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Oakley Square Neighborhood Business District Urban Design Plan

Introduction

In late 1978, the Department of Development requested the investigations necessary to produce an urban design plan for the Oakley Square Business District. The five areas of investigation were to be economic conditions, parking, vehicular/pedestrian circulation, housing and streetscape.

Data collection through field interviews, surveys and inspections began in November 1978 and concluded in June 1979. A small committee representing business interests in the area was organized to receive the results of investigations and react to the formation of guidelines and directions for the plan. The committee's last meetings dealt with setting priorities and reaching agreement on the final recommendations represented in this document.

The existing conditions analysis found the Square to be over-extended, indecisive in terms of growth, suffering from no coherent policies for appearance, and too liberal a zoning policy.

The principal direction of the plan is to provide a logical systematic approach to improvements in the business area. The plan provides the format for public-private participation in entrepreneurship.

The initiatives of the Business Community will determine the character and rapidly of improvements. Clearly there is a need for a unified and well supported development interest. The potential of Oakley in an economic sense and in terms of quality of living is significant. The value of investment in Oakley is attractive at the present time and could therefore become the major springboard to a major leap forward as indicated by this plan.

Since the Urban Design Plan was approved on October 6, 1982, implementation has begun in the form of both private and public investment, namely:

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1. The Oakley School Redevelopment site including an IGA Store, SuperX Store, and LADD housing project.
2. The design and construction of two phases of streetscape improvements including street trees, new curbs and sidewalks, screenwalls, uni-stone paving and street banners.
3. The construction of a new Rax Roast Beef Restaurant on the former Theatre parking lot.
4. The construction of a new veterinarian's office where a gas station had been abandoned.
5. The construction of a new United Dairy Farmers Store.
6. The re-use of the 20th Century Theatre.
7. The potential development of the Ambassador Theatre property which has been purchased by the City.
8. The facade loan program.

9. A marketing study to explore the potentials of the business district.

Goals

The major goal of this urban design plan is to promote a collective entrepreneurship and logical framework of change that enhances the economic vitality of this business center. The focused land use policy recommended will concentrate inter-related business activities and enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of the shopping and automobile oriented centers on Madison Road. The linear strip is currently a scattering of disparate entities which struggle for survival without the advantage of mutual support of other retail interests. The beginning of a new direction is evidenced in one sector. This initiative should be the catalyst for a comprehensive commitment toward adoption of the plan.

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The goals for the plan establish the principle concerns that have directed the planning and design strategies and policy recommendations.

1. Promote a continuity in a business-residents planning process that obtains commitment to seek improvements through public and private developments.
2. Encourage an appropriate retail mix that enhances the symbiotic beneficial relationship of auto oriented or pedestrian shopper oriented businesses, that concentrates in two focal areas on Madison Road.
3. Encourage economic growth that takes advantage of the traffic volume on Madison Road.
4. Establish appropriate character and conditions that support a competitive shopping area.

Objectives

- Improved image and promotion.
 - Increased cooperative investment and leadership.
 - Guided business intensification in appropriate focus areas (auto and shopper oriented).
 - Continued activity by the Business Association and Redevelopment Corporation.
 - Attraction of new businesses and retention of existing business.
- Business/Retail**
- Controlled through movement.
 - Improved signage to parking.
 - More attractive parking, signed and designed to be more attractive.
- Traffic**
- Safe access and movement to shopping.
 - Improved continuity and comfort in the public right of way.
 - Reduced threat from traffic at crossings.
- Pedestrian**
- Reduce the non-conforming uses that interrupt supportive continuity of businesses.
 - Improve shopping area character with greenery, lighting and signage.
- Environment**
- Prepare guidelines to support facade improvements and private investment in concert with public streetscape improvements.
 - Embrace concept themes for the "Western" pedestrian shopping area, and the "Eastern" automobile service sales area of the Square.
 - Control zoning at the boundary of the Square to insure containment of the sprawl, and intensification of the business area.
 - Reduce the clutter of the sidewalk items, trash containers, poles, newspaper boxes, etc.

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Business

Oakley is a rambling sprawl of potentially more significant business success.

The location on a major traffic artery enhances the exposure of the Square that presently fails to gain more than 18% of its potential.

The current mix of business could be sorted out to promote a consolidation in two cores on the extended strip. The eastern end would naturally focus around the automobile oriented sales and services, anchored by the cramped Courtesy Chevrolet dealership. Accommodation of expansion for this business would be central to improvements in this zone. The aggregation of other B-4 zoned businesses (allowing automobile access and trade) would promote adequate access, parking and consistent character required of such an area, while not disrupting the pedestrian oriented shopping experience on the western end of the Square.

The openness of the Square would be improved with intensification of business activity and development in areas released through zoning change or vacancy. The general visual condition of the Square reflects poor health and lack of commitment. There is a sense of beginning around several establishments. This stimulus should be carried forth on a more comprehensive level.

The "Square" must position itself competitively within a regional and larger market area. With the loss of the two neighborhood theatres, the "Square" has to be redeveloped, not only with uses for the former theatre properties but with the inclusion of major generator commercial office uses, to attract people from a larger more regional market area as the theatres once did. The spin-off night time business that the theatres attracted is now gone and needs to be replaced. Positive steps have been taken with the new grocery

and drug stores, new restaurant, and convenience store but there are still many vacancies remaining that need to be filled.

Development Strategy

The strategy for business district improvements in Oakley requires the consolidation and commitment of the major business group to initiate and lobby for improvement funding. There are ten particular project areas that were identified in the design process that need support for improvement. There are planning initiatives that will insure a progressive future for Oakley.

The major organizational efforts should promote the following activities:

1. Consolidation of the power base behind the urban design plan. A community group that reflects broad base support would be most effective in working with city representatives.
2. Prepare for zone change considerations in community meetings as advised in the plan.
3. Assist in the organization of a parking improvement organization and authority.
4. Assist in the organization of a business development corporation to develop and manage common properties.

The Abstract Scheme (see graphic) isolates projects within the business district. These projects reflect the interest of the working committee and the professional opinions of the consultants. The estimated costs, time frame and development scenario approximate a vision of the future in which Oakley could fulfill much of its potential.

The vacant Oakley School property has been developed into an IGA Store, a SuperX Store and 40 units of housing for the disabled. This has been accomplished by many groups of people, among them, the Oakley Community Redevelopment Corporation, (LADD), Living Arrangements for the Developmentally Disabled, Inc., Palazzolo Realty and Development and the City of Cincinnati.

Project 1
(Complete)

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Project 2
Streetscape
(Complete)

The Streetscape improvements have been completed in two phases. The total construction cost was \$300,000.00. The improvements consist of street trees, new concrete and uni-stone sidewalks, new curbs, handicapped ramps, tandem parking meters, new trash receptacles, and parking lot and open space masonry screenwalls.

Project 3
(Parking Lot)

Parking area No. 1 is on the north side of Madison Road directly across from the former Ambassador Theatre. This parking lot is the only major parking remaining for the high concentration of retail businesses near the square. The lot should be better organized, striped, amenities provided and collective management provided to guarantee image, function and maintenance. A screen wall has been constructed along the front as part of the streetscape improvements. Phase 1. Creation of a parking management entity would assume responsibility for on-going operation and maintenance of the lot.

Project 4

The block facing Alston Ave. between Madison and Minot currently has a mix of R-5, B-3 and B-4 zones. It is suggested that the R-5 be changed to R-91 to enhance ready transfer of the property for consolidation for business and/or parking uses supportive of the Madison Road frontage. The remaining area should change from B-4 to B-3 to permit more favorable retail to enter—supporting the consolidation of a pedestrian shopping precinct. There is too much a mixture of auto oriented uses within the B-4 zone and without a zone restriction this evolution will continue to the demise of a "Square" pedestrian Shopping area.

Project 5

The former Texaco Gas Station has been torn down and redeveloped as a new building for a veterinarian's office and other retail shops.

Project 6
(1-2 years)

The major anchor to the Automobile Oriented Shopping of the east end of the strip is Courtesy Chevrolet. The future of this franchise in Cincinnati is questionable since the ability to expand to meet volume requirements is restricted. It would be a very negative consequence if this major retailer were to leave Oakley for a new site outside city limits. The franchise indicated a commitment to the Square and the future of the Oakley Business District.

The intentions of adjustments in the immediate area of the dealership are to facilitate improvements in the operation. Zone changes from R-4 to R-41 to the south and B-3 to B-4 on the north would give more favorable leverage to expansion and re-organization of the business.

Project 7
(3-5 years)

The property between Brotherton and Ballard is required for further off-street lots, and re-organization of access. The property on the north side of the street between Appleton and Brownway would become a prime site for a used car lot and building. The shift from B-3 to B-4 would assist in solidifying auto oriented businesses in the eastern end of the strip and would give much needed expansion to an important business.

Project 8
(3-5 years)

The improvement of parking and access would be accomplished in this zone referred to in the context of Project 4. Consolidation of the surfaces would allow important accessibility from Brownway Avenue to the west. The zone change from B-3 to B-4 would encourage improving the uses toward automobile services and sales.

Project 9
(Complete)

Former parking lot has been developed into a 90 seat Rax Restaurant.

Implementation Schedule

Project	Description	Cost	Source	Year
Project 1	Oakley School Site: IGA, SuperX and 40 Units of Housing for the Disabled	\$ 514,000	Public (IGAs) Private (Housing)	1983-84
Project 2	Streetscape (2 Phases)	\$ 300,000	Public (CDBG)	1983-84
Project 3	Parking Area No. 1		Private	
Project 4	Zone Change—Block facing Alston between Madison and Minot		Private	
Project 5	New Commercial Building		Private	1983-84
Project 6	Zone Change—Courtesy Chevrolet		Private	
Project 7	Parking Improvements		Private	
Project 8	Zone Change—Properties fronting Madison between Appleton & Braze		Private	
Project 9	Rax Restaurant		Private	1984



