

Executive Summary

For over the past year and a half, many members of the Warren community have worked diligently with Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc. (PDG) to prepare this **2009 City of Warren Revitalization Strategy**. It has not been an easy task! Situations within the City over the past decades that have created the need to think about “right-sizing,” coupled with the current national financial and housing crises and a new Federal administration and policies, have created a unique period of time in Warren’s (and this country’s) history. Concurrently, the construction of all new schools throughout the City certainly provides a unique and timely opportunity for neighborhood revitalization citywide.

But the City of Warren has risen to the occasion! After numerous meetings, some disagreements, consensus building, changes in approach to the planning process, and a good bit of neighborhood and resident input, a Plan has been completed. It contains the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction summarizes the process, identifies the Steering Committee, presents a brief overview of the changing demographics of the City, and summarizes past studies and the SWOT Analysis. Details on the latter two subjects are included in appendices. This Chapter concludes with a discussion of how the planning process changed from its original scope to a neighborhood revitalization strategic approach.

Chapter 2: Public Participation discusses the various methodologies used to acquire resident input, and identifies the myriad of meetings that were held with local groups and the public. Detailed summaries of interviews and surveys are included in appendices.

Chapter 3: Market Analysis is a critical component of this entire study, as it compares state and national trends with what is happening, and could happen, locally. It addresses the need to right-size the community, in terms of the over supply of housing, commercial and retail space, and industrial buildings. The Study also identifies some unique opportunities for the City and the downtown. The remaining chapters of this Plan and the recommendations therein reflect much of this market data.

Chapter 4: General Citywide Recommendations addresses those issues that are required to be addressed by the City for the community as a whole. Rightsizing issues are addressed, as well as economic development, transportation, housing, parks, quality of life, government, the land banking program, and general financing issues.

Chapter 5: Neighborhood Revitalization Strategies contains six separate sections of recommendations, one for each of the neighborhoods that were defined for the purposes of this Plan, and a general section that discusses the Elm Street approach (an expanded “Main Street” approach) that was utilized to structure the strategies for each of the neighborhoods. The City was divided into five areas, purposely not by council wards or other traditionally identified areas. Neighborhood associations and residents within each of those five areas worked with PDG to arrive at the recommendations made for their specific neighborhoods

These five chapters, along with this Executive Summary and associated maps and appendices, comprise the *2009 City of Warren Revitalization Strategy*. However, any Plan is only as good as its ability to be implemented. The City of Warren is in a truly unique position when it comes to implementation, because the **Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative (MVOC)**, through funding from the **Wean Foundation**, has designated two full-time staff people to help empower

the neighborhood organizations to build capacity, and part of that capacity building will hopefully assist the neighborhood groups with implementing the strategies presented in this document, as well as other neighborhood goals.

MVOC staff members have participated in the most recent neighborhood meetings, in an attempt to get a handle on the situation and provide for a seamless transition between planning and implementation of the neighborhood sections of this Plan. (This should NOT be interpreted that it is MVOC's responsibility to implement the recommendations of this Plan. They will be assisting the neighborhood groups with organizing and capacity building, so that the neighborhood groups can work with the City to actually accomplish implementation.)

It is imperative that City Council and the Administration, Neighborhood Associations, MVOC, and the Community Development Department (which was active in this process), as well as other public and private partners in the community, embrace this Strategy and work aggressively and **as a united front** toward implementation of the recommendations over the next 10 to 15 years. **This effort needs to be led by City Council.**

Vision Statement

If major recommendations of the *2009 City of Warren Revitalization Strategy* are indeed implemented within the next 10 to 15 years, then just maybe the City could expect a commentary similar to the following from a **typical resident of Warren in the year 2025**:

*"I don't know how many of the changes around here resulted from the **new schools**, but they sure played a huge role. In each of the neighborhoods, the new schools were like the hub of revitalization that kept growing outward in all directions. In the blocks closest to the schools, vacant and abandoned houses were either torn down or rehabbed – many of them thanks to the **Neighborhood Stabilization Program**, which allowed the City to tackle that job at a much faster pace. Most of the **empty lots were sold to neighbors**, and many of them added on to their homes or expanded their yards. The process was contagious, as home-owners throughout the City began taking pride in their property, and in their neighborhoods. Many of the landlords jumped on the bandwagon as well, either due to peer pressure or because of the enforcement of City policies.*

*"With the revitalization of our neighborhoods came a significant **reduction in crime** throughout the City. This resulted in **people moving into the City** instead of leaving, and our **downtown started to thrive again**. It's hard to count how many new shops and restaurants have opened in the downtown recently, but they sparked a renewed interest in living and working there. Now we have several very nice apartments, offices, and condos on **upper floors** of downtown businesses, as well as in the Peninsula area, and the parking garage has a waiting list for reserved spaces.*

*"While East Market Street has always been relatively busy, it has almost taken on a life of its own, with all the **new health care-related facilities** locating around the hospital. The **new Community College** keeps expanding its course offerings to supply well-trained employees to these health care businesses, and to serve the needs of the **new manufacturing companies** that have recently located in Warren.*

*"The West Market Street area is now an attractive gateway into the City. When the new **intermodal hub** was built next to the tracks, the demand for housing in the South West Neighborhood really took off, especially around the new school. With the clean-up of that rough area behind the **Austin Village Plaza**, businesses starting moving back, which really helped improve the image of the City from the west.*

*“Other entrances into the City have also taken on a vibrant, fresh look. The new automotive-related businesses clustered along **Youngstown Road** have helped revitalize that commercial corridor. New businesses and the expansion of the “First Flight” memorial to include the new **Welcome Center** helped to significantly improve Parkman Road as an entranceway into the City. And the new, **mixed-use development** of up-scale housing, shops and offices on Summit Street at the old power plant site, is having a very positive effect, just like the new schools.*

*“With the completion of Warren’s portion of the **Great Ohio Lake to River Greenway bike trail** and the clean-up and expansion of the **trails along the Mahoning River**, the number of people who come to Warren just to use our bike and walking trails is amazing. Add to that the **skateboard park**, and all of our other park improvements, and there are plenty of places for people to play and exercise in Warren year-round. The **Amphitheater** is still a huge draw on both Friday and Saturday nights, but these days the **people come early and stay late** to take advantage of all the downtown venues. Plus, the tours of the historic sites and homes in the City keep expanding each year.*

*“Generally speaking, compared to the days when I was attending the **brand new Harding High School**, our streets and neighborhoods are cleaner and safer, more of our kids are staying in school and able to find jobs here when they graduate, crime is way down, and our **elected officials and City administrators even seem to be working together** much better these days. There is no longer a question about the future of our City or any of our neighborhoods. Instead, there is real sense of hope and vitality here now, and the fact that our football, basketball and other sports teams are vying for State championships on a regular basis, sure doesn’t hurt.”*

Key Recommendations

The 2009 City of Warren Revitalization Strategy contains numerous recommendations that should be considered by the appropriate entities at the right time, as discussed throughout the Plan. Many of the recommendations are focused on the five specific neighborhoods. Others, especially Chapter 4, are intended for the City as a whole. Since the recommendations in the Plan can be overwhelming, a summary of key recommendations is provided, as well as a First Year Strategy. These recommendations are divided into the same five key areas discussed throughout the neighborhood sections.

Organization

- City Council should agree on **who is responsible for assuring that implementation** of this Revitalization Strategy is accomplished. It is recommended that a Committee of Council be created to spearhead Plan implementation, and that a specific Council person be charged with heading up the Committee and the implementation.
- City Council should **agree to and accept the neighborhood groups** identified to speak for each of the neighborhoods, and should identify a liaison from each of these groups to be Council’s key contact person.
- City Council or Administration should enter into a **Memorandum of Understanding with MVOC** regarding their role in empowering neighborhood groups and building administrative capacity within them. That should include an understanding of how MVOC can assist the neighborhood groups with implementation of their neighborhood strategies, the mutual desire to create a new Community Development Corporation (CDC), and other goals and strategies of MVOC.
- City Council should **revisit the 2005 Multiple Building Study** and seriously consider implementing some of those recommendations that would assist with rightsizing the City.

- City Council must **support Main Street Warren** (formerly Warren GROWS) and its efforts to revitalize the downtown through the Main Street program.
- City Council should continue to work with its neighbors to **empower the newly-established multi-county Port Authority** and hire a Regional Economic Development (ED) Director. The Port Authority will be the key to recruiting private investment into the Valley. Then it **should identify the key contact person at the City** to work with the Regional ED Director on all economic development efforts.
- The community (possibly through the Chamber of Commerce) should invite educated, unbiased speakers to the City to discuss the pros and cons of adopting a **charter form of government**, so that an objective, educated decision can be made. This must be a grass roots effort. The public should be educated along with Council.

Safe, Clean and Green

- City Council, the Police Department and the neighborhood groups should work together to **aggressively fight crime**. Existing programs should be expanded, the Weed & Seed program (if funded) should be implemented, and additional steps should be taken to make the City a safer place. This is the #1 priority to turning the City around.
- The Police Department should pursue and implement a **Crime Free Multi-Housing Program** for all apartment complexes within the City. (www.crime-free-association.org) This program would require apartment owners who participate to provide safer units in exchange for quicker proceedings through the courts to evict renters who do not pay promptly or don't maintain their apartments appropriately. (Painesville OH is successfully operating this program.)
- The City and the CD Department should **increase the number of housing units demolished each year** from the current 30 per year to as many as 185 per year to achieve an average housing vacancy rate closer to the statewide average. The new NSP funds, along with existing CDBG and HOME funds should be targeted as needed to accomplish this goal. Habitat for Humanity (which has recently changed its nation-wide priorities to include demolition), as well as other housing partners, should be contacted to assist as much as possible.
- The City should work with private property owners to **demolish vacant industrial and commercial buildings** that are dilapidated. Brown field clean-up funds should be pursued when possible to assist in these efforts.
- City Administration and departments, as well as **private partners**, should work with the neighborhood groups to **support, enhance, and expand clean-up days** in the various neighborhoods.
- City Council should **revisit and implement the 2004 City Parks Citizens Advisory Committee Report**, especially those recommendations regarding creating a Parks District and raising funds for park projects.

- City Council should investigate the possibility of **providing and maintaining** (with neighborhood groups) **at least one City park, including restroom facilities, in each of the five neighborhoods** identified as part of this planning process.
- Neighborhood groups should work with the City to **strengthen and expand the “shepherding program”** and/or an “Adopt a Park” program.
- The community should work together to **construct and maintain the skatepark** at the site of the former Turner JHS near Packard Park. Construction should start in 2009.
- The community should work together to undertake a **Feasibility Study** to determine if it makes sense to **pursue a Community Center**, either in conjunction with the YMCA and YWCA as a citywide facility, or in one or more of the neighborhoods as smaller facilities. The center(s) could be in cooperation with neighborhood parks or other private facilities.

Promotion

- City Council and **private partners** should support the Warren Main Street in its efforts to expand programs, activities, events, and marketing materials to **promote the community**.
- The community should **utilize the new tag line** in its promotions of the City: *“Warren: Celebrating our History; Creating our Future.”*
- The community should **support the Port Authority, the Trumbull County Council of Governments, amphitheater activities, and the Cleveland+ Marketing Alliance** to promote the Mahoning Valley as a place to live and conduct business. Other local arts, cultural, and civic groups that promote the City should also be supported.
- The City should **keep its web site current** and link it to as many local businesses and partners as possible.
- The City should continue its efforts to pursue a **business incubator** in the downtown. A **feasibility study** should be completed as soon as possible to determine the parameters and potential for success.
- The City should work with Trumbull County to **support and promote the industrial incubator** in the former Delphi buildings on Dana Street, and with attempts to secure funding to accomplish it.
- City Administration should continue to pursue **redevelopment of the Peninsula area** and promote a River-oriented mixed-use development that will bring residents to the downtown to live, shop, and work. A **concept plan** should be developed and a **feasibility study** completed for a proposed development. An **RFP** could then be prepared to recruit a developer.

Design

- The City (or Main Street Warren) should meet with Howland and Warren Townships regarding creating **attractive and shared gateways** at key entrances into the City. “Welcome to Warren” could be on one side and “Welcome to Howland or Warren Township” on the other. Costs for the gateways could be shared. Gateway locations are discussed throughout the Plan, and should be coordinated with the appropriate neighborhood group.

- The City and neighborhood groups should focus their rightsizing and redevelopment efforts on **neighborhood revitalization**, using **the five new schools as centers of redevelopment activities**, and working outward from them.
- The City and its housing partners should encourage the development of **innovative and alternative housing options** in any future new housing development. The market study indicated the increasing demand for **condos**, especially as the baby boomers begin to retire, as well as the demand from single-person households. **Artist lofts and live-work units**, especially in the upper floors of downtown buildings, should also be encouraged.
- The community should work with Eastgate to establish a **fixed route transit system** to service the residents of the City of Warren.
- The City's **Zoning Code and Subdivision Regulations should be updated** to accommodate the recommendations of this Plan, and assure that current trends are being properly addressed. The City's **Sexually-Oriented Business ordinance** should be reviewed to assure that it accomplishes the goals of the community in a manner that will be upheld in court. **Design regulations** for the downtown and some of the commercial and historic corridors should also be considered.

Economic Restructuring

- The **Land Bank Program** needs to be enhanced and more aggressively utilized to acquire and dispense of properties. An **aggressive side lot program**, selling vacant parcels to neighbors who will enlarge their homes, add gardens or yards, or otherwise properly maintain the properties, should be established. Other options that should be explored for vacant lots include parks, green space, wetlands bank, trails, etc. Use of **private/public partnerships or existing conservancies to manage** the land bank should be considered.
- The SW neighborhood should prepare, or work with a private developer to prepare, a business plan and/or proposal for the **West Lawn area**, targeting it as key development project in the future. This development could include a grocery store, a community center, and other retail and service operations. It will have to be a private venture, possibly with some local government support.
- City Council and private partners should support the movement to **pursue a Community College** for the area. The market study clearly indicated that the demographics support the concept of a community college. There are several empty buildings that could house this type of facility.
- The community should **pursue "Eds and Meds"** as this is one of the fastest growing industries in the country at this time, especially since Warren has a leg up on other communities with its two existing hospitals and the support facilities in the City. Redevelopment opportunities should be created for additional health-related service businesses to locate around Trumbull Memorial Hospital along East Market Street to and including the downtown.
- When redevelopment opportunities evolve, **mixed-use developments should be encouraged**, as these are currently the most popular trends. Zoning must be amended to

permit mixed-use developments, and the community must be educated to understand and embrace the concept.

- City Administration, WRAP, and CD Department should **update the City's Community Reinvestment Area (CRA)**. The City's CRA was established prior to changes adopted with Senate Bill 19 in 1994. Several requirements were added, some of which could be a liability to the City if not properly used. At the same time, it may be appropriate to expand the CRA to include all of the areas of the City where redevelopment is being encouraged, to provide another incentive for revitalization.
- City Council, the CD Department, WRAP, and the new Port Authority Director should **evaluate existing local incentive programs and consider new local programs** to entice businesses to local or expand in the City. The State is changing many of its programs, as is the federal government, and a key person in the City needs to be very familiar with all of these program changes and potential financing and tax incentive programs.

First Year Strategy

- City Council should **delegate implementation** of specific citywide elements to appropriate City staff and to a designated Council Committee
- City Council should **enter into a MOU with MVOC** to empower neighborhood groups to build administrative capacity to implement the recommended strategies for their respective neighborhoods.
- City Council should appoint a committee of City Council members, School Board members, and South West neighborhood representatives to discuss the **adaptive re-use of Western Reserve High School**. A decision must be made by the School District within six months of the opening of Jefferson Elementary School. A feasibility study should be undertaken quickly.
- Using this same or another committee, the community (not the City government) must decide on the **future uses of all former school buildings and/or sites**, considering all options from community centers to neighborhood parks to private enterprises, working with the neighborhood groups and the School District.
- Implement at least **one new program** to further combat crime.
- Develop better relationships with neighborhood groups and **assign a police officer** to attend each neighborhood group meeting.
- Create a public/private partnership or employ a conservancy to manage the **land bank** more aggressively.
- **Increase** the number of **housing demolitions**, targeting CDBG, HOME, and NSP funds to neighborhoods identified in this Plan.
- If/when the **Weed & Seed grant** is approved, implement and promote the program quickly and show some positive results.

- City Council should **meet with each of the five neighborhood groups** to review their strategies and discuss implementation.
- Council should appoint committees to **revisit the 2005 Multiple Buildings Study** (regarding consolidations) and **the 2004 City Parks Plan** to identify strategies that might be beneficial to implement.