

Revitalization Committee
Ravenna City field trip
Friday, November 17th

Those in attendance: Becky Newell, Edie Benner, Michelle Barnauskas, and Joan Sweet

We met with Ravenna Mayor Kevin Poland. Kevin was City Council President during the Ravenna renovation project. They worked with EG&G...Kevin was pleased with their performance.

He suggested there might be community development grant monies for façade improvements. In Ravenna's case, they assessed the property owners their portion of the cost, to be added to their real estate taxes over twenty years. This should make the project more affordable to property owners.

He recognizes that although the downtown area looks much better than before the improvements, they still need to work very hard to entice new businesses to commit to locating there.

There should also be grant money (DEPA) for water line replacement.

Kevin said it is very important to include residents in the project and that they need to have a feeling of involvement and ownership.

There might be ODOT or state funds available for the street construction, since it is a state highway.

He also reminded us to be mindful of the ongoing maintenance expense for the improved areas.

Kevin told us if we had further questions or if he could be of assistance, to contact him.

Mantua Revitalization Committee
Kent Field Trip
Friday, November 17th

Those in attendance: Edie Benner, Michelle Barnauskas, Sandy Engelhart, Helen Hazlett, Marie Stehli, Joan Sweet, Becky Newell

We met with Joanne, the individual who is heading up Kent's Main Street project. She is currently working for the City of Kent, but is being loaned to the Main Street project for the next two years. She said some of the things we would need to do initially are to apply for 501-c 3 tax status in order to qualify for grants, donations, etc., to draw up Articles of Incorporation for the entity, and establish a board. We should also try to establish an "historical district", since there are tax credits (20% for federal and 25% for Ohio) for renovation projects. She suggested that we try to get a wide variety of people to serve on the board, but that we should try to get some of the "established" citizens and business or property owners to serve as members. The steering committee should meet on a weekly basis.

One of the primary focuses of the Main Street Program is quality of life. Their initial involvement with us would be a "downtown assessment", which would cost us \$3,000.00. Team members from Main Street would visit our village for two days...taking photographs while they tour the downtown area on the first day, and reporting back to our committee the next with their observations and suggestions. The assessment will concentrate on four areas: organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring. They will key in on our strengths and weaknesses. They will undoubtedly stress the importance of making the most of our riverfront.

After the assessment takes place, there is an application process we need to go through. The application requires a four-year budget. We need to understand that every community/neighborhood who applies is not guaranteed to be accepted into the program. Of the five who applied last year, only two were accepted...Kent being one of those who succeeded.

If we would be lucky enough to be selected, we would then begin an aggressive fund raising effort. It was suggested that we approach the Portage County Commissioners, since there is usually grant money available. It was also suggested that we solicit donations for local citizens of means. The normal breakdown for funds would usually be one-third private donations, one-third from the business/property owners, and one-third from government.

Main Street would require that we have an executive director in charge of the project...a town of our size might be allowed to have a part-time one. (It was suggested that the Executive Director not be involved in the fund raising process...that should be done by board members. Training would be required for the manager and board members. They suggest that the majority of the board should be downtown business/property owners.

We should take advantage of any grant monies we can get. There is usually block grant money available for "façade improvement", where the property owner pays half and the grant picks up the other half.

East Liverpool

Michelle Barnauskas, Edie Benner, Becky Newell, and Ellie Stamm visited East Liverpool on Friday, January 12, 2007 meeting with Marc Hoffrichter, who spearheaded revitalization efforts 10 years ago, and current Mayor Jim Swoger.

Although not a resident or property owner, Marc grew up in East Liverpool and was concerned about its future. The town had lost its major employer, a steel mill, and the local pottery was struggling. Downtown was in disrepair with many storefront vacancies, rundown residences, and plummeting property values. The city could barely afford to make payroll, let alone capital improvements. For example, none of the 48 valves in the water system functioned, so each time a leak was discovered anywhere in the system, water supply to the entire city was shut down.

Marc knew John Grossman of EG&G and believed a streetscape project would solve infrastructure problems, reduce maintenance costs, and restore civic pride. He tried to convince city government, but the budget crisis was always an obstacle. East Liverpool Police and Fire are both unionized; the high wages and large staff exhaust 95% of the city's budget. One mayor who was hesitant to give the project the go-ahead finally made up his mind when he was diagnosed with cancer; he wanted to leave a legacy.

Marc stresses the importance of building consensus with the government as a first step. After the mayor and council were on-board, Marc began talking to property owners. He was working full-time, so he visited with two people each evening. Some believed in the cause, some didn't. The Police and Fire constituencies were particularly strong negative forces, believing that any infrastructure improvements would cut into their funding. Marc's position was that "it's not a matter of dividing the pie; it's a matter of making the pie bigger," expanding the tax base by making the city a better place to live, work, and shop. A majority of the 200 downtown business property owners volunteered to contribute \$50 per square foot, payable in a lump sum or over several years, to help fund a streetscape.

Businesses and residents were equally supportive through fundraising efforts, with individuals purchasing items needed for the streetscape, such as:

- ✓ 130 decorative street lights at \$1,250 each (the goal was to sell 30)
- ✓ 800 brick pavers at \$25 each (cost for paver & engraving \$12)
- ✓ benches at \$1,000 each
- ✓ 28 planters at \$150 per year to fund flowers and landscaping crew to care for them (Marc has a waiting list of businesses wanting to sponsor flowers)

A local attorney approached Marc, wanting to make a contribution, but admitting that street lights and benches didn't "do a thing for her." EG&G looked at all line items on the streetscape budget and recommended that she sponsor one corner of the streetscape area, called the diamond. She was thrilled to donate \$5,900 to purchase all bricks required for that corner. Another resident, a 95-year-old gentleman, wanted to buy a streetlight, but they had all been purchased. He was offered a block of trees, which he donated in memory of his good friend. Marc convinced the local newspaper to run a front-page article on the story. When the gentleman read it, he immediately called Marc and purchased trees for another block in memory of another friend. Someone else read about the attorney's brick donation and offered to buy another block of bricks. Though it wasn't easy to secure, press coverage boosted fundraising efforts.

To recognize donors, each item or area bears a plaque, purchased at a 70% discount through a local funeral home's monument supplier. East Liverpool's Rotary Club, whose largest donation had been \$5,000 before Marc approached them, contributed \$25,000 toward the streetscape project. The city

secured community development block grant funding, which allowed them to match dollar-for-dollar up to \$5,000 worth of façade improvement expenses incurred by private property owners. Shortly after the streetscape, 20 private properties were sold at 2-3 times their prior value.

The city purchased seven neglected properties, removed buildings, and built two parking lots at a cost of \$800,000. They were initially turned down for four grants to fund the project. Marc went directly to the funding agencies to fight for the grants, eventually getting all four to complete the project.

Marc cautioned that individuals in a grass-roots revitalization effort must be willing to incur incidental expenses, such as travel and meals, and to dedicate a lot of time and energy. He emphasized using quality materials to minimize future maintenance costs. And he noted that having a state route in the project area opens doors to Ohio Department of Transportation grants.

While not in office when the streetscape project began, Jim fully supported the effort throughout his term as Mayor. He mentioned that while repairing water lines and putting utilities underground, leaks in every gas valve were found, repaired, and connections were run to nearby properties. Prior to that, the city could only afford to make patch-work repairs and repeatedly send crews out for the same problems. They could not afford upkeep of the new light poles (and individuals who sponsored them were quick to point out when the lights needed attention), even though the Rotary purchased new bulbs. The local electrician wanted \$65 per hour in labor for rebuilding ballasts and installing new lights. Jim, a bricklayer by trade, could not justify the cost, so he rebuilds the ballasts on a table in his office and has the road crew install lights. He says, “When people take an interest in making things look nice, it’s my job to keep them looking nice.” His passion for the community goes beyond saving money. Due to budget problems, Council abandoned the city pool, so the Mayor took over its maintenance, received his lifeguard certification (at age 56), and works every weekend at the pool...he puts on the local parade and sweeps the streets afterward...anything to save money and keep amenities while he solves the city’s financial crisis for the long-term.

Lisbon

In Lisbon the group met with Cheryl Mills, secretary to the Mayor, a position she has held for 37 years through several administrations. Lisbon, a village of 2,500 people, has a part-time Mayor, just like the Village of Mantua, and a volunteer Chamber of Commerce that is just being reactivated. Cheryl showed us around town, pointing out improvements to public spaces and private property renovations. She introduced us to the owner of one of two downtown hardware stores, who shared his thoughts on the streetscape. Like Cheryl, he believed it improved civic pride and corrected infrastructure problems; however, it did not increase his business and there were inconveniences while the work was being done. Still, he thought it all worth while. Lisbon’s downtown improvement project spanned 1999-2002 at a cost of over \$2.2 million. It was primarily funded through state grants. Local fundraising along with voluntary property assessments (which received full support) accounted for another 17% of the cost. The government borrowed less than \$150,000 to make up the remaining 6.5%.