



Downtown Pittsfield Strategic Plan

2010 - 2015





Dear Friend:

This strategic plan, undertaken by Downtown, Inc., is intended to guide downtown planning and development efforts for the next 5 years. It contains five strategic priorities and action steps that when completed, will help continue the growth and momentum downtown has experienced in recent years. Great strides have been made downtown and we need to continue to work hard and strategically to build on those successes.

Like Pittsfield, downtowns across the country are working to revitalize themselves after years of decline. Business and city leaders now recognize that a downtown is the heart and soul of a community, the place where people live and go for business, dining, entertainment and socializing. An active and successful downtown instills pride in city residents and is a vital ingredient for attracting new businesses and workers to a community. This plan builds on the existing downtown strategy that emphasizes a diversified mix of uses including arts and entertainment, professional, governmental and non-profit offices, retail, restaurants and market rate housing.

Thanks go out to the following people who made this plan a reality:

- The Board of Directors of Downtown, Inc., under the leadership of President Angelo Stracuzzi, for undertaking this study.
- Mayor James M. Ruberto for his on-going leadership in advocating for and supporting downtown and making it a priority for his administration.
- Yvonne Pearson, Executive Director of Downtown, Inc. and Deanna Ruffer, Director of the Department of Community Development for serving with me on the study's Executive Planning Committee.
- Consultants Peg Barringer of FinePoint Associates and Jackie Gelb of Community Ventures Consulting who directed the planning efforts.
- The 15-member planning team of downtown leaders that included Michael MacDonald, David Carver, George Whaling, Leslie Ferrin, Mary Rentz, Jessica Conzo, Jim Benson, David Powell, Giora Witkowski, Elton Ogden, Michael Bloomberg, Megan Whilden, Yvonne Pearson and Deanna Ruffer.
- The many other downtown supporters who participated in the development of the recommendations and goals. This commitment of time and dedication on everyone's part will yield benefits for the City for years to come.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Lafayette

Executive Director, Berkshire Bank Foundation

Chairman, Downtown Strategic Planning Committee

May 2010



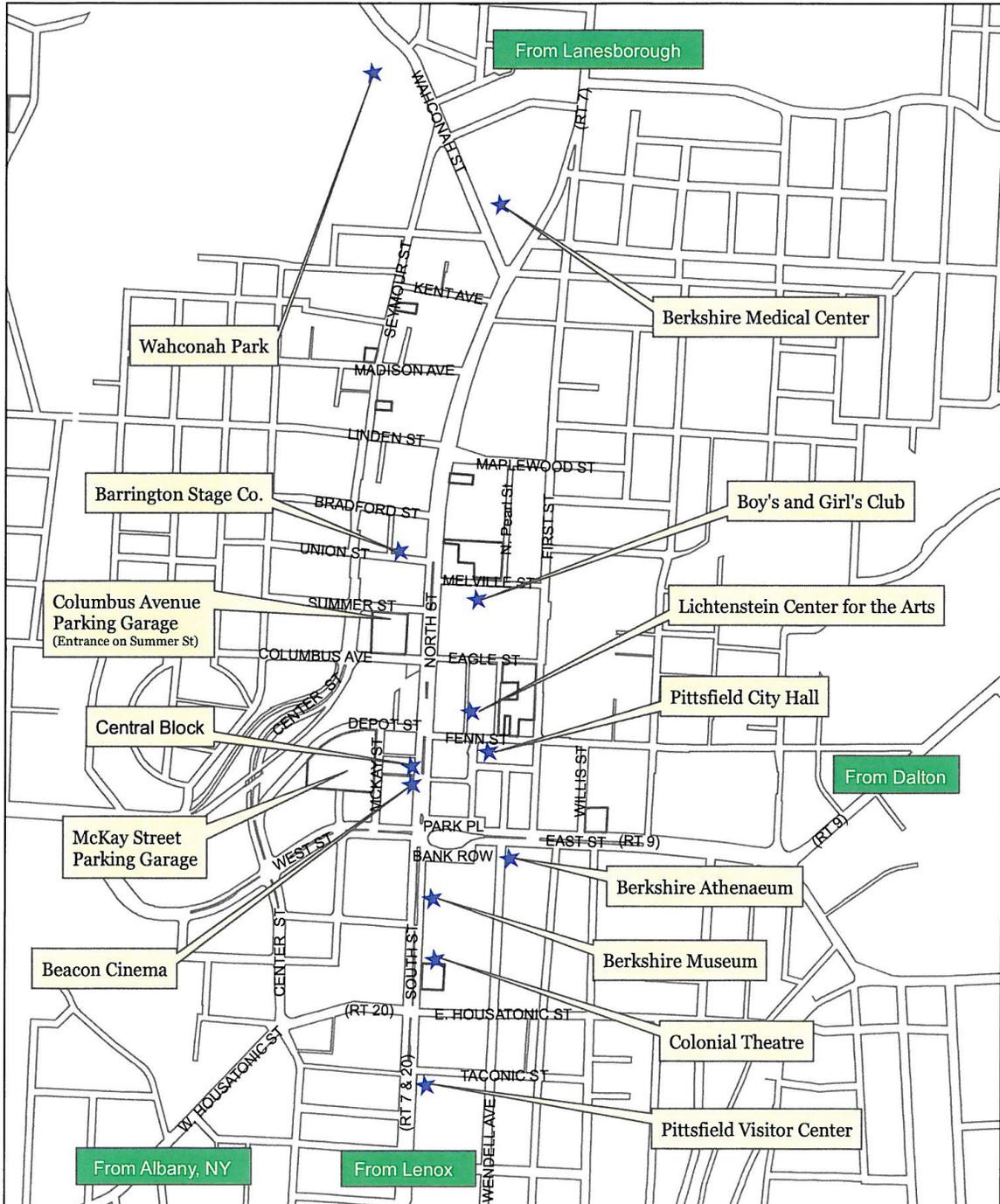
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City of Pittsfield





Strategic Priority 1: Foster the creation of distinctive commercial sub districts within downtown, to enable more effective planning, marketing and business development.

Downtown Sub Districts (final names to be determined):

- Park Square Sub District (Colonial Theatre to Depot / Fenn Streets)
- Central Sub District (Depot/Fenn Streets to Bradford/Melville)
- Upper North (Bradford/Melville to Linden/Maplewood)
- BMC Neighborhood (Maplewood to BMC - Wahconah/Charles)

1. Sub District Planning: Organize downtown into sub districts and empower entrepreneurial property and business owners to:

- Identify business cluster opportunities within each area.
- Set retail / restaurant recruitment priorities and communicate those needs to the Business Recruitment Committee.
- Develop sub district identity for joint marketing and seasonal decorations coordinated with the overall marketing strategy for downtown.
- Identify opportunities to address parking needs as well as other issues and needs as they arise
- Feed sub district priorities into larger downtown development activities

2. Prioritize First Floor for Retail: Develop strategy for preserving all first floor space for retail/restaurant/cultural uses

- Educate building owners about importance of preserving first floor spaces for retail/cultural uses not office or institutional uses
- Amend Arts Overlay zoning to prioritize first floor for retail and windows requirements
- Develop long-term plan for relocation of Juvenile Court off North Street to open that space for retail uses and eliminate retail “dead zone”. Work with local legislators and Mayor to achieve this goal.





Strategic Priority 2: Implement a plan to pro-actively identify and recruit new businesses for downtown and retain existing businesses.

1. Pro-Actively Recruit Retailers and Office Businesses: Establish Business Recruitment Committee under Downtown, Inc. to guide the business recruitment process.



- Develop and maintain a target list of types of businesses desirable to bring downtown, including mechanism for tracking and updating efforts
- Publicize recruitment priorities through business recruitment materials, news articles, with Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Berkshire Economic Development Corporation and other agencies and organizations that can assist with these efforts
- Establish relationships with commercial brokers and retail site locators to assist with recruitment, and develop appropriate supporting materials.
- Support brokers in easily accessing information on available commercial space by maintaining an inventory of available downtown commercial space, pro-actively encouraging property owners to use the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce Site Locator.
- Explore opportunities for a small, targeted number of national anchor businesses on North Street.
- Reach out to existing businesses in region for potential relocation before their leases expire.
- Assist new businesses with their plans to open downtown.



2. Engage Property Owners in Marketing and Recruitment Process

- Hold periodic property owner forums to discuss how to increase the long term value of downtown real estate.
- Support efforts to recruit large new office tenant for the KB Building. Identify and remove barriers to attracting office tenants.
- Support efforts to help retain Big Y supermarket to meet the needs of downtown residents or help recruit another supermarket to replace it.

3. Encourage the development of new market rate housing downtown through conversion of existing buildings or new construction.





Strategic Priority 3: Improve Downtown's Appearance, Convenience, and Safety

Strengthen the collaboration with the key City departments involved with downtown to ensure an attractive and safe business and recreational environment.

1. Collaboration with Public Works Dep't:

- **Parking:** Implement changes in downtown parking to address parking needs in each of the defined commercial districts, market existing parking better and increase communication and joint planning through the sub districts.
- **Lighting:** Increase brightness of street lighting downtown and in city garages to foster public safety and comfort.
- **Downtown Maintenance:**
 - Formalize action plans for snow bank removal, street sweeping, and trash removal.
 - Maintain McKay and Summer Street parking garages to ensure better lighting and cleanliness , especially stairwells.
 - Provide education to building and business owners on importance of maintaining good appearance of their space by keeping windows and sidewalks clean, weeds pulled, facades and signage in top condition.

2. Collaboration with Public Works and Community Development Departments:

- **Signage:** Develop design guidelines and signage ordinance for downtown.
 - Incorporate artistic presence in signage and facades.
 - Develop funding plan for signage and façade improvement programs.
- **Streetscape:** Continue city streetscape improvements
 - Modify sidewalk café guidelines to encourage more sidewalk cafes
 - Continue to plan for traffic calming measures
 - Implement Phase 2 of Streetscape from Park Square to Columbus Ave/Eagle Street
 - Develop interim streetscape/beautification improvements for North Street from Columbus Ave / Eagle Street to Linden/Maplewood Ave. while waiting for new Streetscape funding
 - Develop plan to improve the appearance of First Street from East to Melville Street including the First Street Parking Lot.
 - Support efforts of Pittsfield Beautiful, Inc. to plant and maintain downtown plantings.



Strategic Priority 3: Improve Downtown's Appearance, Convenience & Safety (Cont.)

- **Public Parks:** Improve appearance and functioning of Persip and Sottile Parks on North Street and the Common on First Street
 - Develop plans, through public input, for redevelopment and programming of these parks
 - Secure needed funding to carry out the plans
- **Unifying Elements, Wayfinding and Gateways:** Develop plan for unifying artistic elements, way-finding and gateways.
 - Develop ways to use banners and other elements to identify each sub district, with opportunities for sponsorship of banners by area businesses.
 - Develop plan for gateways into downtown with related way-finding signage.

3. Collaboration with Police to Reduce Crime and Vandalism

- Continue the Downtown Quality of Life Committee to ensure continued emphasis on reducing crime and vandalism.





Strategic Priority 4: Develop Expanded Marketing Effort with a new Focus that Includes Second Homeowner and Visitor Markets along with Year-Round Residents

- 1. Branding:** Define Downtown Pittsfield's value proposition and identity. Who are we? What are we branding?
- 2. Downtown Inc's Co-operative Marketing Campaign** - Evaluate, refine and strengthen co-operative marketing campaign for downtown merchants and cultural institutions. Increase integration with Cultural Pittsfield marketing and events.
- 3. Joint Web-Based Marketing Campaign:** Develop new broad-based marketing plan, directed at visitors and second home owners, to promote downtown businesses and cultural attractions, with an emphasis on web-based marketing.
 - Organize effort to ensure that major web sites like Trip Advisor, Chowhound and YELP have latest positive information on downtown and easily help customers locate Pittsfield activities and businesses.
 - Use search engine optimization to position downtown.
 - Modify City's website to serve as the primary contact for visitor and other downtown information from all search engines. Put in place good links to Downtown, Inc. and Cultural Pittsfield websites.
 - Modify Downtown, Inc. website to have more of a focus on customers including easy to use guide and list of all downtown businesses, restaurants and cultural attractions.
 - Define criteria for measuring effectiveness of marketing efforts, to ensure highest impact.
 - Develop strategy for virtual marketing through Internet, Facebook, Twitter
 - Develop plan to incorporate marketing efforts of each sub district into the larger downtown marketing strategy.
 - Change perception of safety in downtown.
- 4. Expand Cross-Promotions Between Businesses, Cultural Organizations, Non-profits, and City**
 - Use Downtown, Inc. email lists to communicate on regular basis with all downtown merchants about upcoming special downtown events to foster cross-promotion.
 - Develop strategy to have downtown cultural institutions utilize their existing e-lists to promote other downtown activities, restaurants and shopping to their visitor and second homeowner customer base. Use existing lists to expand the virtual marketing effort.
 - Collaborate with downtown stakeholders with large local constituencies to encourage awareness and participation in events.
- 5. Expand Downtown Business's Ability to Meet the Shopping Needs of Existing Downtown Customers:** Capture increased market share from surrounding shopping areas through cross-promotions and expanded goods and services to meet the purchasing needs of existing downtown customers including employees, youth center and senior center members, church parishioners, and residents in and near the downtown.
- 6. Tourism Information Source:** Use and promote single integrated resource as the main source of information for all events. Install links on City and Downtown, Inc. websites to the Calendar. Encourage groups to list their events.
- 7. Visitors center:** Continue to advocate for a strong and viable downtown visitors center.
- 8. Partner with emerging 1Berkshire organization in its regional branding and economic development efforts.**



Strategic Priority 5: Increase Presence and Visibility of Arts Businesses and Cultural Organizations in Downtown

1. Downtown Image – Strengthen the image of downtown as an Arts District with an edgy, artsy feel. Help brand downtown as an Arts District and destination.

- Create a unified brand image for downtown.
- Develop new simple uniform signage to mark all cultural venues / artist studios.
- Develop new street signs with new downtown brand on top
- Work with City to design new banners for downtown and/or the sub districts.

2. Increase Arts Presence and Visibility: Increase visibility of arts-related activities / businesses / cultural venues especially in first floor spaces downtown.

- Initiate program to install art displays, artist studios and “pop up” galleries in vacant storefronts through Storefront Artist Project
- Utilize Artscape Program to install several large sculptures in strategic downtown locations and large scale graphics to create new art destinations
- Hold Open Studio and Gallery Days with all downtown artists, galleries and art venues
- Initiate a highly visible fall community arts project involving high school students placing large Halloween-themed art work in store windows
- Explore feasibility of opening a co-op gallery for local artists and crafts people
- Recruit additional arts-related businesses to relocate or open downtown.



3. Events Strategy: Strategically utilize events to strengthen the viability of downtown.

- Continue to program Lichtenstein Center as a downtown community arts and cultural center especially serving neighborhoods and youth.
- Strengthen existing cultural/community events such as the Pittsfield Art Show, Ethnic Fair, and 3rd Thursdays, and encourage new ones to deepen their impact on downtown.
- Develop criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of downtown events and a plan to better fund these events in a coordinated manner with the private sector.





Strategic Priority 5: Increase Presence and Visibility of Arts Businesses and Cultural Organizations in Downtown (Cont.)

4. Downtown Cultural Coalition: Create a structure to bring together on a regular basis the leaders of the key downtown cultural institutions, arts businesses and artist groups to collaborate with one another, and with Downtown Inc. and the City, to maximize presence and impact of arts and culture in downtown.

- Hold quarterly meetings of the group to share information, discuss issues of common concern and plan new events and projects
- Encourage more partnerships and coordinated events between large and small cultural organizations, restaurants and other downtown businesses and local artists.



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Inc.

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