

Chapter 4: Physical Design

This Design Chapter is focused on the physical spaces within Downtown Sylvania. How the downtown area looks and feels is a topic that is familiar to many. This subject often draws attention as problem areas are often plainly evident and opportunities are frequently discussed. Much of this conversation about Downtown Sylvania in this Chapter is focused on design elements that visually tie the downtown together. These design elements include:

- sidewalks and pedestrian traffic,
- signage,
- gateways,
- lighting,
- street furniture and landscaping,
- green space,
- pavement treatment and pedestrian crossings,
- parking,
- treatment of historic buildings, and
- defining different areas within the Downtown.

Each of these elements contributes to a unique sense of place and provides intangible qualities that set this area apart from other communities. Both the public and private sectors should consider recommendations and suggestions in this Chapter when contemplating any project impacting the physical environment in Downtown. Downtown

merchants and property owners should also be aware of the recommendations made in this Chapter, so that renovations they make to their buildings are in keeping with the overall vision for the district. As per the Main Street model, Design Committee members would implement the work recommendations outlined in this section.

In recent years, the City of Sylvania has put forth considerable efforts toward downtown. These have included planning, design and property acquisitions in and near downtown. Efforts have been particularly focused on the Monroe Street Corridor and the South Monroe Street Redevelopment Area (SOMO). Relevant aspects of this work will be described later, but the challenge that rose to the top for this Downtown Plan was to build on prior steps and provide a fresh look forward. Essentially, this included steps to discover and re-imagine Downtown Sylvania.

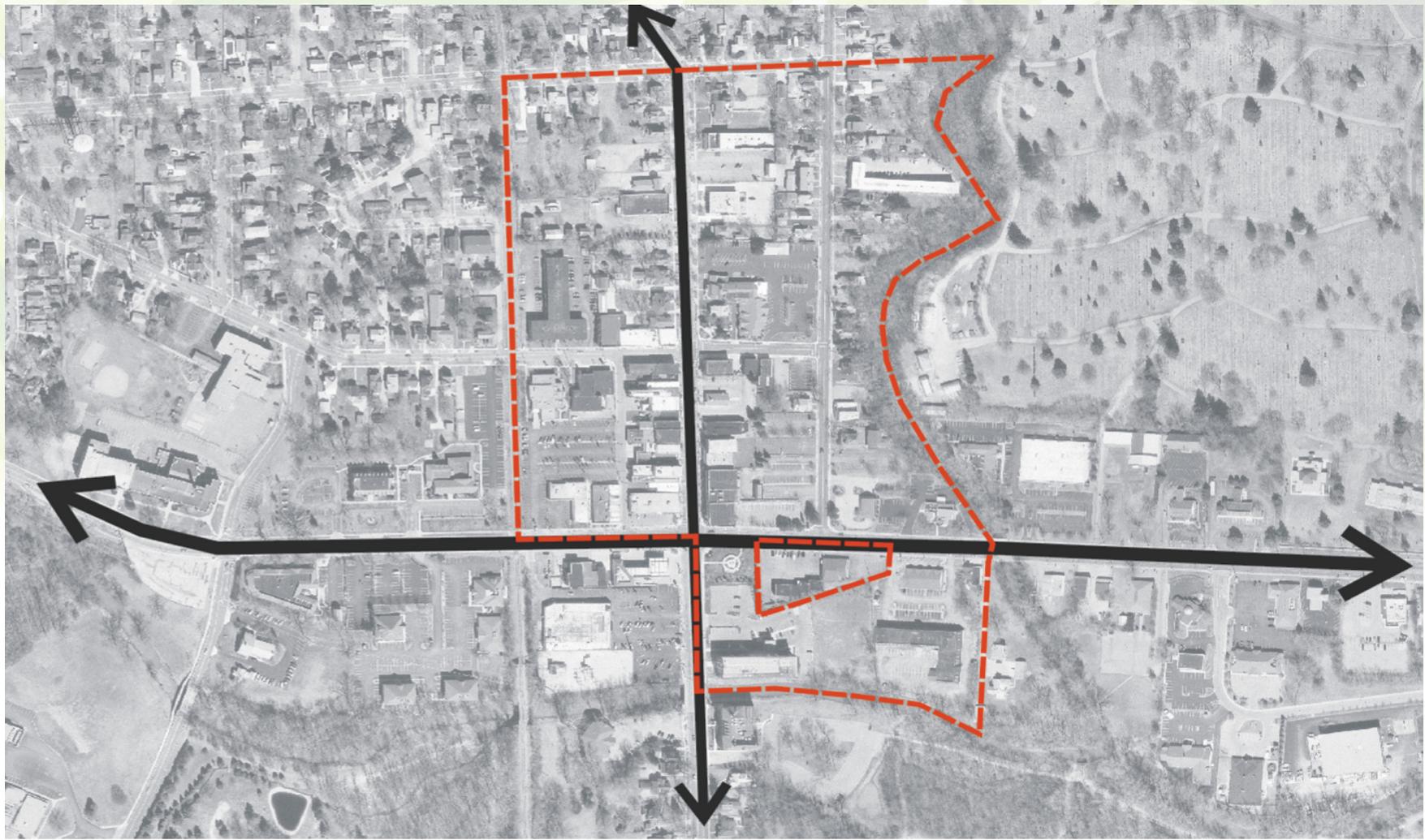
Downtown Sylvania Defined

One of the first challenges confronted as part of this planning process was the need to define the boundaries of Downtown Sylvania. To many, any lines that distinguish the true downtown area from the balance of the City are

blurry. This is true because of the characteristics of the transportation system, the various land uses present and the form and character of existing buildings. For the most part, many people would say that the heart of Downtown Sylvania (and perhaps the City as a whole) is the corner of Main Street and Monroe. About, 15,000 vehicles per day travel east-west along Monroe Street and about 10,000 vehicles per day travel north-south along Main Street. Outward from this intersection, there are a collection of commercial uses that vary widely in character, size and building use. One consideration that does help define Downtown Sylvania is the current boundaries of the B-3 Zoning District (see Map 1). This Zoning District contains uniform requirements in terms of permitted land uses and development standards. Recent updates to the Sylvania Zoning Code included amending permitted land uses and development to be more aligned with a downtown environment (now requiring that buildings be pulled forward toward the street, and more intentionally defining permitted land uses that align with downtown character).

For the most part the variability of building character and use is substantial. As shown in Map 2, parts of Downtown





Map 1

Discover & ReImagine

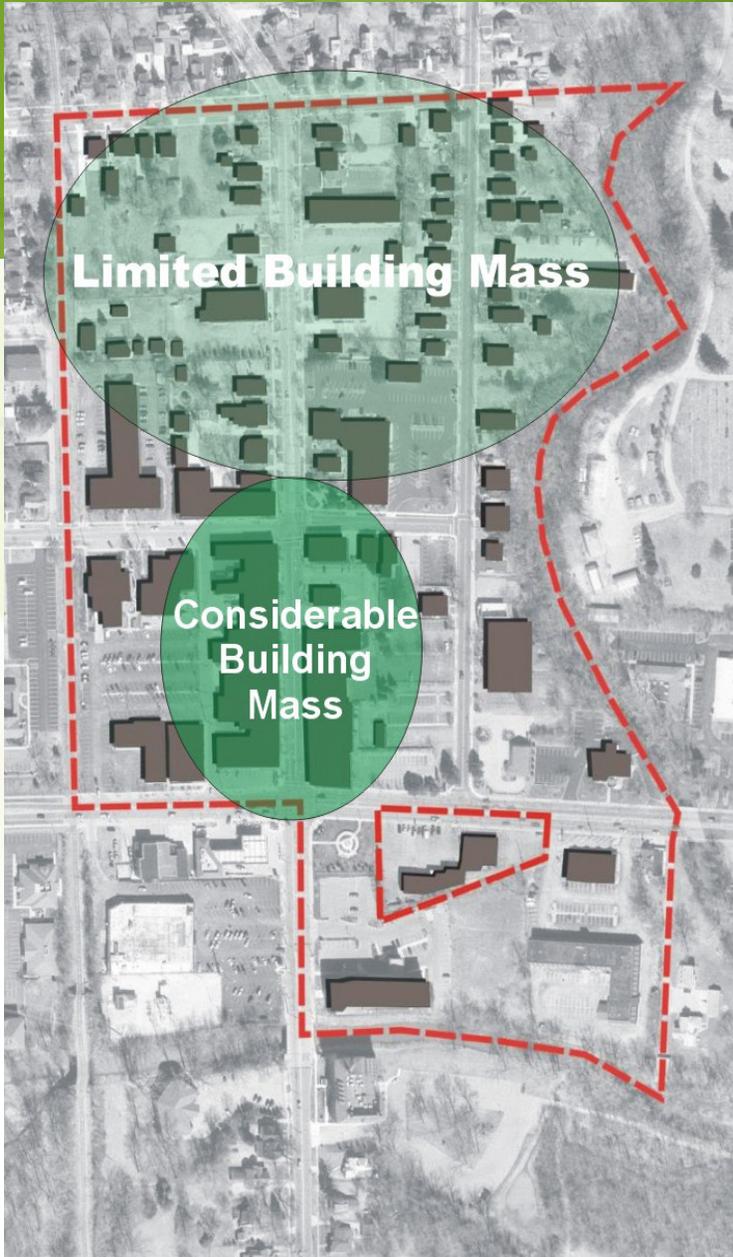
Sylvania display a common downtown appearance, with older, large, mixed use structures, while other areas are more commonly associated with suburban-strip, auto-oriented, commercial corridors. Toward the north, the downtown areas takes on a more residential character with larger homes converted to other uses. This variability is particularly evident when looking at building mass. The block north of Monroe Street is a place with considerable building mass, while areas further north have far less building mass. This is shown in Map 3.

In a more general sense, the Downtown area of Sylvania is also defined by a system of non-motorized transportation connections and by two key destinations, as shown in Map 4. These two key destinations include the hotel and office complex at the south end of the downtown area. The Wingate Hotel has 74 guest rooms and it helps serve multiple travel needs, including those of the adjacent office building. This office building includes facilities occupied by businesses such as Root Learning which draws customers from domestic and international locations. To the north, a second key destination is the Sylvania Historical Village. This collection of buildings includes many historical structures and this space is well programmed with educational opportunities and various social events.

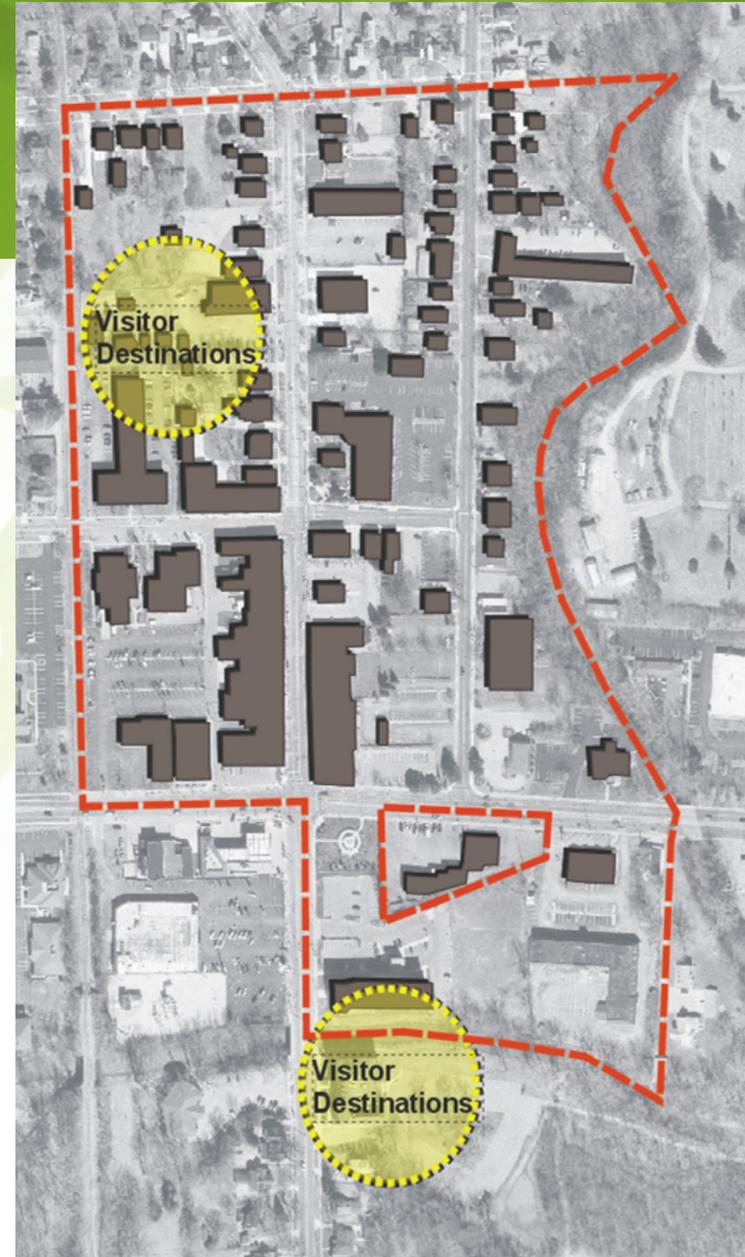
The City of Sylvania has historically placed a strong emphasis on non-motorized transportation. Plans to expand bike trails and non-motorized connections in Sylvania are articulated in the City's 2009 Bike Network Plan. Existing and potential non-motorized connections are as shown on Map 5.



Map 2



Map 3



Map 4

Map 5





Sidewalks and Walkability

The walkability of a downtown is arguably among the most critical factors in determining the success of the overall revitalization efforts. Sidewalks are the paths for pedestrian flow and must be physically attractive and safe. Sidewalks along Main Street are beginning to show their age as they have been in place for many years. Brick pavers in both the street and sidewalk are also in need of repair as improvements are reaching the end of their useful life. Poorly maintained sidewalks make the Downtown appear abandoned and generally run-down, so every effort should be given to regular maintenance. ADA access ramps should also be repaired or replaced in compliance with the latest state and federal standards to provide barrier-free accessibility. Sidewalks to the north of the downtown core are more residential in size and orientation.

Future efforts should be directed toward improving sidewalks on streets surrounding the Downtown to visually link the entire Downtown district, and make pedestrian travel safe and enjoyable throughout the central business area.

Pedestrian travel to, from and within parking lots also needs to be carefully considered. Many merchants have developed “back door” entrances and maintain “front doors” along Main Street. Pedestrian spaces in the parking lots should also be delineated. The recent update to the zoning code now requires that connections between building entrances and the public sidewalk must be defined.

Public Signage

Good signage not only directs people to destinations, but it also helps them find their way easily from place to place. It takes the “guess work” out, ultimately reducing the potential for frustration and anxiety. The City of Sylvania recently developed a comprehensive city-wide wayfinding system. A “family” of sign types was developed to serve as gateway signs, directional signs and identification signs. These signs have a consistent look and design which help to define community. The challenge before the City is to maintain and develop this system. It should also be noted that other visual cues can be added to the wayfinding system that do not necessarily involve signage. Banner systems, street lighting, pavement markings and landscape treatments can all help to define a place or area, without traditional signage elements.

Gateways

Along with wayfinding and public signage, the City of Sylvania has developed a gateway plan that is focused on Monroe Street. This plan recognizes that Monroe Street is the primary entrance to the community and defines various upgrades to help make this route to the heart of the City more inviting, safe and generally appealing. This gateway plan includes various streetscape enhancements and a non-motorized trail along the Ten Mile Creek/Ottawa River. A regional gateway at the US 23/475 interchange east of downtown is defined along with a Main Street Corridor, and the Central Business District.

Lighting

Lighting has the one of the strongest impacts on how people perceive the Downtown. It can portray a sense of warmth, create a feeling of safety, and invite people to linger when they visit Downtown during evening hours. On the other hand, poor lighting design can promote a feeling of insecurity, and will have the effect of hurrying people out of the Downtown. Especially important are lights which are low to the ground and create a positive pedestrian atmosphere (as opposed to the traditional ODOT cobra head lighting fixtures that work well on highways and rural roads). Overlapping circles of light pull pedestrian traffic down the street and create a friendly and safe environment.

The City of Sylvania has adopted a distinctive light pole and fixture design that is strongly associated with community identity and downtown. These not only visually enhance the Downtown, but to provide visual cues that define the heart of Sylvania. Continued use of this lighting design theme is anticipated.

Street Furniture & Landscaping

Another important element in creating a distinctive sense of place in Downtown Sylvania is the street furniture and landscape elements. Sylvania has managed to retain the feeling that life’s pace is a little slower here than in other places. Street furniture and greenery will continue to promote this “laid back” perception, and can visually fill in “empty” spaces in the streetscape and can be used to highlight the authenticity of the historic environment.

Recently, the Chamber of Commerce sponsored its first public-art fund-raiser and commissioned the creation of individually decorated park benches. These benches added character to the downtown streetscape. This public-art concept was well received, and more recently, the Chamber launched a sequel event and commissioned large decorative planter pots. Vessels were purchased by sponsors, decorated then later auctioned during a community event.

Landscaping presents a huge opportunity in Sylvania. The City has adopted maple leaves as its municipal identity and places a heavy emphasis on plantings and vegetation throughout the City. The City of Sylvania already has several excellent and well maintained green spaces that add quality and visual interest to the streetscape. For example, the park at the northeast corner of Main Street and Maplewood is a very attractive and appealing space nestled into the downtown.

Beyond this, there are more opportunities to use landscaping to help support this community image and help make downtown more appealing. This is especially true along the right-of-way. Here, more naturalized streetscapes and rain gardens can soften pavement surfaces and functionally aid in stormwater management. During the planning process, sample imagery such as the photos on the right were discussed and were found to be appealing to many.



Existing Park





Pavement Treatment and Pedestrian Crossings

The largest surface in any downtown are the streets, alleys and sidewalks, all of which are generally asphalt or concrete. The condition, material, color, and texture of these surfaces dictate a lot of the aesthetics of the Downtown environment and play a large role in the sense of place, the level of pedestrian-friendliness, and even the temperature of the Downtown (asphalt and masonry retain heat much longer than vegetation and landscaped areas). Modern paving techniques provide for a variety of ways to distinguish pavement and sidewalk treatments. Some of these techniques are evident in Sylvania today as shown above.

Clarifying the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic can often be accomplished by a change in pavement treatment. Traffic calming methods can also employ pavement treatment to dictate desirable actions by drivers. Changes in pavement treatment create a more diverse and appealing aesthetic character for the Downtown.

Existing Pavement Markings

Pavement markings that may be more distinctive are also possible and could help support a desired image and theme.



Decorative brick or clay pavers are another option to highlight crosswalks, accent sidewalks, and pave pedestrian alleys. The mid-block crossing on Main Street, between Monroe Street and Maplewood, uses brick pavers to help define pedestrian space. Cross walks are an important element to consider for special pavement treatment. These intersections of pedestrian and vehicular spaces can be set apart in various ways, some simple and others more involved.

Parking

For most downtowns, parking is a central topic and is often quite contentious. Merchants in the retail core are concerned that customers have sufficient nearby parking,



and many express frustration over employees and owners “taking the best spots.” The City of Sylvania recently commissioned a parking study of the downtown which was completed by JJR and Tetra Tech in 2009. The focus of this study was to document and evaluate existing conditions and to create parking recommendations that address capacity, land use, and character to enhance current conditions and allow for anticipated growth. A steering committee of stakeholders (civic leaders and business owners) participated throughout the study process. The following recommendations, divided into short-term and long-term include:

Short-Term Recommendations:

- Expand and improve the existing municipal lot.
- Consolidate existing parking lots between Summit and Main Streets into a single municipal lot.
- Improve wayfinding to all public parking areas.
- Amend existing ordinances to ensure that private parking lots are improved consistently and in a safe, convenient, and attractive manner.

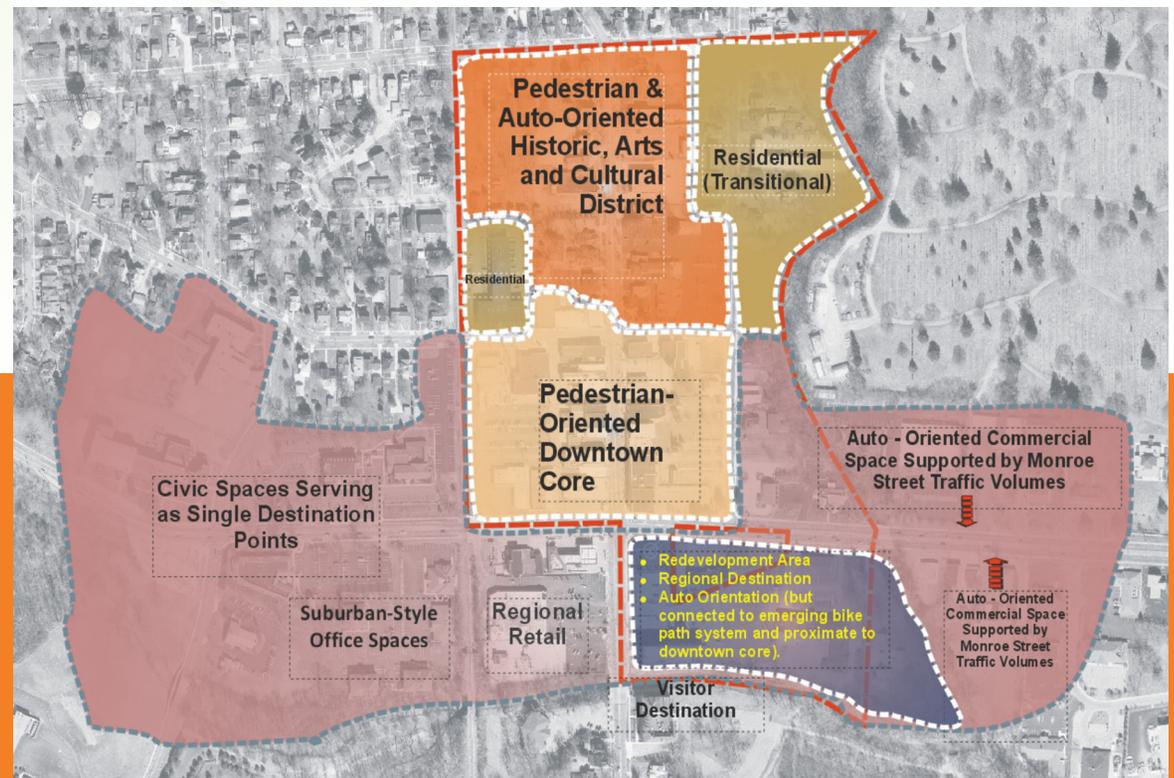
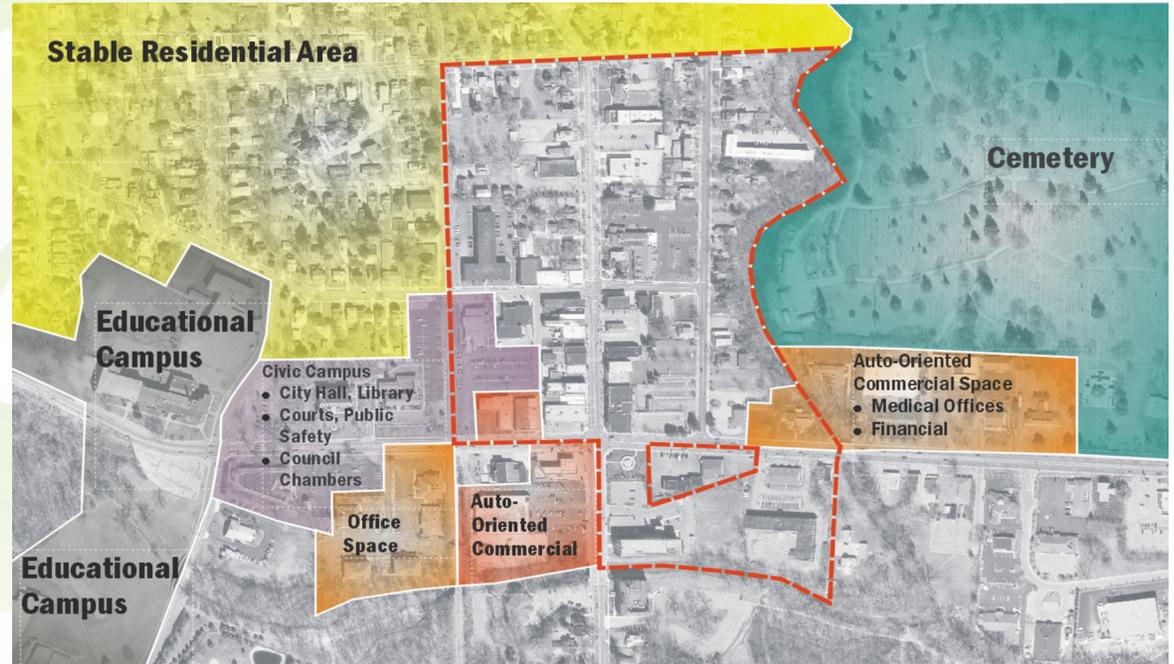
Long-Term Recommendations:

- When needed, locate a public parking deck above an existing or proposed municipal parking lot.
- Encourage private parking decks south of Monroe to promote higher density development.
- Expand on-street parking.

The Different Areas within Downtown Sylvania

Areas around Downtown Sylvania also help to frame downtown spaces. In particular areas to the north, west and east are places of uniform character. A stable residential area exists to the north and west of downtown and a large cemetery defines some eastern limits of downtown. To the southwest a system of larger civic and educational uses create a campus appearance that is oriented toward educational and civic uses. Toward the south, collections of office spaces and auto-oriented retail uses create defined areas.

Looked at more broadly, Downtown Sylvania came into sharper focus in the following graphic as it became clear that Downtown Sylvania is actually several places. Each space has its own vibe and characteristics. The pedestrian-oriented downtown core is the heart of downtown Sylvania with older buildings, unique urban character, mixed uses. South of Monroe Street and east of Main is the South Monroe Street Area (SOMO). SOMO is an area that includes many city-owned buildings and is ripe with redevelopment opportunity. Recently, the City funded the preparation of a separate market study for this area and subsequently developed conceptual redevelopment plans to help define redevelopment opportunities. To the east of SOMO are more auto-oriented commercial areas that depend on vehicular access to Monroe Street. To the west of SOMO are regional retail establishments (gas station and grocery store) and the civic and educational campuses mentioned previously.



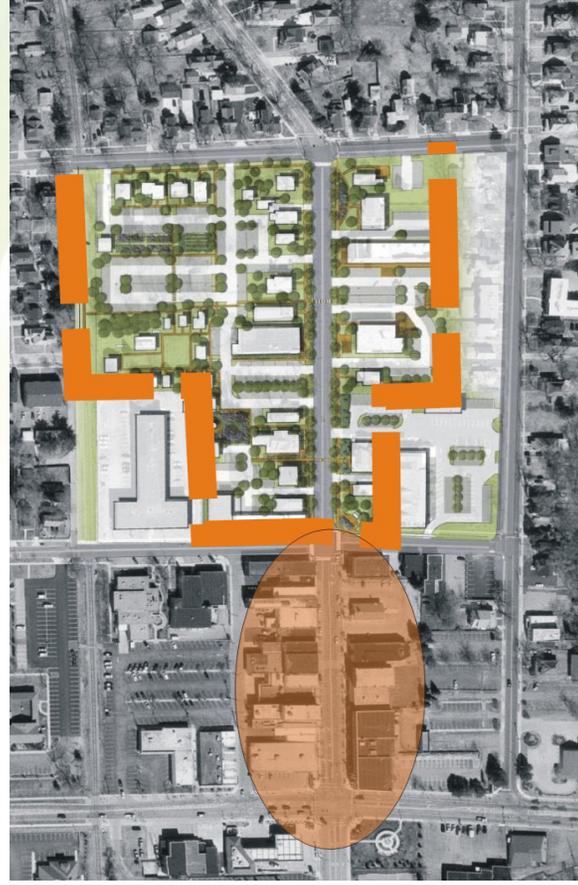
Though the northern portions of downtown include an area that is predominantly residential and an area that has been defined as an area to celebrate local history, arts and culture. This area presently includes an amazing collection of distinctive buildings, historical assets, unique enterprises and art-oriented businesses. Many believe this area has the “critical mass” necessary in terms of existing character to provide a solid foundation to build an even more substantial place within downtown.

Art, History and Culture District

This concept of a defined place or district to celebrate local history, art and culture is new to Sylvania and only first became apparent during the Downtown Planning Process. However, when first introduced, the concept resonated with many and led to more exploratory steps. In a significant way, the idea of establishing a defined place for activity associated with art, history and culture has appeal in at several levels. First, it helps create synergy. Simply put, a collection of similar attractions and businesses can gain much from proximate locations. A person inclined to go to an area to see and experience one art-related, cultural or historic venue is far more inclined to visit an area when multiple attractions exist in an area. Initially, the idea was to treat Main Street between Maplewood and Erie as a separate districts within Downtown. This section of Downtown certainly feels different; buildings are more residential in character, and even the businesses clusters are different from those in the rest of Downtown. But as the Market Analysis was conducted, it became clear that the physical differences between the pieces of Downtown north and south of Maplewood did not necessarily mean that they

could not work together economically. As a result, the idea of establishing the entire Downtown as a cultural, historic and arts district was born.

There are definite synergies associated with complimentary

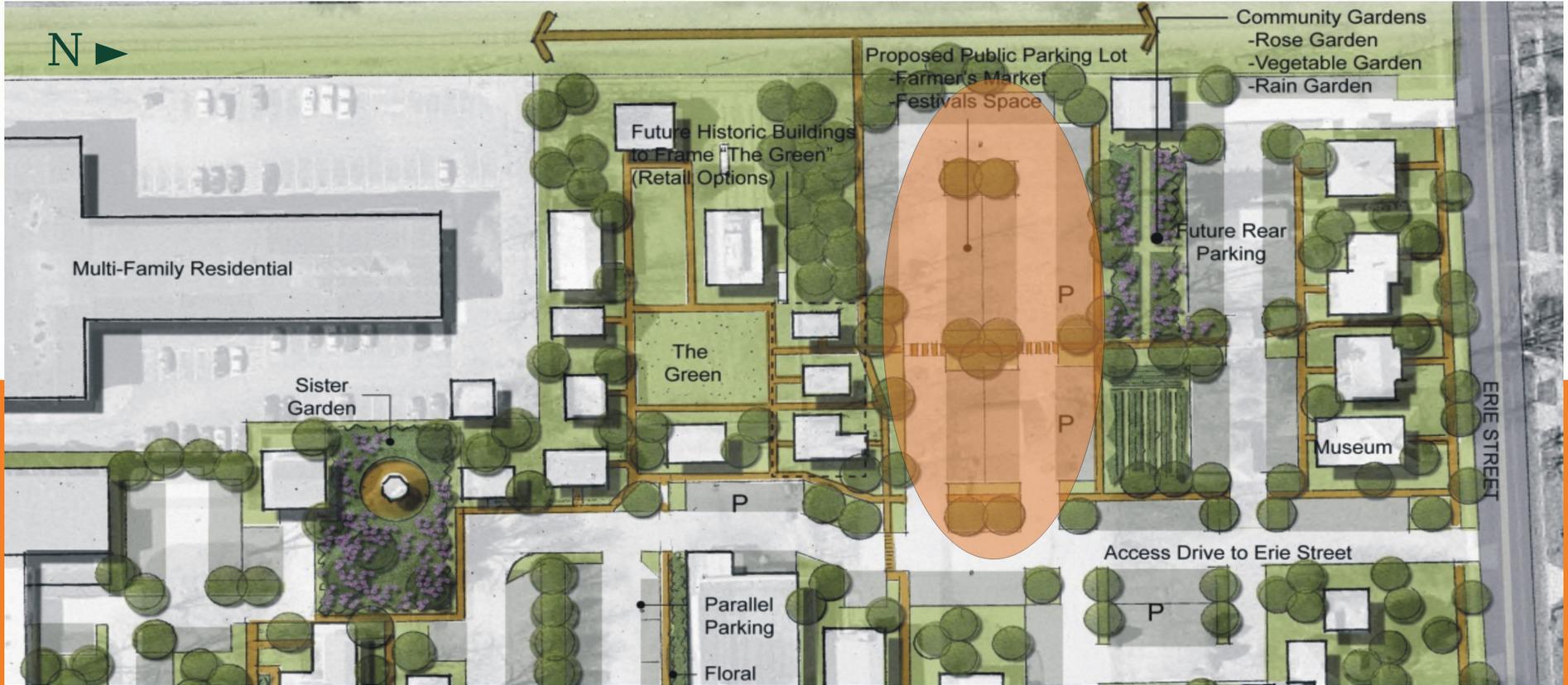


Small concerts can also be held in places with flexible gathering space.

activities within a short walking distance. The traditional downtown core has commercial offerings and dining opportunities that can benefit from visits to the area for a unique experience related to art history and culture. Likewise, the more residential feel of the northern portion of Downtown nicely compliments the Historical Village. The pairing of these two offers visitors a visual window into all aspects of historic Sylvania.

The opportunity to take a closer look at the History, Arts and Culture District revealed many interesting possibilities. Considerably more work is needed to develop these ideas, but in a general sense, there are significant opportunities to create smaller event spaces, more educational opportunities, and venues that sell and create art and cultural awareness.







Land use concept for Main Street between Erie and Maplewood Streets.



Examples of ways to enliven pedestrian spaces.

While there are ample opportunities to develop interior spaces, the street frontage can also be enhanced with roadside plantings and gardens to help create a more attractive streetscape and pedestrian experience. This streetscape can also include elements in the sidewalk itself as shown. Such enhancements should naturally compliment the theme of art, history and culture.

The future improvement of buildings and surrounding sites are obvious and important ways to further develop a place oriented toward arts, history and culture. Some examples of how buildings could be enhanced and re-purposed to support this development concept is as shown below. These examples are for illustrative purposes only. Many other variations on this theme are possible and could be pursued with the benefit of necessary and substantial property-owner input



Site furnishings and landscape treatments can also contribute to a sense of place and uniqueness.



Signage that is intentionally designed to support the art history and culture design theme can also provide identity to the area.



A critical aspect to developing this concept is that of developing a brand and identity. This work is regarded as a subsequent step in the planning process that should include more focused efforts to engage community leaders, downtown stakeholders and property owners in the area. A brand identity should revolve around considerations that are authentic, memorable and aligned with an authentic experience one would have in the area. In all cases the name would then be matched with a graphic that links with downtown and the city as a whole to help fold the identity of this area in with the larger community.

A key value of defining areas where art, history and culture is celebrated is to help define and “create a unique place.” Economic development practitioners find significance in creative “placemaking” and see important significance associated intangible considerations that make a place special and unique. Simply put, people are drawn to places that provide a unique and one of a kind experience because so many suburban corridors (and whole communities in some cases) are lined with franchise architecture and boring sameness.

Naturally, new and future promotional materials developed should draw attention to the area should express branding efforts, common design themes and imagery. Additional information on promotions can be found in Chapter 7.

WELCOME!



*Downtown
Sylvania
Association
presents*

Downtown Delights

November 11, 2011
5 - 9 p.m.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- Christmas Tree Lighting - 6 p.m.
- V Concept Ribbon Cutting - 7 p.m.
- V Concept Fashion Show - 8 p.m.

ENTERTAINMENT

- Cast from Northview's Wizard of Oz
- Students of Jean Holden and Lori Litzer
- Sam Dearmond at Chandler Cafe
- Carolers at Angela's Angels

and much more!

Art Camp (June)

Art Camp is an annual day camp that runs for one week (Monday – Friday) in June. Elementary students in grades 4 – 7 learn historic/folk arts and crafts. Media art projects change every year. Projects in previous years have included ceramic tile frescos, glass etching, wool felting, sock monkeys, pressed flower journals, tin lanterns, spinning, weaving and others. Guidance is provided by area elementary school music and art teachers and university graduate students majoring in education.



Limited enrollment. Registration required.



Downtown as a Whole

Apart from the value and significance of a potential History, Art and Culture District, the balance of downtown has equal (if not more) importance and meaning. The key issues related to downtown as a whole are broken down by several key topics in the following material:

Buildings

The existing building stock displays both opportunities for redevelopment and preservation. Most notably, the existing building at the northwest corner of Main Street and Monroe Street (former Rite Aid Pharmacy) presents a substantial redevelopment opportunity. The existing building is setback from the sidewalk to the south so the space is less pedestrian-oriented and there are few windows to make the building inviting.

Ideally, this building should be redeveloped to provide more of a two or three story mixed use property that is more relational to pedestrian spaces. As shown below, redevelopment of this property could include street-level landscaping to separate the road pavement from pedestrian areas. As shown here, redevelopment of this property could include street-level landscaping to separate the road pavement from pedestrian areas.

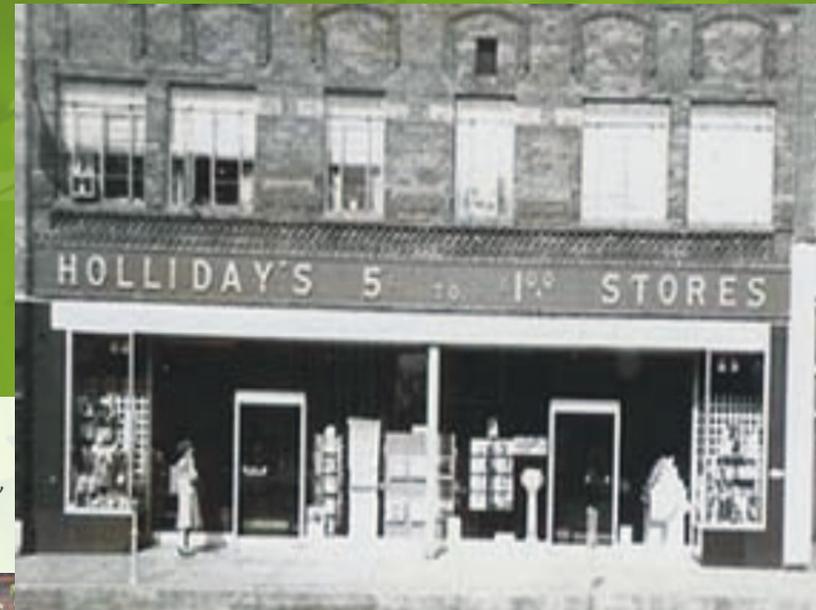
Similar mixed use building concepts are shown on the next page.





Historic Building Restoration

In most cases, historic building restoration is recommended to maintain unique architectural assets. In some cases, downtown buildings have undergone exterior façade renovations that depart from original building designs, and diminish the architectural integrity of the area.



Murals on Buildings

In several areas, there are important opportunities to create murals on the sides of buildings. Murals can transform blank, uninteresting walls into statements about the community and represent a “placemaking feature” downtown. The following example shows an existing wall in downtown Sylvania that can be improved with a mural depicting the quarry heritage of the area. This kind of messaging can help communicate a sense of place and historic community roots that are authentic and real.



Some other communities have also used murals to help document more of a living history. Naperville, Indiana for example, provided residents and businesses with the opportunity to be part of a mural image.

Preserve a Face in Naperville's History!



Along with the notion of creating murals to enhance the public spaces, the need to activate the street frontage with outdoor activity is also important. One direct way to accomplish this is to provide more opportunities for outdoor dining space. The recent zoning code update addresses this issue and more clearly allows outdoor cafés. These regulatory changes are intended to encourage the transformation of existing outdoor areas toward outdoor eating areas that become an extension of the built environment. Such areas provide visible activity at street-levels and a more socially engaging and appealing place. Certain areas in Downtown Sylvania provide excellent opportunities for such transformations. One such area is illustrated here.



Example of upscale outdoor eating space



Example of upscale outdoor eating space



Outdoor cafes can even be created within the street right-of-way if conditions warrant.