

## SECTION 9 CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

The Central Business District (CBD) contains a unique concentration and variety of activities found in no other single area of the region. It is the principal center for the finance, government and legal services sectors in the community. Vectren Corporation, American General Finance, the Evansville Courier Press, Welborn Clinic, the area's leading banks, and numerous professional offices and community service organizations have continued to place value on a downtown address. Like many downtowns throughout the nation, Evansville's Central Business District has experienced a loss of permanent residents, decline in the number of retail businesses, an increase in the number of vacant stores, and under-utilization of many properties, due in part to public mobility and suburban development. Although the downtown has declined, it is still a focal point of the community.

The fluctuation in the residential population of the CBD over the last 40 years are shown in Table 9-1 below. The slight increase in population and households that occurred between 1990 and 2000 was short-lived, as the recent demolition of the Riverside One high-rise apartment building has reduced the current population and household numbers below the totals reported in the 2000 Census. Based on Census data, this loss is estimated to be 168 people and 127 occupied households.

**TABLE 9-1: POPULATION AND OCCUPIED HOUSING IN THE CBD**

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Population	1,623	662	972	857	946
Households	841	372	430	218	231

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

According to the 2000 County Business Patterns data for Zip Code 47708, there were 403 business establishments with 11,517 employees having an annual payroll of 410 million dollars. The boundaries of this Zip Code closely correspond to the CBD boundaries. This information indicates that the CBD is still a major employment center and a significant contributor to the local and regional economy.

### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The CBD has suffered because of various economic, social and physical layout reasons, some of which are beyond local control. One of the pressing development issues facing the CBD is what the future character of this area will be. Trends indicate that the CBD has transformed from a major commercial district to a regional government, finance, and legal

center. The primary retail centers are now located in the outlying suburban areas. Preferably, the CBD would have substantial retail, service, residential, and cultural components, producing a thriving multi-use center.

Evansville desires a strong CBD and Urban Core with the opportunity for an identity and lifestyle that is not possible in rural or suburban settings. The strength of the commitment to these areas should be reflected through public and private efforts to implement revitalization. Government departments and boards with jurisdiction over development decisions must maintain their focus on revitalization, redevelopment and rehabilitation in the CBD and Urban Core, and partner with the private sector to accomplish these goals. Obviously, private sector involvement is critical, in cooperation with government, to invest and finance redevelopment/revitalization projects in these areas. Actions over a period of years are needed to achieve the community's vision for these areas. Efforts should be made to maintain the CBD as the region's dominant general office, government and financial center, while at the same time, growing the residential, commercial and cultural sectors in the CBD.

For the retail and entertainment businesses downtown to be prosperous, an adequate and stable population base within and surrounding the CBD is necessary to support additional commercial establishments. The continued population decline of the CBD and the Urban Core has further eroded the economic feasibility of attracting these commercial activities. Therefore, we cannot focus on the CBD as if it is an island unaffected by deterioration of adjacent neighborhoods. To be successful, efforts to revitalize the downtown must include the Urban Core. A lower crime rate, improved neighborhoods, the central location, better linkages to the CBD and a comprehensive public/private enhancement program for the Urban Core could attract residents and provide the increased population base that has been lacking to support downtown commercial uses in recent years.

Although Evansville's most prominent natural and recreational asset is the Ohio River, development of the riverfront has not left many areas available for green space and public viewing/enjoyment of the River. In fact, green space is lacking in both the riverfront and in the downtown as a whole. The addition of Sunrise Park on Waterworks Road and the construction of the Kid's Kingdom play structure has helped to address this need.

## DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

The latest Downtown Master Plan was completed in 2001. Through this planning process, the City hoped to reverse the continuing decline of the downtown over the past several decades by developing a sound strategy to recruit new investment. The Plan's conclusions and recommendations are briefly summarized as follows:

### 1. TARGET MARKET

In general, the target market for housing and office was determined to be local residents and businesses desiring to move to higher quality facilities or locations within the City, and not necessarily new residents or businesses to the area.

#### Retail

The largest target market for retail was determined to be the primary trade area residents and workers in the downtown area. Additionally, downtown retailing should focus on the visitor/tourist market generated by Casino Aztar, conventions, and other events.

#### Housing

As the CBD revitalization plan is implemented and the image of downtown Evansville begins to improve, the Plan predicts housing in downtown will become more desirable to area residents. The benefits of increased residential population will heighten demand for a variety of new or relocated businesses.

#### Office

The market for offices in downtown Evansville continues to be the driving force behind the entire micro-economy of downtown. Attention must be placed on business retention efforts to make certain strong economic anchors remain downtown. A recruitment campaign should also be undertaken to introduce flexible high-tech space for e-commerce businesses interested in locating in urban areas. The development of an urban technology zone could utilize existing buildings and encourage the development of new in-fill buildings.

### 2. PRINCIPLES OF REVITALIZATION

Many of the projects proposed in the entire master plan will take several years until they come to fruition. The retail environment should be flexible enough to accommodate these changes as they progress over the next 5 to 20 years.

### Build an Enabling Organization For Downtown Revitalization

The strength of any revitalization program is based on having an effective organization. Center City Corporation and the Evansville Downtown Development Corporation have merged into a new downtown focused entity [i.e. Downtown Evansville, Inc. (DEI)].

### Ensure the Basics are in Place

It is important to have a good mix of neighborhood commercial establishments that service the downtown businesses, office workers, and local population.

### Build Off Strengths

Downtown Evansville has several important commercial attributes to capitalize on.

Some of these attributes are as follows:

- Safe, comfortable environment;
- High concentration of historically significant buildings;
- Adjacent to Ohio River;
- Sizeable, stable workforce;
- Key commodities are convenience goods and services, restaurants, and antique stores;
- New housing initiatives to increase the downtown population;
- Professional services; and
- Strong office market and potential visitor market.

### Start with a Geographical Concentration

Revitalization activity and investment should start with blocks of retail strength and building these up to impressive levels rather than trying to do a little bit everywhere or by trying to fix the big problems first. Strong clusters of similar stores build critical mass; however, there currently is no critical mass of strong retailers present.

### Linkages are Critical

Linkages create a cohesive downtown environment by helping businesses work together and mutually support one another. The establishment of partnerships is essential, as revitalization does not happen with the public sector acting alone. Partnerships can also vary widely in what they attempt to accomplish (e.g. sharing the cost of downtown improvements), and hold the key to ensuring that the shared vision for downtown Evansville becomes a reality.

## 3. ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

As DEI, the City of Evansville, Vanderburgh County, and others come together in the Downtown Evansville revitalization effort, a new downtown coalition will be formulated to bring community-wide leadership to the forefront and establish new goals and expectations. Support must be secured from both the public and private sectors and the community at large.

It is imperative that DEI gains the support of the major corporations & institutions not currently involved in the downtown.

DEI must have the capacity to accomplish tasks; just acting as an advocate for downtown is not sufficient. The DEI must inspire commitment and action by catalyzing, energizing and facilitating others to create visions and solve problems. Strong community based leadership is critical to downtown success. Communities dominated by one family, one corporation, one political leader, or one industry often lack the flexibility to react to new opportunities. Collaborative leadership requires a community to get beyond single individuals, single issues and single organizations.

#### 4. COMMERCIAL STRATEGY

The downtown coalition will be responsible for implementing the recommendations of a two-step commercial strategy, with DEI and DMD playing critical roles. The commercial strategy will consist of the following short-term and long-term elements:

##### Short Term

This strategy for downtown revitalization will focus on fulfilling the needs of the office workers and downtown residents; and

##### Long Term

This will concentrate on developing an identifiable retail role that is conducive to a lifestyle district with a variety of eating and drinking establishments, antiques and collectibles, and other leisure retailers (expected after planned projects are complete and increases occur in people visiting and living in the downtown).

##### Marketing

DEI marketing should organize promotional programs to attract more persons to the downtown and convert single-purpose, business visitors in the downtown into multi-purpose visitors (e.g. go to the bank and have lunch).

##### Existing Business Retention

Before developing new businesses, protect and enhance the existing retailers through various new services and efforts.

##### New Business Recruitment

It is not likely that national chain retailers/restaurants will come to Downtown Evansville. Most chains have clauses in their lease, preventing them from locating a new establishment within a certain distance from an existing location. Therefore, recruitment efforts should focus on businesses other than the national chains that already have an establishment in the region.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION

Although the recommended coalition is not intended to become a formal nonprofit organization, it will be important to have an organizational mechanism to help coordinate the efforts of all those involved.

### Focus on Actions to Further Strategic Goals

The Land Use specific recommendations are listed in the Central Business District Action Plan on the following page.

### Development & Business Incentives

The prospects of investing in downtown will undoubtedly continue to be an issue. Consequently, City & County government will need to work closely with potential retailers and developers to identify economic incentive packages that underwrite a portion of a project's expense and help lessen the private risk. An example of a program in this area that has been initiated since completion of the Master Plan is:

#### Loft Housing Matching Grant Program-

The goal of this effort administered by the Department of Metropolitan Development is to stimulate the creation of market rate, loft-style housing in the upper floors of downtown buildings. The program targets the Downtown Redevelopment Area which is bounded by Lloyd Expressway, Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Chestnut St. and Riverside Drive. Improvement projects that are eligible include restoration, rehabilitation or renovation of exterior features, interior features and entrance/exit improvements.

### Public Policy & Guidance

Review current regulatory mechanisms such as zoning, building code compliance, and design review to improve the environment for downtown development and help implement key action plan projects.

### Sustainable Design

As future community development issues and opportunities are being discussed, consideration should be given to the long-range benefits of sustainable design practices for the entire community and in particular the downtown.

# CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

Source: 2001 Downtown Master Plan

## VISION STATEMENTS/GOALS

The **short-term vision** for Downtown Evansville incorporates a highly functional environment that supports downtown businesses and office workers.

The **long-term vision** for Downtown Evansville is to create a dynamic urban center with a blend of unique shopping, entertainment, social, cultural, and service experiences that are distinct from that of the competition in the region. This vision will be based on Evansville's historic architecture, its location on the Ohio River, its vibrant street life, and its healthy businesses. The three primary activity nodes or districts include:

CIVIC/CULTURAL DISTRICT, where government and cultural activities are focused;

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, which will be business, service and lifestyle focused; and

ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT centered around Casino Aztar.

## OBJECTIVES

Promote Main Street revitalization.

Guide downtown growth and physical development.

Upgrade existing buildings and reuse vacant buildings/land.

Provide for new downtown housing.

Evaluate/Improve access, traffic, parking, and linkages.

Integrate the proposed entertainment district within the downtown.

Provide for appropriate riverfront development.

Aid in developing the final plans for the proposed Events Plaza.

Establish an effort to recruit and retain the downtown workforce.

Develop recommendations for future private & public sector actions.

### SHORT TERM POLICIES

Convert one-way streets to two-way traffic.

Identify a pilot project to rehabilitate structures within a designated block on Main Street.

### MEDIUM TERM POLICIES

Implement design enhancement ideas for parking lot screening, storefront enhancements, property owner signage.

Support new in-fill housing projects.

### LONG TERM POLICIES

Connect North Main St. with Main Street including improved signage and circulation efforts around the Civic Center.

Create larger entertainment venues, such as an arena.

Develop regional marketing relationships.

Reconfigure Fourth Street for easier circulation.

SOURCE: COMMUNITY / AREA PLAN COMMISSION

### OBJECTIVE

Expand the number of businesses, employees, residents and visitors in the CBD through redevelopment/revitalization activities.

### POLICIES

Expand the residential component of the downtown by encouraging conversion of second and third story storefronts to loft apartments, and encouraging the construction of new multi-family dwelling units in the area.

Encourage additional green space in the downtown, especially on the riverfront; and

support the construction of the Events Plaza.

Supply ample and convenient parking to accommodate the needs of the people.

Discourage continued development of surface parking lots, especially in the central core area of downtown.

Ensure that efforts to revitalize the downtown include consideration of the adjacent neighborhoods, especially the linkages (e.g. pedestrian, transit, etc.) from these areas to the CBD.

Promote the construction of additional multi-level parking structures within the downtown.