

COVINGTON CENTER CITY ACTION PLAN



ACTION PLAN

May 2012 | Covington, Kentucky

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Introduction:

Center City Covington's diverse neighborhoods, compact geography, sense of history and proximity to the Ohio and Licking Rivers present an attractive mix ripe for increased investment, economic growth and overall vitality. Promoting City Center's affordable real estate, strong neighborhoods and emerging culture of innovation and entrepreneurship provide the cornerstone of this planning effort.

Vision:

Center City will become the vibrant regional hub of economic activity attracted to Covington by its reputation for business innovation, ample jobs, beautiful natural setting, historic mixed use environment, pedestrian and bike amenities and affordable residential and commercial real estate opportunities.

Background:

In 2010, the City of Covington was one of only 42 communities nationwide awarded a Community Challenge Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD). The HUD grant is funding this planning effort.

The Action Plan is designed to balance the community's aspirations (identified through an extensive outreach process) with market realities (identified by the market profile undertaken as part of this planning process and P.U.M.A.'s global trends analysis). Center City Covington has tremendous potential to attract new jobs, work force and investment in the near term. Demographic and lifestyle trends are making downtowns around the country more desirable destinations for living, dining and entertainment. Affordable mixed use urban environments such as Center City Covington that can provide job opportunities and affordable housing will be poised to leverage new investment.

The Action Plan lays out priorities and policies for Center City to prepare for and maximize economic opportunities. A variety of economic development strategies, physical improvements and an organizational structure designed to leverage several resources in Center City are outlined in this plan.





Outreach Process:

The outreach process undertaken during this planning process was extensive and incorporates the feedback of more than 1,000 Covington stakeholders. The outreach included:

- + Small group meetings with each of the six neighborhood groups at the beginning and middle of the planning process which attracted approximately 80 participants;
- + Small group meetings with a variety of business groups with interests in Center City which attracted approximately 50 people;
- + A presentation to the Covington Business Council luncheon where there were approximately 75 attendees;
- + More than 30 individual meetings with key stakeholders, City staff and elected officials;
- + A Steering Committee of 25 individuals met regularly to review the planning process and provide feedback;
- + Six meetings with business and property owners interested in the potential formation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the Madison corridor and Mainstrasse areas were held;
- + Approximately 200 stakeholders attended community open house presentations in which all Center City stakeholders were invited – the first

series of open houses was held in November of 2011 and the second series was held in March of 2012.

- + Major themes from the community open houses are outlined below:

On the economy:

- + Attract new jobs and support existing businesses
- + Cultivate thriving retail
- + Keep young talent in Covington
- + Activate development opportunities
- + Leverage affordable real estate
- + Encourage innovation

On the Public Realm:

- + Develop open space and river access
- + Emphasize walkability & accessibility
- + Create stronger connections
- + Improve gateways and signage
- + Make Madison Avenue more inviting

On Neighborhoods:

- + Provide balanced, affordable housing options
- + Develop more neighborhood amenities such as a recreation center, dog park and community gardens
- + Improve infrastructure and safety
- + Develop quick wins that can improve neighborhoods immediately





- + A survey designed to gain community-wide feedback regarding downtown was completed by almost 800 stakeholders. A full summary of survey responses is attached to this document. Key findings from the survey include:
 - + Nearly 60% of respondents visit Center City Covington once a week or more.
 - + Respondents' top reason for visiting Center City Covington is dining, followed by special events, nightlife and entertainment.
 - + The top reason for not visiting Center City Covington is a lack of diverse shopping options.
 - + Difficult and limited parking, an unappealing environment, and lack of restaurant options were also mentioned as deterrents to visiting Center City Covington.
 - + More shops and restaurants, a cohesive downtown strategic plan, business and job attraction and residential development were cited as key enhancements that would be important to achieve a vision for Center City Covington in 2020.

- + A high quality grocery store was the most desired new business type for Center City Covington.
- + Economic development, capital improvements and enhanced maintenance are the top three service bundles that respondents would be most willing to pay for through a business improvement district.

Center City Study Area Boundary:

The Action Plan study area encompasses the area bounded by the Ohio River on the north, 13th Street on the south, the Licking River on the east, and I-71/I-75 on the west – it is illustrated below:



Guiding Principles

This plan is rooted in a set of principles intended to embody the spirit of Center City Covington. Those guiding principles were developed by the Action Plan Steering Committee and are outlined below:

Guiding Principles of a Vital Center City Covington

Prosperous: Focused on attracting jobs, investment and economic growth

Inviting: Neighborhoods that are safe, attractive and welcoming

Walkable: Easy and safe for pedestrians and bicycles to navigate

Diverse: Socially and economically inclusive – providing jobs and housing for all

Collaborative: Public and private sectors working together to enhance prosperity and livability

Entrepreneurial: Embracing entrepreneurs and creative thinkers of all types

Investment Framework for the Center City Action Plan

This Action Plan recommends that resources and energy be concentrated on building upon Center City’s areas of strength and existing activity. To help direct and make the most of public and private investment in Center City, a framework has been developed that addresses three primary geographic areas outlined below.

- + **Existing Activity Centers:** Center City Covington has several primary activity centers that collectively generate approximately 1 million visitors per year. These centers include:
 - + Northern Kentucky Convention Center – approximately 300,000 visits
 - + Mainstrasse – approximately 400,000 annual visits
 - + Mary Ann Mongan Library - 390,000 annual visits; which will be enhanced by the Gateway Community and Technical College site redevelopment.

These three primary destinations create the foundation for the physical framework in the near term and are outlined below:

Riverfront/ Convention Center/ Roebling Commons	Mainstrasse	Gateway Campus/ Library
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Employment center + Entertainment amenity & gathering place + Opportunity sites + BID opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Mixed use, entertainment and dining district + Attract/strengthen small businesses + Create better connections + Opportunity Site: “Hamburger Heaven” and BID opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Activity generator + Innovation zone + Business incubator + Mixed use development + BID opportunity



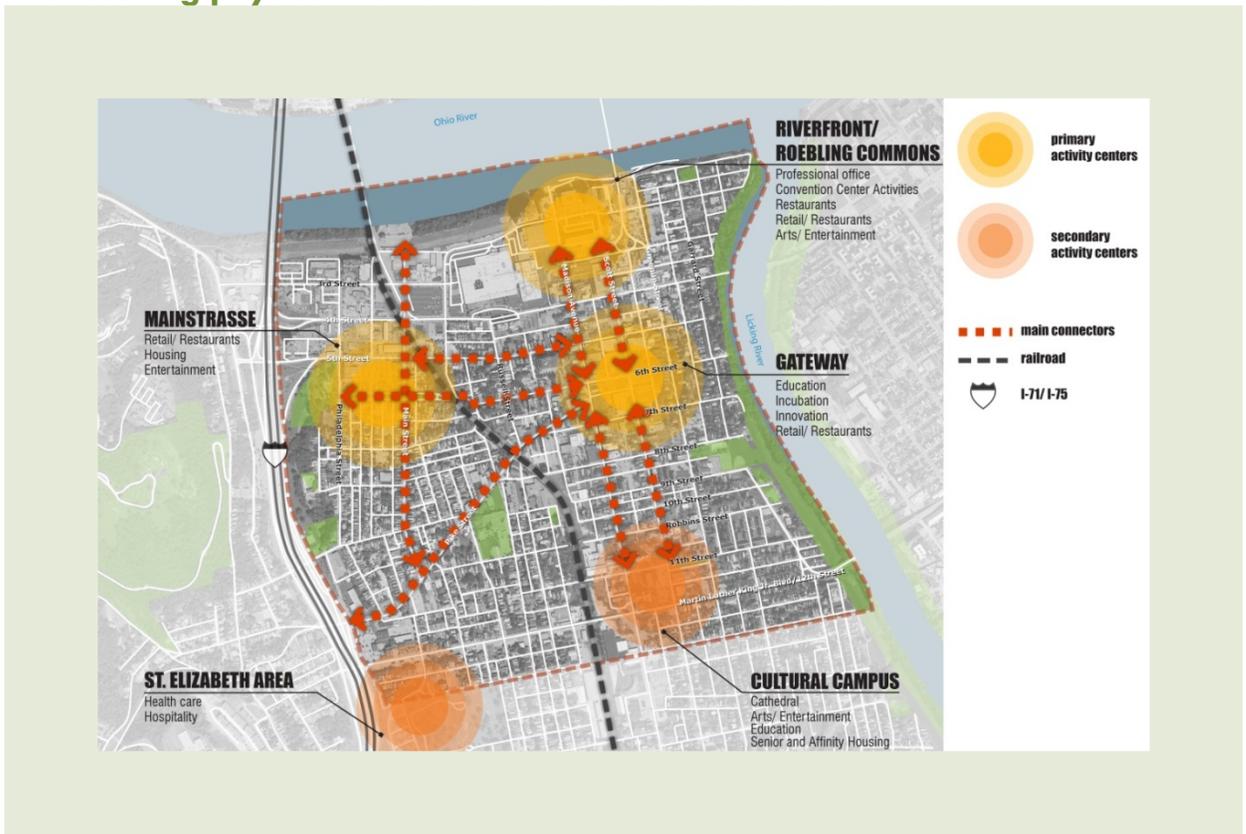
- + **Riverfront/Convention Center/Roebling Commons – The Employment Core:** Located near the Ohio River and the northern end of the Madison Avenue corridor, this area is a primary employment center of Covington. There are several landmark office towers, national brand hotels and the Northern Kentucky Convention Center. Just to the southeast is Roebling Commons, an emerging dining and entertainment district that can become an attractive amenity for employees and visitors in the area. The Roebling Suspension Bridge, which provides both auto and pedestrian connections to Cincinnati, is accessed here, providing a strong and accessible link to Covington from the north side of the Ohio River. Riverfront and Cincinnati skyline views and river access are available from this area of Center City.
- + **Mainstrasse – The Entertainment District:** To the west of the Riverfront/Roebling Commons area lies Mainstrasse, Covington’s premier dining and entertainment district. Mainstrasse is a historic mixed-used area graced by mature trees, public gathering spaces and a diverse range of dining and entertainment options. Mainstrasse is a popular destination area both for locals and visitors from throughout Northern Kentucky and the Cincinnati area.
- + **Gateway Campus/Library – The Center of Innovative Thinking:** The Mary Ann Morgan Library currently generates significant visitation. Adjacent to the library is the new Gateway Community and Technical College Campus which anticipates a student population of approximately 2,500. The overall daily activity generated by these two uses provides an opportunity to capitalize on the creative and innovative energy of those using these facilities.

The plan framework aims to utilize these three existing activity centers to build a programmatic and geographic framework. Specific areas of focus will include identifying near-term job creation and investment opportunities, creating better connections throughout Center City, promoting innovation and identifying funding mechanisms to implement the recommendations put forward in this plan.

In addition to the near term primary focus areas, the plan also recommends two secondary focus areas, which can be developed over the long term – these are the “Cultural Campus” and “Saint Elizabeth’s Area”. They are seen as potential activity centers that will provide enhanced gateway developments, attract visitors and encourage job growth.

- + **Cultural Campus** – With the location of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington Latin School and immediate proximity to the Carnegie Arts Center near the intersection of Madison Avenue and Martin Luther King Blvd, the setting for a connected cultural campus is already in place. This area also includes the original home of Frank Duveneck, famous figure and portrait painter, as well as the Seminary Square neighborhood just to the west of the Cathedral area. These landmarks and destinations along with the gateway opportunity from the south creates a unique environment, which brings in visitors, students, art enthusiasts and residents into this area.
- + **Saint Elizabeth’s** – The redevelopment of this area is well underway with the new St. Elizabeth Hospital campus and new streetscape along Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. The historic Bavarian brew house (located within the former Jillian’s Entertainment Complex) and other contiguous sites currently lying dormant provide excellent opportunities for significant redevelopment of this area. With the recent redesign of the Brent Spence Bridge alignment (and with changes recommended by the City), Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd will become one of the prime gateways into the City.

The resulting physical Framework is illustrated below:



Action Plan Construct

In order to capitalize on the existing activity centers through targeted investment and strategic planning, the Action Plan is rooted in the philosophy that concentrating on three distinct yet interrelated elements that can be applied to this plan will create a strong, cohesive and sustainable Center City. Those elements are:

- A. STRONG ECONOMY:** Creating an environment that will attract jobs and investment is the primary goal of this plan. Supporting existing businesses while attracting new ones is critical to the sustained economic growth of Center City Covington.
- B. INVITING PUBLIC REALM:** A more cohesive and attractive public realm designed to provide greater access to open space, enhance the pedestrian experience and connectivity of Center City will strengthen neighborhoods, business districts and create more economic opportunity. An appealing public realm is fundamental to attract more investment, jobs and residents.
- C. STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS:** Center City is home to six unique neighborhoods – each with its own character, context, history and sense of place. Creating diverse housing options and residential amenities will attract more residents. Jobs and investment will follow stable and attractive neighborhoods.

Overall Construct of the Center City Action Plan:



A. STRONG ECONOMY

Covington, while beginning to see signs of a regional economic upturn, continues to experience challenging economic conditions. City-wide revenues are down, several large employers have recently moved their headquarters out of Covington, public services have been reduced and investment in Center City has leveled. However, Center City has the raw material to create strong public/private partnerships to make Covington a regional and national destination for innovative businesses. Recommended initiatives are outlined below:

A1. Attract Jobs & Support Existing Businesses

- + **Goal:** Attract new jobs and support existing businesses in Center City Covington.
- + **Why it's important:** The City of Covington's economic health is inextricably tied to jobs. Payroll taxes generate almost half the total revenue for the City's general fund, and declining payroll tax revenues have reduced the City's overall budget significantly. In 2011, Covington lost 2 major employers who moved operations out of the City, creating a sense of urgency to replace those jobs and ensure existing small and innovative businesses have the support they need to stay and thrive in Center City Covington.
- + **Strategies:** Build upon Center City's niche of innovation and incubation through providing incentives, business support and technical assistance to new and existing businesses in Center City. Capitalize on vacancies and low lease rates. Commercial lease rates in Center City range from approximately \$8 to \$13 per square foot and the overall vacancy rate in the study area is approximately 21%. Plenty of available space and favorable lease rates create a prime opportunity for small business and start-ups to locate in Center City. Recommendations to attract and maintain businesses and investment include:

1. Provide Technical Assistance & Financial Incentives:

- a) Provide easy access for prospective and existing businesses so they can navigate through City processes and gain access to incentives and support including:
 - + Permitting and regulatory help
 - + Market information
 - + Inventory of available commercial space



- + Business planning
 - + Merchandising
- b)** Provide financial incentives to small businesses that locate in Center City including:
- + Providing working capital for innovative and creative business concepts
 - + Low/no interest loans and grants
 - + Funding for tenant finish
 - + Working with landlords to develop contract or lease relief for businesses that generate a certain kind or number of jobs and provide a desirable service or product
 - + Providing incentives for light manufacturing, creative pursuits and residential uses on upper floors of currently underutilized buildings in Center City
- c)** Establish regular communication with existing businesses in order to help identify what technical or financial needs may exist before problems arise and to leverage successes to an entire district.
- d)** Develop and nurture strategic partnerships to leverage investment in Center City. Potential partners include:
- + Center for Great Neighborhoods
 - + Catalytic Development Funding Corporation of Northern Kentucky
 - + City's Community Development Department
 - + Renaissance Covington
 - + Covington Business Council/Urban Partnership
 - + Two Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are being contemplated for Center City as part of this planning process – along the Madison corridor/Rivercenter area and in Mainstrasse. BIDs can provide a reliable financing mechanism and facilitate the cooperation of several partners to support economic development, capital improvements and maintenance in Center City.

- e) Identify a physical space in Center City that can be a center dedicated to promoting entrepreneurship through providing:
 - + Technical assistance
 - + Affordable office, manufacturing, retail space
 - + Provide mentorship programming
 - + Helping identify sources of business capital

2. Marketing & Branding Strategies:

- a) Market Center City as a center of innovation to University students throughout the region including Gateway Community and Technical College, University of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky University. Strive to attract and keep young talent in Covington by promoting its quality of life, amenities and affordable real estate.
- b) Collective marketing strategies: Build on the strength of the commercial districts through collective marketing with web presence, maps, specials, and other district-wide marketing strategies.
- c) Work with Covington hotels and the convention center to ensure in-room brochures and marketing collateral references include Covington businesses and restaurants, not just Cincinnati offerings (You're in Covington!).
- d) Develop a map and directory of Center City to distribute to Center City employees, visitors and conventioners.





3. Regulatory Adjustments:

Ensure a predictable, reliable and consistent regulatory review process as part of an overall economic development strategy to attract investment. A review of the City's zoning code has been undertaken and is included in the Appendices to the Action Plan. The zoning code review addresses several short- and long-term strategies to effectively implement the recommendations in this plan. In order to make inroads in the near-term, some "quick wins" that will allow for immediate gains are outlined below:

- a) Adjust code regulations to enable implementation of mixed use buildings
- b) Enable conversion of existing commercial structures to mixed use or multifamily apartments by adding an adaptive reuse provision that

waives transparency requirements of subsection 3.05.02 and the 30-foot required rear setback for residential floors in section 3.04.

- c)** Allow adaptive reuse of some existing residential structures to commercial use in Mainstrasse by adding a wider range of structure types, with location restrictions, to the standard for Neighborhood Retail Sales and Service.
- d)** Allow for more neighborhood retail and services by revising the definition and use standards.
- e)** Ease HP-O design requirements, such as for wooden windows and siding, on non-street faces of buildings.
- f)** Rezone key commercial properties to readily enable more use and intensity consistent with desired redevelopment patterns, including the IRS property and “Hamburger Heaven” area.
- g)** Rezone appropriate residential areas to allow for future increases in intensity using the RU-1 and RU-0.5 designations.
- h)** Rezone the ART district to CBD and consider converting ART to an incentives-based overlay.
- i)** Add a use regulation to prevent addiction clinics being located adjacent to established single family residences.
- j)** Add more flexibility to infill standards including parking requirements and dimensional standards.
- k)** Streamline processing and add for regulatory flexibility by giving authority for administrative adjustments of quantitative standards by up to ten percent to the Zoning Administrator (or other designated staff within the Community Development Department).
- l)** Revise provisions on expansion of nonconforming structures and uses to be more liberal.



A2.Strategies for Thriving Retail

+ **Goal:** Enhance existing retail “niches” and districts with specific offerings that will help reinforce current businesses, fill vacant spaces and increase street-level vitality in Center City.

+ **Why it’s Important:** Retail not only serves the needs of local residents and workers, but, as the use that visitors first see and can most easily access, plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of Covington and influencing decision-making on where to live, work, and invest.

+ **Strategies:**

1. Embrace an approach of “triage” to Center City retail revitalization, focusing energies and resources first and foremost on the most promising activity centers and sub-districts within Center City (enforcing existing activity areas’ strengths) and de-emphasizing other areas in the short term. Specifically Mainstrasse Village (for additional up-market restaurants and bars), the RiverCenter complex (for quick-service food/drink and other worker-oriented conveniences) and the stretch along Madison Avenue from 5th Street to 8th Street (for “hipster”/alternative-themed, student-oriented, and young creative professional businesses that can take advantage of the Madison Theater and Gateway Community and Technical College anchors, respectively).
 - a) Add new retail space only in those Center City sub-districts where justified by current and/or future tenant demand and rental dynamics. Suggested areas of focus include development sites at Main Street and 5th Street and on Madison Avenue between 3rd and 5th Streets.
 - b) Encourage the transition of existing ground floor non-retail uses to retail use as demand warrants, particularly on important pedestrian “connector” blocks like Madison Avenue between 4th and 5th Streets and Park Place between Scott Boulevard and Tobacco Alley (for quick-service food/drink and other worker-oriented conveniences).
 - c) Concentrate on prospects for and locations in Center City with the most “catalytic” potential (e.g. anchor/“pioneering” businesses and high-visibility storefronts) and reorient retail incentive programs towards the same. Examples include the above-mentioned stretch of Madison Avenue (for “hipster”/alternative-themed, student-oriented and young

professional businesses), MainStrasse Village (for upscale eating and drinking establishments) as well as 4th and 5th Street “through” corridors.

- 2.** Strive for a retail mix in Center City that reflects and reinforces Covington’s cultural and socio-economic diversity, including the retention and upgrading of “purpose-serving” businesses geared toward serving low and moderate income populations.
- 3.** Work with landlords and brokers in Center City to secure “buy-in” to the retail positioning/tenanting strategy and the role that the City and other organizations would be playing in its implementation (specifically, #8 below).
- 4.** Create and maintain a retail database of current vacancies and soon-to-expire leases in Center City, for use in directing prospective tenants to available spaces (see #8 below).
- 5.** Produce a retail marketing/leasing brochure for Center City and its different sub-districts that can be used by landlords and brokers in trying to tenant available spaces.
- 6.** Enhance recruitment capacity that can supplement the efforts of landlords and brokers in Center City. Identify current capacity at the City, and supplement those skills and activities to ensure there is not a duplication of effort.
- 7.** Identify and pursue established regional and local “chain-lets” which can add to the character to Center City and Covington but also provide a reassuring track record to landlords/lenders.
- 8.** Work with small-business resource centers or consider engaging a business consultant to conduct “Technical Assistance” workshops that can help strengthen and retain existing merchants in Center City.
- 9.** Base parking policy in Center City on consumer expectations, as established by relevant competitors, rather than City revenue potential or individual merchants. (See section A4 for a more detailed parking discussion.)
- 10.** Consider working with the Police Department and/or other local resources or possibly retaining a consultant to provide guidance in dealing with the



impact of public-safety perceptions in Center City, including necessary improvements to the physical environment, adjustments to various programs and patrols, innovative approaches to strategic communications, and appropriate metrics and measures to track progress.

- 11.** Consider embarking on a campaign to “rebrand” Covington and Center City’s individual sub-districts to the broader regional audience and to specific target sub-markets, based on the retail positioning strategy.
- 12.** Support the growth of other sub-markets (e.g. office workers, conventioners, etc.) that can increase retail demand in Center City.

A3. Activate Development Opportunities

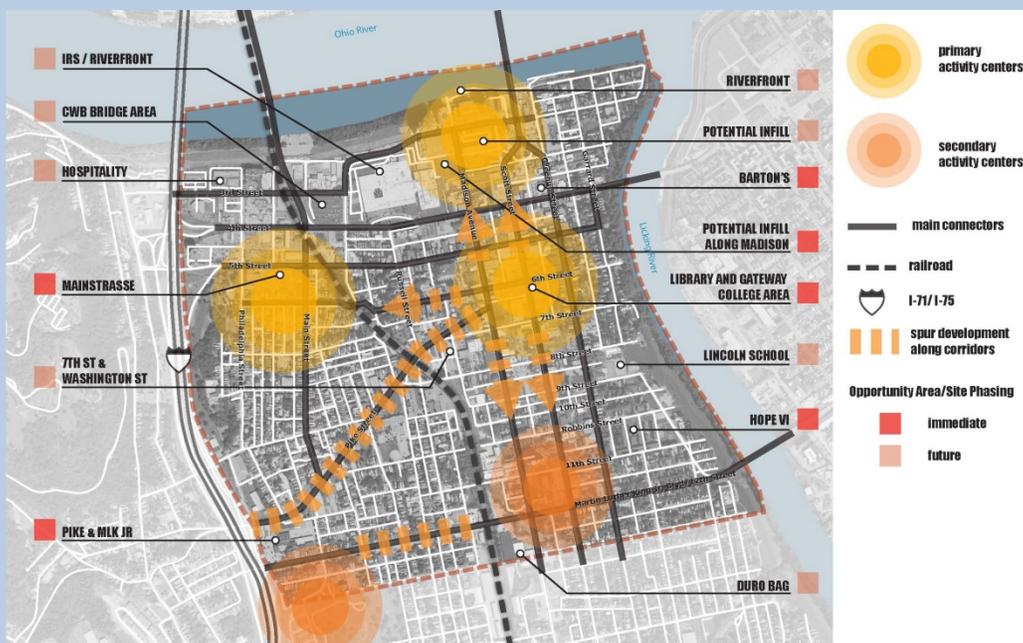
- + Goal:** Encourage redevelopment of underutilized real estate throughout Center City
- + Why It’s Important:** There are many parcels throughout Center City that are currently surface parking lots, drive-throughs and other auto-focused, low density uses. Vacant upper stories of buildings are prime opportunities for office, light manufacturing, service and residential uses.

+ Strategies:

- 1.** Identify underutilized parcels in Center City and prioritize those parcels that have the biggest catalytic potential to bring new vitality to Center City.
- 2.** Begin communication with property owners and developers whose collaborative efforts will be critical for redeveloping underutilized sites.
- 3.** Encourage upper floor commercial and/or residential tenancy in underutilized buildings; address code issues and other impediments to upper floor usage.
- 4.** Ensure TIF and other redevelopment tools are available for use and will support new development.
- 5.** Develop objective criteria to guide investment in Center City to ensure new development is strategic and intentional. Recommended “investment filter” criteria include:
 - a)** Does the investment focus first and foremost in the three activity centers – Roebling /Riverfront; Mainstrasse and Gateway Community and Technical College/Library? If not, does it provide catalytic opportunity?

- b) Does the investment promote innovation and/or create jobs?
- c) Does the investment strengthen Center City neighborhoods?
- d) Does the investment enhance the public realm?
- e) Does the investment promote quality of life in Center City?
- f) Does the investment leverage previous public investment? If not, does the investment offer a compelling opportunity and/or investment catalyst for Center City?
- g) Is the investment leveraged by diverse sources of capital?

Opportunities Site Map



Shows opportunity sites or areas for higher and better use and the proximity to the activity centers. The opportunity sites are color coded to indicate priority for redevelopment and phasing

Court Street | Before



Court Street | After



Leverages existing opportunities to create a sense of place with context-sensitive new infill, view corridors to potential public gathering spaces, activating first floor development to encourage pedestrian-oriented environment and possibility of Farmer's Market and event space - envisioning the area as Covington's premier outdoor public gathering and activity area

A4. Parking Management

+ **Goal:** Develop parking strategies that efficiently manage available parking resources and promote logical, consistent and reliable parking solutions that support economic development throughout Center City.

+ **Why It's Important:** Well managed parking provides the backdrop for more shopping, dining, investment and access to business districts, which, in turn, supports businesses, generates revenue and encourages new investment in Center City.

+ **Strategies:**

1. Develop a parking management plan to determine what's working and where improvements can be made in parking management and enforcement. A management plan should:
 - a) Work with residents, business and commercial property owners to determine best strategies to address metered parking, use of lots and regulated on-street parking.
 - b) Determine if higher meter and/or lot fees (or an increment thereof) could be dedicated exclusively to improving parking facilities through a dedicated parking fund or district
 - c) Improve signage and wayfinding of parking facilities
 - d) Explore technology that can make parking more convenient (i.e. smart meters, pay by phone, flexible hours and pricing).
2. Evaluate time limit maximums for meters in Center City areas.
3. Provide a "fifteen minute free" option on meters throughout Center City and a "first hour free" approach in City-managed lots (capturing lost revenue in the subsequent hours).
4. In a collaborative effort between the MSVA and the City, address specific recommendations for Mainstrasse with regard to:
 - + Providing hang-tags for residents, employees and others
 - + Introducing a residential permit parking system
 - + Consider installing meters on Main from 5th to 9th Streets and from Philadelphia to the railroad tracks



B. INVITING PUBLIC REALM

An appealing and inviting public realm is a fundamental part of a strategy to strengthen neighborhoods and business districts alike.

B1. Strengthen Physical Connections

+ **Goal:** Create intuitive connections throughout Center City to encourage better bike and pedestrian movement and access that contributes to its overall appeal, safety, economic vitality and quality of life.

+ **Why it's important:** Encouraging multiple transportation modes appeals to current and prospective urban dwellers. Center City's compact geographic area and natural beauty contribute to the notion that Center City is a prime locale for investment in paths, trails and access.

+ **Strategies:**

1. Plan for and develop a trail network throughout Center City to accommodate walkers and bikers. Incorporate the Ohio and Licking River bridges into any pedestrian/bike trail plan; take advantage of flat terrain in the area.
2. Consider commissioning a bike master plan for the City that can provide strategies to support bike mobility and amenities throughout Center City.
3. Create a wayfinding framework with a common design theme that reinforces the unique attributes. Two hierarchical levels of signage are recommended to help reinforce a sense of place as well as direct automobile, bike and pedestrian traffic through the center city areas. They are:

+ **Primary/Gateway Signage:** Strategically located at the gateways and outlying areas in the areas indicated in the paragraph above. These signage components will guide automobile traffic to specific focus areas (Roebing Commons, Mainstrasse, Gateway and others) and major destinations within center city.

+ **Secondary/District Signage:** This family of signs will be designed with pedestrians and bicyclists in mind. It is recommended to have not only the common design theme of the signage family but should also incorporate some distinctive

characteristics or logos/marks specific to the focus areas in which they are located. Examples of such distinctive characteristics are the Goebel Park Clock Tower, the lively/kinetic/action signage within Mainstrasse or the Basilica within the Cultural Campus area. In order to highlight and provide a stronger sense of orientation, consideration should be given to employing the use of pedestrian-scaled signing elements that can be easily modified as tenancing evolves within the focus areas. Future consideration should also be given to include the identity of the residential districts, such as “Licking Riverside” or “Eastside” on signage within the Center City core. Gateways and signage should be installed at strategic entry points including:

- a.** 5th Street as a major entry point to Center City
- b.** Madison looking south from Convention Center
- c.** Improve directional signage throughout Center City to:
 - + Mainstrasse
 - + Roebling Commons
 - + Rivercenter
 - + Gateway
 - + Library
 - + 12th Street Gateway
 - + 4th Street Gateway (on the east)
 - + 11th Street Gateway (on the east)
 - + Clay Wade Bailey Bridge Area

4. Although plans have not yet been finalized for the alignment of the roadways with the new Brent Spence bridge and potential of 12th Street/Martin Luther King Blvd being one of the primary main interchanges for Covington – it is recommended that an alternate route or loop road connecting 12th Street with 5th Street and the Pike Street area be enhanced as “boulevard streets” to create a sense of place as well as creation of potential investment opportunities along these enhanced corridors and the gateway area as a whole.

- 5.** Engage local artists in improving the public realm through:
- a.** Murals and public art
 - b.** New signage, gateways, bike racks and other improvements to the public realm
 - c.** Others as appropriate



Connectivity Map



Highlights the potential alternative connections and improvements recommended for specific corridors (6th Street, 11th Street, Greenup Street) to accommodate the bike and pedestrian friendly environment within the center city area connecting neighborhoods and destinations.

Madison Avenue | Before



Madison Avenue | After



Exhibits potential infill and streetscape enhancements to help bridge the connection between the Convention Center area and Madison Avenue.



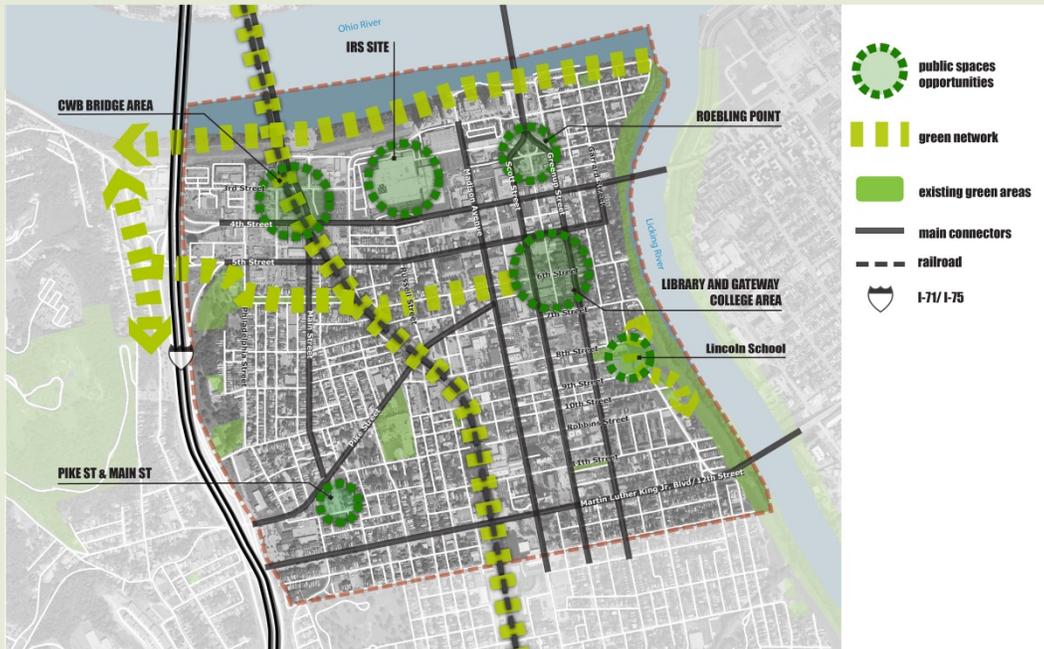
B2. Develop Open Space & River Access

- + **Goal:** Develop more green space and river access throughout Center City.
- + **Why it's important:** Green space, connections and pocket parks will help improve the overall urban experience in Center City. Strategically developed green space will encourage more pedestrian activity, help develop much-needed connections throughout Center City and ultimately provide economic growth through creating a more appealing environment in which to live and work.

+ **Strategies:**

1. Identify and prioritize open space opportunity sites throughout Center City that will enhance an existing amenity or connection and be well utilized.
2. Determine if the IRS site (and/or others) can be integrated into Center City by allowing better access and movement through the site.
3. Ensure open space is properly scaled to allow a sense of safety. Open space that is too large or doesn't have a visual connection to adjacent activity areas will likely not encourage a broad spectrum of users and desired activity.
4. Open space should be well lit and easy to find.
5. Provide better access to both rivers:
 - a) Ensure any new development near the rivers preserves physical and/or visual access to the rivers
 - b) Ensure any new river trails relate to Center City so access is logical and intuitive
 - c) Identify and prioritize development and green space opportunities along both rivers
 - d) Ensure any new development along and/or on the river contributes to the sustainable economic health of Center City and is intended to enhance the overall authentic experience Center City has to offer
 - e) Explore recreational opportunities along the rivers including non-motorized boating, fishing, passive green space and community gathering spaces

Green Network Map



Exhibits potential opportunities for public spaces and connectivity to existing green spaces. Also shows extended green connections along the Ohio and Licking River to create a Covington "emerald necklace" opportunity for greenway connections that will leverage waterfront and views for further redevelopment

B3. Celebrate Rail Lines and Bridges

- + **Goal:** Accentuate the elevated Rail lines and bridges with unique lighting and creative treatments that create a unique identity and look for Covington.
- + **Why it's important:** View the elevated rail that bisects Center City as a unifying, identifying and historical feature, as opposed to a barrier that divides the community. Creating an identity for Covington that is visible from Cincinnati and the highways will elevate Covington's presence and help brand it as a unique, creative and inviting place.



+ Strategies:

- 1.** Lighting treatments; special lighting to reinforce the kinetic energy of the rail and unique ground lighting to illuminate the industrial character of the raised rail as public art
- 2.** Local architects' and/or artists' competition; develop a high quality design package for each overpass and street penetration along the rail corridor
- 3.** Signage; develop a creative and functional signing system that complements a citywide Covington wayfinding program

B4. Encourage Historic Preservation

- + **Goal:** Preserve the urban, compact form and building height of the built environment in Center City.
- + **Why it's important:** The existing character of Center City is largely derived from its historic urban design. Much of the historic core – Madison Corridor, Short Pike and Mainstrasse have 2 to 3 story buildings, are built to curb and have gracious pedestrian spaces.

+ **Strategies:**

1. Ensure zoning in each of the business districts is appropriate, make adjustments if necessary;
2. Ensure there are appropriate transitions from commercial to residential areas and that neighborhood business districts are aesthetically sensitive to the surrounding residential areas (See zoning discussion in section A1 (3) above)
3. Adjust design guidelines so as to preserve historic character, while ensuring guidelines are not so rigorous as to inhibit reinvestment.
4. Create signage guidelines.
5. Provide design and financial assistance for businesses that are undertaking exterior finishes.
6. Reinforce historic preservation policies that recognize the importance of preservation of place; not exclusively focused on building rehabilitation.
7. Ensure building codes are written to accommodate historic building rehabilitation.
8. Preserve and reuse/repurpose existing buildings whenever possible.



C. STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS

Strong neighborhoods are a critical component of a vital community. Diverse housing options, well maintained infrastructure and a safe environment are all important features of strong neighborhoods that will ultimately contribute to the sustained economic growth of Center City.

C1. Identify Amenities & Quick Wins for Each Neighborhood

- + **Goal:** Identify ways this planning process can provide improvements and amenities to each of Center City’s neighborhoods.
- + **Why It’s Important:** Center City residents are fatigued by a recent legacy of planning with mixed results – it is important to demonstrate that the Action Plan will create immediate change, improvements and momentum. Strong neighborhoods support strong business districts and vice versa. Neighborhoods that are safe, well maintained and well connected, will provide stability, appeal to new residents and encourage greater investment.
- + **Strategies:**
 1. Work with the City, civic organizations and funders to carry out residential painting programs in Center City Neighborhoods
 2. Eliminate or ameliorate the occurrence of trash by and under the 4th Street Bridge.
 3. Improve the appearance of the flood wall and the riverfront from the suspension bridge to “The Point” (confluence of the Ohio and Licking Rivers).
 4. Establish a “Code Enforcement Blitz”: Neighborhood Enhancement Program – A ninety-day blitz of City services as part of a partnership between the City and the neighborhoods to address blight, crime and other nuisances, to kick-start long-term neighborhood revitalization and reinvestment.
 5. Enforce and improve regulations that hold banks and absentee landlords more accountable for property upkeep and maintenance.
 6. Improve the CSX railroad underpasses on Sixth Street and Seventh Street and adjacent open areas through a design process that identifies long-term solutions for the appearance and sense of safety in the area.

7. Work with the City to establish a protocol to develop better communication with the neighborhood residents, ensure follow-up and transparency with regard to how the City implements changes and improvements. Use internet technology to develop an interactive process.

C2. Develop Sustainable and Attainable Housing Options:

- + **Goal:** Expand housing options to diversify the array of household types and income levels in Center City, and provide amenities for a wide range of people including students, young entrepreneurs, families and baby boomers.
- + **Why it's important:** Housing that is designed and priced to meet the needs of those groups who are increasingly looking for urban housing options will allow for sustainable growth and stability in Center City neighborhoods.

+ Strategies:

1. Incentivize a diverse mix of residential housing products. Work with developers and homebuilders who understand the unique challenges of residential infill projects, financing and delivery.
2. Continue strong collaboration with LIISC/CGN to help consumers obtain loans, mortgage assistance and other types of financial support and education.
3. Prioritize Jackson Square residential redevelopment. Build upon past efforts that embrace this historic area of Center City.
4. Work with Hope VI to ensure the new development in the East Side neighborhood meets the needs of those it will serve. Ensure a balance of ownership and rental units are allocated to create a sustainable development that is designed to relocate the adjacent Center City neighborhoods' generally urban and form-based design.
5. Develop amenities that support and enhance livable neighborhoods including dog parks or community gardens.



C3. Improve Infrastructure and Safety

- + **Goal:** Ensure all Center City neighborhoods have basic infrastructure
- + **Why it's important:** Infrastructure and safety emerged as significant issue during October outreach with each of the neighborhood organizations
- + **Strategies:**
 1. Conduct an infrastructure audit to determine where the greatest needs and priorities are in each neighborhood. Consider using green infrastructure techniques (such as storm water retention) throughout Center City when appropriate and possible.
 2. Work with the Police Department to audit public spaces to identify and remedy areas that encourage crime through poor lighting or design.
 3. Emphasize safety and connectivity in the CCCAP context; consider greater utilization of alleys to achieve better pedestrian connectivity and access.
 4. Examine design solutions for 4th and 5th Streets to encourage traffic calming strategies and to better accommodate pedestrian safety.
 5. Improve the CSX railroad underpasses to increase safety to the motorists from the top of the embankment.
 6. Work with social service providers to develop a strategy that balances their and their clients' needs and the needs of Center City residents and businesses, including:
 - a) Work with social service providers to prepare a strategic plan that evaluates the existing agencies, their programs, and capacity, to develop an overall plan to accommodate expansion of existing agencies and/or adding new ones.
 - b) Work with social service providers and transitional housing facilities to develop policies and promote a dialogue and information exchange between the providers and neighborhoods.
 - c) Consider working with social service providers to consolidate physical locations and/or programming to create efficiencies when appropriate.

5th St Gateway | Before



5th St Gateway | After



Illustrates how context-sensitive infill development and streetscape could transform the suburban low density area into a vibrant urban gateway and expand the Mainstrasse neighborhood to the north

Organizational Framework

In order to implement recommendations in this action plan that are intended to support strengthening Center City's economy, neighborhoods, and public realm, a new organizational structure is recommended. The organizational structure is intended to provide an umbrella organization that will bring together several like-minded groups to promote economic prosperity, innovation, jobs, neighborhood improvements and investment to Center City.

The proposed organizational structure is inspired by "best practices" in downtown management from across the country and successful organizational tools used in Cincinnati. In Cincinnati, Downtown Cincinnati Inc. (DCI) utilizes a Business Improvement District (BID) to market, maintain and manage the downtown environment and experience. Another important organization is the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC), a non-profit development corporation that has mobilized both private and public sector capital to develop a variety of improvements ranging from Fountain Square to housing in the Over the Rhine neighborhood.

In Covington, it is proposed that existing marketing and advocacy organizations, the City of Covington and civic partners such as the Catalytic Development Funding Corporation of Northern Kentucky (CDFC) and the Center for Great Neighborhoods (CGN) come together in a close knit collaboration where their resources can be utilized to support implementation of the Action Plan, and where the use of their resources can be leveraged through the unified "umbrella organization" under a reconstituted Urban Partnership. This will mobilize energy, make efficient use of resources and have a significant impact in Covington. The reconstituted Urban Partnership will bring together the best revitalization elements found in Cincinnati, including DCI and 3CDC.

The Urban Partnership (Reconstituted)

The proposed organizational entity will be a reconstituted Urban Partnership (UP). Utilizing an established organization with a mission dedicated to advancing urban Covington is an efficient and logical way to advance the Center City Action Plan and its implementation. It is envisioned that the Urban Partnership will be actively engaged in efforts to implement the Action Plan, and ensure that programs are initiated and sustained to promote the well-being of Center City's business districts and neighborhoods.

The Urban Partnership (Reconstituted) is envisioned to re-organize itself in order to be fully equipped to implement the Action Plan. Specific recommendations include:

- + A revised board composition to better reflect the anticipated partners that will come together to implement the Action Plan; and
- + Revised By-Laws that specifically outline the objectives of the Urban Partnership as it relates to implementation of the Action Plan.

The envisioned overall goals and mission of the reconstituted Urban Partnership include:

- + A unified focus that is dedicated entirely to promoting a strong economy, strong neighborhoods and inviting public realm in Center City Covington.
- + Providing a wide array of business support, economic development strategies and market information for new and existing businesses (support and expertise provided by the Urban Partnership will be distinctly separate and not duplicative of the kinds of economic development support the City currently provides; as well as the direct transactional support of the CDFC as it utilizes its resources in opportunity sites in Covington. The reconstituted UP will play an active role in facilitating/ leveraging these resources).
- + Marketing Center City as the new hub of innovative and entrepreneurial thinking.
- + Marketing incentives to new and existing businesses and encouraging investment in Center City.
- + Advocate for the amenities and infrastructure needed to attract and sustain innovative business is available in Center City.
- + Promoting strategic infill development and the renovation of existing commercial and residential space.
- + Supporting arts and cultural district initiatives and the role arts and culture play in enhancing the quality of life in the community and the associated impact on economic development.



- + Being the unified voice for Center City in advocating for an array of improvements including infrastructure, transportation, diverse housing options and other kinds of investment.
- + Inviting collaboration, participation and feedback from key downtown stakeholders and civic partners.



In order to capitalize on the many strengths and resources already active in Center City, The Urban Partnership will collaborate with other organizations currently providing economic development, neighborhood and housing expertise, funding, programming and resources. The collaborations suggested below are intended to strengthen the overall economic vitality of the residential and commercial areas within Center City, avoid duplicative efforts and strengthen the various organizations working to enhance Center City. Partners envisioned to work collaboratively with the Urban Partnership include:

- + **The City of Covington’s Community Development Department to:**
 - + Provide expertise in community, economic and business development
 - + Manage TIF and other finance tools for development/revitalization
 - + Redevelopment plans and programming

- + Invest in innovation and entrepreneurship
- + Residential development/special initiatives
- + Grants administration/program delivery
- + The proposed Business Improvement District (BID) to:**
 - + Contribute funding support for maintenance, economic development and physical improvements
- + Catalytic Development Funding Corporation of Northern Kentucky(CDFC) to:**
 - + Invest in and facilitate catalytic projects and development in Center City
- + Covington Business Council (CBC) to:**
 - + Act as a liaison to the business community to facilitate networking, business support services and business advocacy
- + Renaissance to:**
 - + Work collaboratively to provide business support, membership services and outreach (It is envisioned the current Renaissance staff position will no longer be staffed at the City, rather become part of the Urban Partnership organization and the City's associated funding will be reallocated to support the Urban Partnership.)
- + MSVA to:**
 - + Continue to focus its efforts in Mainstrasse, contribute expertise toward events and promotions
- + Center for Great Neighborhoods (CGN) to:**
 - + Facilitate the continued strategic investment in the residential areas of Center City, ensure public funding, grants and other sources of revenue are dedicated to leveraging past efforts and catalyzing stronger neighborhoods
 - + Provide technical expertise around home loans, mortgage assistance, and related issues
 - + Work with other housing focused efforts



+ Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) to:

- + Work with CGN, City of Covington and others to provide strategic capital for new investment throughout Center City
- + Provide technical assistance and support

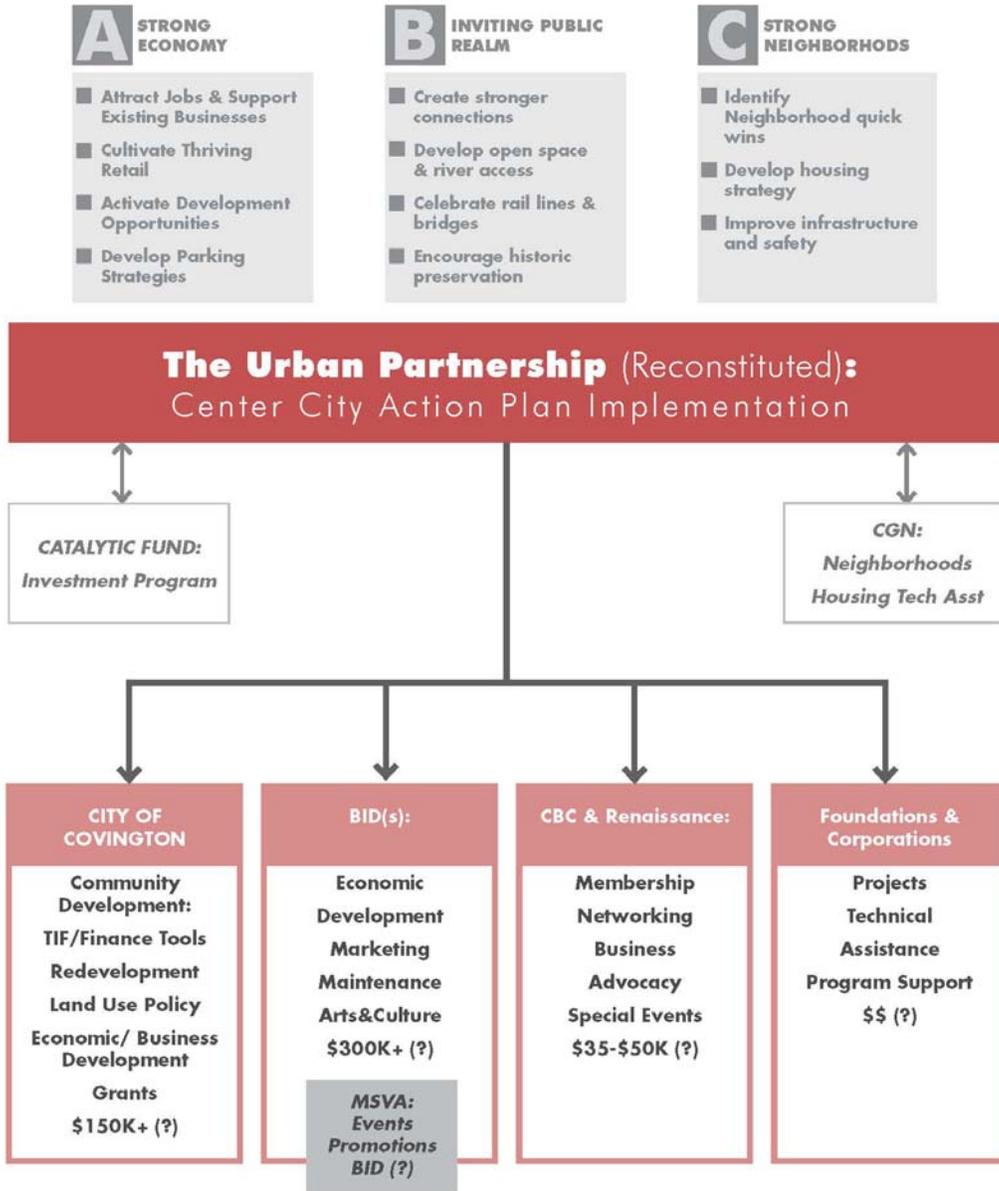
+ Foundations to:

- + Work with the Urban Partnership and partners to promote mission-specific activities and events

+ Others as appropriate

The organizational structure is outlined below:

The Organizational Structure



The Urban Partnership Phasing & Funding:

In the near-term (2012-2013), it is envisioned the reconstituted Urban Partnership will be funded partially by the City of Covington. Ideally, CBC or grant support to match City funding (\$150,000 +/-) will be identified for the initial one-to-two years of operation, resulting in an initial funding base of around \$300,000 per year.

Sustainable long term funding for the operation of the reconstituted Urban Partnership will also utilize a portion of funding derived from the proposed Madison/Riverfront BID effort. If the BID is established in either 2013 or 2014, it can contribute to operating expenses associated with the reconstituted Urban Partnership. Diversifying, leveraging and finding new sources of funding in the absence of, or in addition to BID revenue, will be a top priority for the reconstituted Urban Partnership.

The Urban Partnership Staff and Governance:

Board: It is recommended the Urban Partnership have a board of voting 12 to 16 members, consisting of the following representation:

- + City of Covington (2-3 seats)
- + Covington Business Council/Renaissance (2-3 seats)
- + BIDs (2-3 seats)
- + Foundation and Corporate Sponsors (2-3 seats)
- + Catalytic Development Funding Corporation of Northern Kentucky (1 seat)
- + Center for Great Neighborhoods (1 seat)
- + Mainstrasse Village Association (1 seat)
- + Gateway Community and Technical College (1 seat)
- + At-Large, ex-officio members TBD

In reconstituting the Urban Partnership, it is recommended that the initial board slate be selected by the Center City Action Plan Steering Committee and appointed by the Mayor of Covington. The UP's Bylaws will need to be amended to reflect changes in board composition. The board will be responsible for determining the mission, work program, goals and policies for the reconstituted Urban Partnership. The board will be responsible for hiring staff to run the organization. Components of the board's new makeup will be outlined and identified in its amended Bylaws. Existing UP board members who do not represent one of the organizations stated above will serve out current terms and then leave the board. The above-mentioned organizations who currently hold board seats will continue representation either with the individual currently holding the seat or another individual from the same organization per determination of the CCCAP Steering Committee. Current Board seats held by existing UP or City staff (other than the City Manager who it is envisioned would fill one of the City representative seats) are to be relinquished upon reconstituting the UP Board. The Urban Partnership is incorporated as a 501(c)3 and may add a 501(c)6 non-profit organizational component if needed to carry out the future work program.

Staff: It is recommended the staff will consist of 3.5 to 5 positions:

Executive Director: An Executive Director of the reconstituted UP will be chosen who has strong economic development, real estate, finance, communication, management and team building skills. General duties of the Executive Director will be rooted in the recommendations set forth in this plan and including: (This position could remain vacant for the first year or two of operations as organizational funding is solidified.)

- + Set the tone for the reconstituted UP as the go-to organization for business and real estate expertise in Center City
- + Attract new businesses and innovative entrepreneurs to Center City
- + Develop excellent relationships with Center City stakeholders, investors and partners
- + Have a strong sense of collaboration and be a consensus-builder
- + Incorporate technology in ways that demonstrate to prospective investors that Center City is cutting edge and has the infrastructure needed to attract entrepreneurs in all fields



- + Work closely with partner organizations, funders and others to implement all facets of the Action Plan
- + Facilitate new investment and development in Center City
- + Ensure any public funds used in Center City projects are used wisely and leveraged appropriately
- + Supervise the UP staff
- + Manage organizational relationship with the UP Board
- + Recommended approximate salary range \$75,000 to \$100,000 annually, including benefits

Economic Development Manager: The Economic Development Manager will have strong interpersonal and business development skills and real estate and finance knowledge. General duties will include:

- + Understand local real estate dynamics, including vacancies, potential tenants, underutilized parcels and development opportunities
- + Understand the economic development tools available in Center City and how they can be applied
- + Ability to facilitate real estate and business development deals
- + Ability to counsel entrepreneurs to advance business concepts
- + Develop excellent relationships with Center City stakeholders, investors and partners
- + Ability to be flexible, nimble, proactive and innovative
- + Recommended approximate salary range \$45,000 to \$65,000 annually, including benefits

Membership & Communications Manager: The Membership & Communications Manager will possess good interpersonal skills, be creative, collaborative and willing to work on a variety of projects as needed. General duties will include:

- + Cultivate and sustain membership
- + Produce and coordinate special events
- + Coordinate marketing, promotions and communications for UP, including content for website and other mediums, including social media
- + Other duties as needed
- + Recommended approximate salary range \$30,000 to \$50,000 annually, including benefits

Arts & Culture Program Manager: The Arts & Culture Manager will fulfill local obligations to manage the AEC facility plus advocate for arts and cultural uses in Center City. The position will be either full-time or part-time as appropriate. Salary + benefits TBD

Secretary/Administrative Assistant: An Administrative Assistant would provide all office management duties, provide support as needed by other staff and oversee all office functions. Recommended salary range is \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually, including benefits.

Maintenance: Any maintenance such as sidewalk cleaning, trash removal, graffiti removal, etc., will be undertaken by contract with a third party maintenance provider. Maintenance will be funded by the BID.



Phasing and Implementation

The priority framework outlined below is grouped into three categories: immediate, near-term and mid-term investments. It is anticipated the immediate priorities will be undertaken in 2012 and 2013. Beyond 2013, it is recommended proposed investments are re-evaluated annually to determine priorities and how to implement them.

	STRONG ECONOMY	INVITING PUBLIC REALM	STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS
Immediate Investment Priorities, 2012-2013	A1(b): Provide financial incentives to businesses that locate in Center City	B1(1,2): Develop bike and pedestrian access and connections throughout Center City; Develop a Center City Bike Master Plan	C1(prioritize C1,C4 &C6):Develop residential painting programs; Code enforcement blitz; Improve CSX railroad underpasses on 6 th and 7 th streets and adjacent areas
	A1(d):Develop and nurture strategic partnerships, pursue BID formation and formation of a reconstituted Urban Partnership	B1(3): Develop a wayfinding framework	C2(1): Incentivize a diverse mix of residential housing products
	A1(e): Identify a physical space that can be dedicated to promoting small business innovation and entrepreneurship	B1(5): Engage local artists in public right of way improvements	C2(3): Prioritize Jackson Square residential development
	A1(3): Make necessary regulatory adjustments to attract and retain investment	B2(1): Identify and prioritize open space opportunities	C3(1,2): Conduct an infrastructure audit to determine greatest need in each neighborhood; conduct safety audits
	A2: Cultivate a variety of strategies to promote a thriving retail environment	B4: Encourage historic preservation	

	STRONG ECONOMY	INVITING PUBLIC REALM	STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS
Near-Term Investment Priorities within 3 years	A3: Activate Development Opportunities	B2(5): Provide better access to both rivers	C2(4): Work with Hope VI regarding its new development in the Eastside Neighborhood
	A4: Develop Parking Management Plan	B2(2): Determine how the IRS building (and other sites) can contribute to overall connectivity of Center City	C2(5): Develop neighborhood amenities i.e. dog parks and community gardens
	A2: Develop marketing and branding strategies geared at both consumers and investors		C3(6): Work with social service providers

	STRONG ECONOMY	INVITING PUBLIC REALM	STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS
Mid-Term Investment Priorities within 6 years		B1(4): Enhance 12th Street with 5th Street and the Pike Street areas as "boulevard streets" once Brent Spence realignment is determined	C3(4): Develop traffic calming design solutions for 4 th and 5 th Streets
		B3: Celebrate rail lines and Bridges	
		B2(e): Explore recreational opportunities along both rivers	



CCCAP Appendix Information

(The following documents are integral to the recommendations and implementation strategies outlined in this plan):

- + CCCAP “Pledge”
- + Covington Economic Profile
- + Community Survey Results
- + Open House and Neighborhood Meeting Summaries
- + Regulatory Memo
 - Madison Corridor Management District Economic Improvement Plan –
WORKING DRAFT
- + Mainstrasse Village Management District Economic Improvement Plan –
WORKING DRAFT

(The following documents were developed during the Center City Action Plan process and are intended both to support the Action Plan’s recommendations as well as serve as stand-alone documents that further develop ideas and recommendations outlined in this plan.)

- + Strong Neighborhoods | Menelaos Triantafillou + Associates, MT+A
- + Retail Positioning and Tenanting Strategy - Center City Covington |
Michael J. Berne, MJB Consulting
- + Place Matters: Covington Center City Action Plan, Niehoff Studio | Frank
Russell and Richard Mille