cleaning and repair, awnings and signs, and window and roof repair. Offer a few one- to two-hour workshops a year property and business owners and developers and contractors. Team with other agencies, like MSOC and the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, to find speakers and presenters. Also, contractors could be invited to the workshops to offer discounts on signs or awnings to attendees.

The Design Committee should consider holding at least one workshop on how to use the federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit—of which most downtown properties are eligible. The tax credit can be a powerful incentive for developers or property owners considering a major building rehabilitation or adaptive use project. Consult the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office or MSOC for speaker references.

Recommendation Six: Develop a set of comprehensive DDA district design guidelines.

As the resource team visit understands it, the DDA does not use design guidelines to judge the appropriateness of the projects it funds through the façade improvement program. In addition, the city’s historic preservation commission does not use design guidelines for its review process other than the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards*. The *2001 Downtown Development Plan* includes sample design schematics and guidelines for the new development zones area but not the historic core area. Make it a priority to develop one comprehensive set of design guidelines that includes both the new development zones, as proposed in the *Development Plan*, and the historic core area. Design guidelines are important at this juncture given the Design Committee’s impending activities in encouraging private sector building improvements.

The Design Committee should lead guideline development, and perhaps form an ad-hoc subcommittee and include participation from the Pontiac Historic Preservation Commission, the City of Pontiac, the Downtown Business Association, developers, residents, property owners,

and merchants. The guidelines should ideally include, as its study area, the entire Woodward Avenue Loop (“*Green Zone*”) area and not just the core National Register district area. The National Register district core area will obviously have stricter guidelines regarding building rehabilitations. Outside of the core historic area, guidelines should address infill construction as it relates to the core area in regards to setback, building heights and widths, building bulk, materials, sign placement, and ornamentation. The *Development Plan* guidelines for infill construction can be adapted for the new set. These guidelines can and should be used to review new construction by the Design Committee and in partnership with City’s Planning Commission.

When considering which chapters to include, refer to these typical components of comprehensive guidelines:

- Downtown Pontiac’s architectural history and building styles.
- Downtown district map.
- Building characteristics, including height, rhythms and proportions, window openings, and roofs.
- Storefronts and rehabilitation.
- Signs.
- Infill development and new construction.
- Parking.
- Public improvements.
- Materials and maintenance.
- Incentive programs.
- *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.*
- City permitting procedures and information.
- Bibliography.
- Contact Information.

Recommendation Seven: Devise a yearly program of program improvements.

A major issue for downtown Pontiac is to upgrade its infrastructure, including the sidewalks, streets, and parking lots. To that end, the DDA has already been moving ahead with plans to implement a streetscape improvement project. However, the DDA and the Design Committee should work together with the City of Pontiac to develop and implement a yearly public improvements program comprising projects funded each year. Obviously, the timetables for implementing public improvements will vary according to when resources are available, but the improvements program should be based on a rolling implementation plan, coordinated with the city’s capital improvements plan if one exists, which can outline appropriate timetables to when resources can be used. The Design Committee, with community participation, should develop the plan.

Recommendation Eight: Implement a simplified streetscape improvement plan.

Now that the schematics have been completed for the new streetscape project, it will soon enter the construction document drawing phase as the project is slated to begin this fall. The resource team recommends that the streetscape improvement plans remain simple and straightforward in scope. Basic concrete sidewalks, good lighting, and basic pedestrian amenities (e.g. seating and trash receptacles) are all that is necessary.

Previous streetscaping projects in downtown Pontiac have proven that brick sidewalks are impractical and subject to rapid deterioration from salt and fluctuations in winter and summer temperatures.

Carefully re-examine if some of the planned pocket parks could instead make better candidates for new real estate development. The open spaces along Saginaw Street should be reserved for new buildings with commercial storefronts in order to re-establish an urban streetwall. Temporary landscaping of those lots can satisfy short term improvements but try to only plan pocket parks in areas with a low chance of being developed.

Recommendation Nine: Improve appearance of rear alleys.

Previous efforts to landscape downtown Pontiac's rear alleys were well intended but many are still cluttered and unattractive. As part of an ongoing public improvements program, the Design Committee should keep the alleys clean, passable for delivery and emergency vehicles, and well-lit for safety. The alleys should not be spaces for extensive streetscaping improvements that encourage pedestrians to walk behind the commercial buildings. Concentrate pedestrian traffic to the sidewalks to create a positive sense of downtown activity.

Also, consider these improvement strategies regarding alley-side dumpsters:

- Re-pave alley streets as needed.
- Group dumpsters along the alley, but at the rear of buildings, so they don't extend all the way into the alley. This will require some type of operating agreement with the property owner.
- Hide dumpsters from public view.
- Persuade businesses to share dumpsters to reduce the overall number.
- Place dumpsters in central interior-block locations.

Recommendation Ten: Implement a one-stop downtown development process.

During several interviews, many participants revealed their frustration with the overall development process in downtown Pontiac. These respondents claim that the process to review development projects and grant permits can take up to several months. While this may not be the case for every project, it is common to hear these types of complaints. Still, review the process to ensure that it is user-friendly and facilitates projects through the permit process fairly and timely. The DDA Design Committee should work with the City of Pontiac to improve the process in the following ways:

- **Pre-application conferences.** Before permits can be filed, require developers to meet with the City of Pontiac planning department staff, other related city departments, and the DDA executive director to discuss the major aspects and issues of the development proposal. This conference also provides the opportunity for the city and the DDA to express their project expectations and discuss the development process, rules and regulations, and any applicable incentives from the DDA and the City of Pontiac. For this meeting, construction drawings might not be required, only schematics and a site plan. Planning staff in other cities cite pre-application conferences as one of the more useful tools in expediting new development. This reveals critical issues before the project engineering phase.
- **Interdepartmental review.** In some cities, projects can be reviewed by an interdepartmental team consisting of city planners, traffic engineers, building code officials, and others

collectively or in separate back-to-back meetings. While this process can speed up project review considerably, it can also be confusing for a developer inexperienced with this process.

- **Brochures and information pieces.** The DDA and the city can produce concise information pieces and brochures on the development process, including how to request a pre-application conference, who reviews the project, the available incentives, and the design guidelines and zoning code regulations that must be met.
- **One-stop development center.** The City of Pontiac should consider establishing a one-stop development center with all project review agencies under one roof. A single center would save developers considerable time when trying to secure permits and approvals and should foster more interdepartmental communications regarding review processes and procedures.
- **Web site information and permit applications.** The City of Pontiac should consider placing more extensive information about permits and the development process on its web site. Permit applications should be available for downloading. Information can also be placed on the DDA's web site.
- **The DDA as facilitator and educator.** The DDA's staff is always out working with the development community and is often involved in discussions about new development. The DDA could become a central information clearinghouse for developers pursuing projects downtown and offer training seminars on the permitting and development process.

Recommendation Eleven: Install a wayfinding system.

Wayfinding directional signs will help visitors navigate downtown Pontiac and find parking and major downtown shopping and entertainment venues. The signs should be attractive and promote a image of quality. As the downtown area grew around Saginaw Street, as its main thoroughfare, the street served as a major orientation point for travelers. From Saginaw it is easy to understand how to travel in and around downtown Pontiac. When the Woodward Avenue Loop was built, it facilitated rapid movement of cars around the downtown and out from the core downtown destinations. Without good directional signs, it is easy for an unfamiliar driver to make a mistake or get lost. A wayfinding system should point out core downtown destinations and parking facilities.

Recommendation Twelve: Implement 2001 Downtown Development Plan recommendations of a Woodward Avenue Loop redesign.

The resource team concurs with both the *2001 Downtown Development Plan's* proposal and the Pontiac community's desire to redesign the Woodward Avenue Loop. Currently, the roadway has excess capacity, which encourages speeding. Woodward Avenue also forms a significant barrier and discourages pedestrian traffic among the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

In keeping with the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*, the resource team also suggests including landscaped center medians. The medians help pedestrians safely cross the street by providing a safe place to wait in the middle. This median should also be landscaped to give a favorable first impression for motorists approaching Pontiac and should use salt resistant plants to avoid winter burn. Plantings and planter boxes should not block a motorist's view of motorist turning at intersections. The width of the street will be able to support two-lane, two-way traffic with a left turn lane; that number of lanes is unlikely to hamper the road's current and future carrying capacity. Additionally, these lane arrangements will help slow traffic.

The community will have to be exceedingly persistent in pursuing this project with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). While designing this project, consult traffic engineering professionals who specialize in traffic-calming and other proven Main Street-friendly road design standards. Work with federal, state, and county legislators and officials in a coordinated effort to convince MDOT that this is a worthwhile project for downtown Pontiac. Pressing the Woodward Avenue Loop redesign issue now and will make future implementation far more likely within the next five to 10 years.

Recommendation Thirteen: Encourage new infill development.

New infill development will happen gradually, but the DDA can start the planning process now. Eventually these sites will feature new buildings with commercial space on the first floor. Key sites to consider for new development include:

- Huron and North Saginaw intersection—an ultimate site for possible District Court expansion and other mixed-use buildings on the southwest and northeast corners.
- Lot Nine—a site for new mixed-use developments fronting on Saginaw and Pike Streets, to include retail on the first floor.
- 37 and 41 North Saginaw Street
- Old Sears Building on N. Saginaw, north of Huron Street
- Waterman Building on N. Saginaw, north of Huron street
- Old Central School
- 37-41 N. Saginaw Street
- 27 West Lawrence Street

In addition, consult the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* for the pro-formas and sample design guidelines for the new development areas in downtown Pontiac.

Recommendation Fourteen: Revise current downtown zoning regulations with new design standards.

When considering new infill buildings, ensure development follows the established development pattern and urban fabric in downtown. This will allow downtown's streetwall to return where new buildings will typically abut the sidewalk. The following are a few of the key design guidelines that could be incorporated into current downtown zoning regulations:

- **Zero lot setback.** New buildings need to have their storefronts directly next to the sidewalk. This allows for more window shopping and, generally, a more exciting retail environment.
- **Storefront glazing.** Require that new downtown commercial space maintain about 80 percent of the first floor storefront in clear glass. This would be from a height of 2 feet to 10 feet and would encompass the entire width of the storefront. The glass should be clear, not tinted or mirrored.
- **Drive-throughs and parking lots.** No drive-throughs or parking lots should face Saginaw Street.

Recommendation Fifteen: Revise and adopt a new sign ordinance.

Many perceive downtown Pontiac's current sign ordinance as cumbersome and not flexible enough to allow creative new sign design. Pontiac DDA should make it a priority to rewrite and simplify the current sign code. The richness and variety of downtown's architecture and businesses can be easily conveyed by diverse sign types, including projecting, tile mosaic, window glass signs, art glass in the transom windows, and sculptural or icon signs. This is one aspect of downtown design improvement that can involve the local arts community in the production of new signs.

Recommendation Sixteen: Illuminate landmark buildings.

Pontiac is fortunate to still have much of its great period high and low-rise commercial architecture that defines its skyline. The DDA and the Design Committee are encouraged to illuminate these buildings. Illumination will provide a visual focal point to these resources. Explore other communities' downtown lighting efforts; see the efforts of Cumberland, Maryland.

Recommendation Seventeen: Redevelop Lot Nine.

It is safe to say that as a parking lot, Lot Nine in the northern sector of downtown Pontiac, is far from being used in its highest, most appropriate use. DDA and other downtown stakeholders should be thinking of redevelopment scenarios for the site, and redevelopment is even planned for in the *2001 Downtown Development Plan*, but don't forget Lot Nine is a key parking lot for many people downtown. Any new development on this site needs to accommodate its current users. Consider the following actions for short- and long-term use of the site:

Short-term actions:

Lot Nine is one of the first sites a visitor sees of downtown and Saginaw Street as one approaches from the south and west. Entryways to the site are poorly defined, traffic patterns and parking spaces within the lot are not marked, and there is no landscaping in and around the site. At the same time, large amounts of money should not be spent maintaining an underused parking lot. Consider these suggestions:

- Repaint the lines defining parking spaces on the pavement.
- Return some parts of the lot to grass, especially along the Woodward Avenue Loop. Large portions of the lot are seldom used during the year and peak demand can easily be accommodated by the Phoenix Center's garages or other nearby parking lots. Plant grass in parts of the lot to make it more attractive than it is now.
- Define the parking lot's entryways with landscaping and signs. When the lot is covered with snow, it is difficult to determine where the entrances and exits are located.

Long-term actions:

- Pontiac should view Lot Nine as a significant opportunity for new development and adding public amenities. This site has the potential to integrate a "relocated" Clinton River that was placed in a culvert beneath Pontiac many years ago. The *2001 Downtown Development Plan* already recommends that the Clinton River be "day lighted" in the eastern sector of downtown Pontiac; perhaps it can be re-introduced in Lot Nine. Many communities around the country

have been successful in revitalizing their downtowns by rediscovering their neglected waterways including Providence, Rhode Island; San Antonio, Texas; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Indianapolis, Indiana.

- Form a task force to oversee and implement a development plan for Lot Nine as well as other key development sites. This task force should have representatives from the DDA, City of Pontiac, Oakland County, downtown neighborhoods, and community leaders, and should be a subcommittee of the Economic Restructuring Committee. The committee should hold public forums and planning charettes to examine the community's ideas for Lot Nine as well as examine how re-using a river resource would benefit the downtown. This is critical as it will develop buy-in for the overall redevelopment project. Last, the task force should seek the best professionals to help facilitate the process and design any new development with an urban, not suburban, character.
- Continue to improve the rest of downtown. The success that occurs in the areas immediately adjacent to these sites will help to build support for redevelopment.
- Develop a concept plan that leads to RFPs. Key downtown sites, especially Lot Nine and the corners at Huron and Saginaw Streets, should have an overall development plan to prevent piecemeal and suburban style development. In general, the site should have dense development and should reserve the first floor spaces along Saginaw Street for retail. The concept plan should strive to incorporate as much of the Clinton River into the site as possible. Remember, more river frontage will translate into more value for the ensuring real estate development.

Recommendation Eighteen: Try to recapture Pontiac's original plan.

Downtown Pontiac experienced a lot of physical transformation over the years but yet its original plan is still evident, and most importantly, it can still be relevant for the downtown's future. The following four points need to be considered when making decisions regarding physical development in downtown:

- *Design for the pedestrian first and the automobile second.* Make sure there is always something of interest for pedestrians walking through downtown, like window shopping. While cars are an important part of the transportation system, they are not the reason people come downtown. Therefore, parking should be behind buildings, on the upper floors of buildings, or underneath them, but not on the ground floor in the principal retail zone.
- *Emphasize establishing spaces that people want to explore.* This is a common denominator in successfully revitalized communities and is critical for the future of all cities. In today's job market and technology, people can choose to live anywhere. Studies have shown that communities that offer a creative environment that is active and thriving will retain and attract the brightest people of the new economy.
- *Ensure that downtown Pontiac has mixed-uses in its historic commercial buildings and new development.* Residents and workers on the upper floors of downtown Pontiac's buildings are likely to be the key customers for the services on first floors.
- *Streets need to **be** the downtown and not just go **through** the downtown.* Don't move people through and around downtown Pontiac, move them *to* downtown. There are several major arterials and interstates around Pontiac for motorists to use who want to speed through the community.

Recommendations Nineteen: Transition the Parking Commission to DDA control.

The Pontiac DDA should have oversight over the Parking Commission and should control parking management strategies. The Commission could remain a semi-independent unit of the DDA but would work with the Design Committee to develop and implement parking management strategies.

§ VIII. CONCLUSION

Main Street revitalization is always an incremental and evolving process; quick results are not guaranteed, nor realistic. Board members, volunteers, the municipal government, and other stakeholders always desire immediate results, but for the Pontiac DDA, the most important goal is to have a strong organization. Without a strong organization, there will be *no* results.

With this in mind, the resource team would like to emphasize that one of the most important assets Pontiac has is its wealth of talent, skills, and experience in its staff, the board members, volunteers, and partners. This is where the program starts. When implementing the Main Street approach, their combined commitment, vision, and hard work will most assuredly result in a successful program and revitalization process, placing Pontiac in the vanguard of communities that implement the Main Street approach within the downtown development authority framework.

§ IX. APPENDICES

A. BACKGROUND

B. RESOURCE TEAM PERSONNEL

APPENDIX A. BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Pontiac, Michigan, is one of eight communities participating in Main Street Oakland County, a downtown revitalization program offered by the Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services. The Pontiac Downtown Development Authority is the recipient organization of MSOC and NMSC technical services in Pontiac.

MAIN STREET OAKLAND COUNTY

In February 2000, the Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Division established MSOC as a program to assist local communities revitalize their traditional commercial districts. MSOC's mission is to provide local towns and cities technical services to help them implement the comprehensive Main Street Four-Point Approach™ and maximize the economic potential of their traditional commercial districts while preserving their unique heritage and sense of place.

MSOC's objectives are to:

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

Communities currently participating in MSOC were selected through a competitive application process. Pontiac was chosen in MSOC's third application round in September 2002, along with the City of Farmington. MSOC communities receive a set of intensive technical services designed to help them develop their local Main Street programs and address specific downtown revitalization issues. The NMSC and MSOC will deliver these services over a period of three years, after which the level of technical assistance will be reduced. However, MSOC will provide a series of ongoing services to help communities with specific organizational, design, economic restructuring and business development issues. For instance, design assistance services will provide hands-on consultations and conceptual drawings with downtown property owners looking to rehabilitate their historic commercial buildings. Business development services will be delivered in the form of one-on-one business consultations and technical workshops.

Additional technical assistance will also be provided through Oakland County's Downtown Design Studio. The Studio, the first of its type in the nation, will serve two primary functions: to provide support to communities seeking solutions to specific downtown design and planning issues and to serve as a meeting and training facility for MSOC communities. Housed in a traditional storefront space in downtown Pontiac, the Studio is operated as a partnership of

Oakland County's Planning and Development Services, the Pontiac DDA, Chrysler Arts Beats & Eats, and the NMSC.

THE NATIONAL MAIN STREET CENTER

The NMSC 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. 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 NMSC 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 NMSC 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 NMSC 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 neighborhood commercial districts as strong competitors in today's market. The Main Street approach consists of four points:

Design takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in downtown Pontiac 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 Pontiac 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 Pontiac'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 Pontiac. This will allow the DDA's Main Street revitalization program to provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy of the commercial district. Diverse groups from the public and private sectors (City of Pontiac, local

bankers, merchants, property owners, community leaders, and others) must work together to create and maintain 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 more complex problems can be addressed and more ambitious projects undertaken.
- **Self-Help.** Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the project successful. MSOC, the NMSC, and the city of Pontiac 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 MSOC, the NMSC assembled a resource team consisting of five commercial district revitalization professionals who visited Pontiac on April 15–17, 2003 to develop an integrated set of downtown revitalization recommendations based on the observations and expertise of each team member. This *Pontiac 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 Pontiac.

During the first two days of the visit, the team reviewed relevant reports and studies, including the *Pontiac Needs Assessment Report*, the *2001 Downtown Development Plan* and the *PDI Pontiac Assessment Report*, and interviewed various downtown stakeholders including DDA board members and staff; 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 is to determine and assess attitudes and opinions regarding the downtown Pontiac revitalization effort, the actions and progress of the DDA, obstacles facing the DDA agenda, and the current level of human and financial resources available to the DDA.

On the third day, the team scheduled a meeting with the Pontiac City Council to present its preliminary recommendations to downtown stakeholders and the general public. This report, written by the resource team members and prepared by the NMSC, details all recommendations made by resource team members.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX B. RESOURCE TEAM PERSONNEL

Robert Donohue is a principal planner with Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services and has worked for the county since January 1999. He is also the program coordinator of MSOC, the first countywide Main Street program in the country. Prior to his current position, he served as the Main Street manager (DDA executive director) in Rochester, Michigan, for eight years. During that time, the program created over 2,000 new jobs; more than 400,000 square feet of new or adaptive-use retail, restaurant, and office space; and over \$75 million in business and building reinvestment. Mr. Donohue has a bachelor's degree in American Studies from the University of Michigan and a graduate studies certificate in Historic Preservation Planning from Eastern Michigan University. He is also certified as an architectural historian by the U. S. Department of the Interior.

Scott W. Day is a senior program associate with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center and provides a variety of technical assistance services to Main Street communities in Colorado, Michigan, Texas, Nebraska, Georgia, and New Mexico. He has been with the NMSC since 1988. Mr. Day specializes in downtown design management, pedestrian- and transit-oriented development, and has also conducted numerous training sessions on business recruitment, sales leakage analysis, and business retention. He has also developed a merchandising workshop for small, independent retailers focusing on the use of several merchandising methods, including inventory control, open-to-buy, floor planning, and visual merchandising. Mr. Day has a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has worked for the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Agency, where he specialized in urban design, community planning, and development. He is also the former executive director for Bluffton Revitalization Inc., in Bluffton, Indiana.

Nick Kalogeresis, AICP, has been a program associate with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center since March 1998. At the Center, Mr. Kalogeresis is a specialist in nonprofit organization management, downtown and community comprehensive planning, transportation planning, and downtown design management. In his tenure with the NMSC, he has worked with the Chicago Main Street Initiative; the Pontiac neighborhood in Dayton, Ohio; and now the MSOC program in Michigan and the Fond du Lac/North Avenue commercial corridors in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 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. Mr. Kalogeresis holds a bachelor's degree in history from Elmhurst College 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 sitting commissioner of the Village of Oak Park (Illinois) Historic Preservation Commission.

Michael D. Calomese currently works for an independent downtown revitalization consultant program based in Silver Spring, Maryland. Between 1999 and 2002, Mr. Calomese was a program associate with the NMSC and was previously a staff associate with Illinois Main Street for two years before that. During his tenure in Illinois, he delivered technical services in organization and economic restructuring to 19 Main Street communities in northern Illinois. He continues to provide these services to Main Street communities across the country. Mr. Calomese graduated from Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts in American Studies with a concentration in Black Studies.

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 (Washington), the Downtown St. Charles Partnership (Illinois), Old Town Pocatello (Indiana), and Main Street Marshfield (Wisconsin). Mr. Schlinsog is also a graduate of the NMSC's Certification Institute in Washington, D.C.

Scott Freres, RLA, ASLA, is currently a principal of The Lakota Group, Inc., a full-service landscape architecture, urban design, and planning firm in Chicago, Illinois. As principal, with over 16 years experience in land planning, urban design and landscape architecture, Mr. Freres leads the firm's urban design and landscape architecture projects. Prior to joining Lakota in 1993, he worked as a planner/landscape architect for a Chicago international architecture firm, two other local planning/landscape design companies, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Planning Office. His projects have included corporate/business parks, residential subdivisions, university campuses, downtowns, mixed-use waterfronts, golf course communities, public plazas, community parks and playgrounds, medical centers, and a new town.