

**Annual Program Assessment Report  
For Ferndale  
(Oakland County, Michigan)  
December 16-17, 2002**

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## **Introduction**

On December 16-17, 2002, Robert Donohue, Jr., Coordinator of Main Street Oakland County (MSOC) and Nicholas P. Kalogeresis, AICP, Program Associate of the National Main Street Center, (NMSC) conducted an annual program assessment of the Ferndale (MI) Downtown Development Authority.

The purpose of the annual program assessment visit is to recognize accomplishments in the year since the DDA initiated its Main Street program and to eliminate barriers and obstacles to improving overall operations and accomplishing specific downtown revitalization projects. No official “report card” will be issued for this assessment since it is not meant to be a qualitative ranking of downtown revitalization and management activities in Ferndale. Main Street programs vary considerably due to each community’s particular priorities and resources that comparison between them is not practical. Instead, the evaluation is meant to examine the effectiveness of the local Main Street program within its own context and to gauge the level of activity that the program is prepared to undertake in its next year.

During the assessment visit, information was collected from several sources including previous reports, a year-end survey questionnaire, and interviews with DDA board and committee members and staff. This information has been integrated into recommendations based on regional, statewide and national perspectives. The intent of all recommendations is to clarify issues and provide concrete direction for the Ferndale DDA in the year ahead.

Ferndale is currently one of eight communities participating in Main Street Oakland County, a downtown revitalization program offered by Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services. The following section provides background information about the establishment of the Main Street Oakland County Program, its relationship to the National Main Street Center, and a recent history of the Ferndale Downtown Development Authority, the organization designated to receive MSOC and NMSC technical services in Ferndale.

## **Main Street Oakland County, Ferndale DDA and the National Main Street Center**

In February 2000, the Oakland County Division of Planning and Economic Development Services established Main Street Oakland County to help communities revitalize their traditional commercial districts. Main Street Oakland County’s mission is to assist towns and cities maximize the economic potential of their traditional commercial districts while preserving their unique heritage and sense of place through the delivery of technical services and local implementation of the comprehensive Main Street Four-Point Approach™.

Communities participating in MSOC were selected through a competitive application process. Ferndale was chosen in MSOC’s second application round in September 2001 along with the communities of Lake Orion and Holly. All communities receive a set of intensive technical assistance services designed to help them build their local Main Street programs as well as to

address specific downtown revitalization issues. The NMSC and MSOC will deliver these services over a period of three years, after which the level of technical assistance provided will be reduced. However, on-going technical services will be offered by MSOC to help communities with specific organization, design, economic restructuring, and business development issues. For instance, design assistance services will be provided to downtown property owners who wish to rehabilitate their buildings. Communities will also receive business assistance services in the form of one-on-one business consultations, technical workshops, development of a database to track MSOC community statistics, and financial incentive programs for business start-ups and expansions.

## **The Ferndale Downtown Development Authority**

Created in 1980, the Ferndale Downtown Development Authority is responsible for the ongoing revitalization and management of downtown Ferndale. The DDA is currently governed by a nine-member board of directors and is staffed by a full-time DDA Executive Director. Its DDA district boundaries, located primarily along Nine-Mile Road, encompasses 14 square blocks with over 152 buildings housing over 189 businesses.

Since 1980, Ferndale DDA has focused much of its work on public improvements and streetscaping projects including the reconstruction and repaving of several downtown streets, the creation of new off-street parking facilities and various landscape and pedestrian improvements. Its most significant revitalization project in recent years was the 1998 reinstallation of on-street parking to Nine-Mile Road which has led, as pedestrian traffic has returned to the street, to the opening of new stores and other businesses. In addition to its ongoing public improvements program, the Ferndale DDA has been energetic in undertaking several marketing and promotional activities including the Ferndale Sidewalk Sales, the Taste of Ferndale, Winter Tale and the publication of a new downtown directory. Private design improvements have also been strongly encouraged with the establishment of the BUILD incentive program that has resulted in several successful rehabilitation projects this past year.

Since 2001, the Ferndale DDA has received four on-site technical assistance services from MSOC and the NMSC, including this year-end assessment, designed to help the DDA establish its Main Street organizational structure and to define and carry out realistic and appropriate downtown revitalization goals and strategies. First, a needs assessment was delivered in November 2001 to determine the technical assistance needs of the Ferndale DDA and to provide a set of basic recommendations in starting up and implementing its local Main Street program. Second, in March 2002, a resource team of commercial district revitalization professionals visited downtown Ferndale to provide more in-depth and comprehensive recommendations and strategies for how the Ferndale DDA can best address its specific downtown revitalization issues. In May of 2002, work plan development assistance was provided to each DDA Main Street committee along with an evening public visioning session. Last, throughout the past year, the Ferndale DDA also received a variety of other training in the Main Street Four-Points through MSOC and NMSC regional workshops.

## The National Main Street Center

The National Main Street Center® is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Created by a Congressional Charter in 1949, the National Trust is a leading advocate of historic preservation in the United States. The preservation movement involves more than saving historic buildings. Economic growth, urban revitalization, and the creation of new jobs are all issues the National Trust addresses through the rehabilitation of historic structures.

Established by the National Trust in 1980, the National Main Street Center (NMSC) has worked in 43 states and Puerto Rico. Through these efforts, 193,000 net new jobs have been created, \$12.8 billion has been reinvested in Main Street commercial districts, 51,000 new businesses have been created, 62,000 buildings have been rehabilitated, and 1,514 communities have built strong organizations to revitalize their commercial districts. The NMSC also sponsors the National Main Street Network™, a professional membership program for organizations interested in commercial district revitalization. The Center produces publications, newsletters, and special reports on revitalization and preservation issues and serves as a clearinghouse for information on community redevelopment issues. The NMSC accomplishes its mission through the Main Street Four-Point Approach™.

## The Four Point Approach

**Design** takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in Ferndale by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising displays, and promotional materials. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all of these areas, to educate people about design quality, and to expedite commercial district improvements.

**Promotion** takes many forms, but the aim is to create a positive image of Ferndale in order to rekindle neighborhood pride. Promotion seeks to improve retail sales events and festivals and to create a positive public image of the downtown in order to attract investors, developers, and new businesses.

**Economic Restructuring** strengthens Ferndale's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is accomplished by retaining and expanding existing businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, by converting unused or underutilized space into productive property, and by sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of neighborhood business people.

**Organization** establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in Ferndale. This will allow the Main Street revitalization program to provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy of the commercial district. Diverse groups from the public and private sectors (City of Ferndale and Oakland County governments, local bankers, merchants, Ferndale Chamber of Commerce, property owners, neighborhood leaders, and others) must work together to create and maintain a successful program.

## The Eight Principles of Main Street

While the Main Street Approach provides the format for successful revitalization, implementation of the Four-Point Approach is based on eight principles that affect all areas of the revitalization effort:

**Comprehensive.** Downtown revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach must be used.

**Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help to develop skills so that more complex problems can be addressed and more ambitious projects undertaken.

**Self-Help.** Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the project successful. The NMSC and Oakland County provide direction, ideas, and training; but continued long-term success depends upon the involvement and commitment of the community.

**Public/Private Partnership.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical viability of downtown. Each sector has a role to play, and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations so that an effective partnership can be forged.

**Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities – like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.

**Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies equally to each element of the process, from storefront design to promotional campaigns to educational programs.

**Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.

**Implementation-Oriented.** Activity creates confidence in the program and ever-greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is underway. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger activities as the revitalization effort matures.

## General Observations

- In a few short years since on-street parking was reintroduced onto Nine-Mile Road, downtown Ferndale has become one of the more vibrant downtowns in Oakland County and the Detroit metropolitan area. The vacancy rate is low and the downtown enjoys several strong business clusters including restaurants and nighttime entertainment establishments, book stores, apparel, record stores and other music-related businesses. As a testament to the success of these stores, many interview participants stated that their quality and merchandising efforts have noticeably improved over the course of the year.
- New façade and building improvements have taken place in the past year as several property owners have taken advantage of the BUILD incentive program. Interest is now strong in the program after years of relatively weak participation by downtown business and property owners. One significant BUILD improvement project was Huntington Bank which opened a new facility in a storefront that had been vacant for several years. In addition, through the BUILD program's review procedures, the Design Committee has become active in working with applicants on improving their design improvement schemes.
- Significant strides have been made by the DDA board to adopt and implement new Main Street organization elements, such as working committees, and to shift from being a staff-driven to a volunteer-led downtown development authority. However, more work needs to be done to fully implement the Main Street program and to improve overall operations. For instance, only two of the four committees seem to be fully functioning with a compliment of volunteers. Other committees do not have a formally appointed chairperson to lead them and are relying too much on the executive director to help them complete their projects.
- The DDA board in general has good leadership and has shown enthusiasm and commitment to successfully implement the Main Street program. However, it is unclear whether all DDA board members are actively participating in board and Main Street activities.
- Achieving full autonomy from the City of Ferndale continues to be a difficult issue. Interference by the municipality with the DDA's oversight of the budget and its staff goes beyond any stated provision in Michigan state law. One point in evidence of this is the City's recent withdrawal of funds from the DDA's budget without formal request to the board of directors. The DDA's scheduled move to a new office outside of City Hall will greatly aid in promoting the DDA's visibility to the public and reduce the perception, on part of the public and the City, that the DDA is a line agency of the municipality. However, the DDA will need to resolve these autonomy issues to ensure that it can operate effectively and efficiently and to the fullest extent allowed to it under the law.
- Developers are demonstrating strong interest in downtown Ferndale and see it as an attractive and viable place to undertake new real estate projects. One proposal has been submitted to the DDA for the Troy Street parking lot but an RFP process needs to be instituted to solicit other proposals as well. Although developer interest is positive in the downtown, it has come

early in the DDA's efforts in building its Main Street program. The DDA will need to continue to evolve and increase its sophistication, in order to effectively organize and deal with the myriad issues and details associated with managing such development projects. The DDA must also be prepared to work with the community and the City on how new development will take place and what benefit it will bring to the downtown, let alone the complex design and financing issues that come with these projects.

- With the advent of new development comes the question of how to plan effectively for them. Much discussion has taken place within the DDA and the community about the need to undertake a downtown master plan and it appears the economic restructuring committee may be undertaking one component of it. However, it's not certain whether that particular part of the plan will be sufficient enough to comprise a downtown master plan.

## Organization

### Observations

- DDA board and committee members generally appear to be committed to developing a successful Main Street program. While a majority of the board has been active in committee work this past year, there are still a few members of the board who are not active and not attending monthly board meetings on a regular basis. Currently there is one board vacancy.
- Overall, the Ferndale DDA is making a somewhat smooth transition from being a staff and project driven program to one that is more balanced with community participation and involvement through the committees. All committees are established but only two, including the design and organization committee, are completely functioning with chairs in place and staffed with a necessary number of volunteers. Both the economic restructuring and promotion committees, though both active this past year, did not have formal chairs in place and needed more volunteers to accomplish their work. However, it was observed that some of the committees' work load is also being placed on the executive director's shoulders.
- Generally, the DDA has adapted fairly well to the work planning process and all committees have accomplished some or all of their work plans for the year. Committee and DDA board members clearly understand the process between completing committee work plans and taking their work plan budgets and including them as actual line items into the overall DDA budget. Some committee work plans were more complete than others while most needed more detail, such as firm task assignments as measurable benchmarks, to be more effective in guiding the committees' work.
- Ferndale DDA's operating budget seems to be in good shape to support the many activities being proposed in each of the committee work plans.
- Since there was no face-to-face meeting with City of Ferndale officials during the assessment visit, it is unclear how much understanding, support and participation staff and elected officials have provided and shown over the last year.
- Achieving full operating autonomy from the City of Ferndale continues to be a vexing issue for the DDA board of directors. At issue this past year was the apparent withdraw of DDA tax revenue without formal notification or request to the DDA board and the freezing of the executive director's salary though she is not a municipal employee. The City also required that the DDA's new by-laws be reviewed by the City attorney and adopted by the City Council even though there is no requirement for the municipality to formally do so in state DDA law.
- Overall, the newly adopted corporate by-laws are good and insitutionalizes the Main Street program and its committee structure.
- Much of Ferndale's early success with its Main Street program can also be attributed to a

hard-working, experienced and personable executive director. The manager demonstrates the most important quality needed for the job and that's being able to effectively work with the board and volunteers and to motivate them to put the Main Street program into practice. However, it was observed that the director has not been formally evaluated in the past year and that no job evaluation criteria have been established by the board. In terms of compensation, the executive director is relatively underpaid relative to others in Oakland County.

- The DDA has made plans to relocate its office from the basement of City Hall to a new storefront location in the downtown district. This new office will provide much needed public visibility for the DDA as well as more office space and meeting facilities for the executive director the board and volunteers.
- A draft vision statement was produced for the DDA during the highly successful visioning session last May. The board has recently adopted the vision statement as well as a new mission statement.
- It is apparent that the Troy Street parking lot development proposal is already taking time away from the staff and the committees involved from their own work plan implementation activities. The development proposal may be one of the most important projects to come to the DDA since the Nine Mile Road parking reinstallation, and staff should devote a certain amount of time to see through its successful implementation. However, the DDA should find ways to be more efficiently organized in addressing project issues without interfering with the committees' usual work plan execution.
- By and large, the organization committee's work plan was fairly comprehensive but realistic in its scope of activities. Work plan projects included volunteer development activities, researching possible future DDA management roles in the downtown parking system, expanding the DDA boundaries and a variety of public relations activities.
- A new newsletter and website have been planned as part of the overall public relations effort for the DDA but were not executed this past year. The committee has been looking at engaging outside consultants to help design and build the website.
- Though listed as an important work plan objective volunteer recruitment activities have been minimal in the past year. The DDA recognizes that in order to maintain and enhance its current level of activities and to better staff its weaker committees it will need to conduct active volunteer development efforts. Fortunately, the new office location will make it more conducive for volunteer training and orientation activities.
- The organization committee has worked out a fairly realistic plan of action for expansion of its DDA boundaries and has already accomplished most of its work plan tasks. The expansion is viewed as a strategic priority for the Ferndale DDA. All that remains at the time of the year-end assessment is the Ferndale City Council's final approval.

- Research was conducted this past year, primarily by the executive director, to determine what ways and means the DDA could take on the responsibilities of managing the downtown parking facilities. Though much research was completed, the development of a formal plan to be presented to the City of Ferndale has not been undertaken.

## **General Organization Recommendations**

- Work with the Mayor to fill the one remaining vacancy on the DDA board by providing recommendations or a slate of candidates who the DDA feels can best serve in a board member position. In the future, form a nominating subcommittee of the DDA board or organization committee that could recommend new board members as vacancies occur or on a yearly or as-needed basis. Recommend volunteers who have distinguished themselves in DDA committees or other volunteer activities. At the very least, recommend new people who are willing to devote time to the DDA and who are willing to be leaders in the committees.
- Formally appoint chairs to manage the organization and economic restructuring committees. As a best practice, the board should consider adopting an official policy or procedure whereby the DDA board chair makes the committee chair appointments, with approval from the entire board, on a yearly basis. In turn, chair positions would have one-year term limits which could be renewed yearly by the board chair if so warranted.
- To ensure that optimal communication is occurring between the board and committees, the DDA board should require committee chairs to report back to the board on a monthly basis. Committee chairs not on the board should delegate the reporting responsibility to the board member currently participating in the committee to make that report. Good communication is one way in which the board can know if the committees are performing properly and meeting their annual work plan objectives.
- Consider amending the DDA by-laws to eliminate the provisions for a maximum number of volunteer participation in the committees and add one to allow for existence of subcommittees and ad-hoc task forces. In addition, add by-law provisions for the annual adoption of work plans by the committees and the board process and requirements that committee chairs report to the DDA board on a monthly basis.
- Take the work plan development process two steps further by taking all completed and adopted work plans and publish them in a formal, spiral bound pamphlet or notebook. Distribute the work plan publication to all DDA board members, committee chairs and to all city council members and staff so that they can become knowledgeable about DDA projects and activities in the coming year. The publication should adequately answer questions by city officials about what the DDA is planning to do and how it's spending its money. Last, the DDA should review the progress of work plan implementation during the regular monthly board meeting.
- Form a joint task force between the design and economic restructuring committees and other

members of the DDA board to specifically work on and oversee the Troy Street parking lot development project. The task force should work in tandem with the City to ensure that a fair and equitable RFP process is conducted and that any chosen proposal should meet the design and development standards the DDA seeks from such new projects. The establishment of a task force will allow the design and economic restructuring committees to continue their usual work plan implementation schedules without being delayed by assuming the Troy Street project. The DDA should consider using the task force or ad-hoc committee format for future RFP/development processes and for the development of the downtown district plan which is currently listed within the economic restructuring work program.

- The DDA should hire its own legal counsel to assist the DDA board of directors in questions over its autonomy, especially when it comes to budget and personnel issues, from the City of Ferndale. The board should also promulgate new policies, and perhaps incorporate them within the corporate by-laws, that only the DDA board will have authority over its own budget and staff. In particular to the budget issue, the DDA should require that any other governmental entity or organization should request any monetary appropriation from the DDA in writing to the board.
- The DDA board should begin planning for upgrading the current part-time administrative staff person to full-time. As the committees grow and mature in volunteers and in their annual work programs, there will be a critical need to support those activities with full-time administrative staff.
- The DDA board officers should adopt formal staff performance review standards, begin to conduct regular performance reviews of its staff as well as adopt formal, written job descriptions for each staff position.

### **Organization Committee Recommendations**

- Organization committee members who have not received training in the Main Street Four-Point Approach in the past year should attend future MSOC and NMSC workshops.
- In the coming year, the organization committee should add as a work plan activity the development of formal job descriptions for DDA board members, officers of the board.
- Strive to develop a regular stand-alone Ferndale DDA newsletter with a quarterly distribution that is entirely produced and supported by volunteers.
- At some point in the coming year, hold a more open and detailed Ferndale DDA annual meeting. The meeting could serve several functions such as communicating the successes and new goals and downtown management strategies the entire DDA is undertaking. Present reinvestment statistics and awards for good building projects and outstanding volunteerism. Use the meeting as an opportunity to recruit and recognize volunteers as well as conducting usual business matters such as electing new officers.

- Continue to formally establish a volunteer management program that would ultimately encompass recruitment, orientation, training, review and recognition efforts. Focus on some recruitment initiatives including a community open house, newsletter solicitations, and media announcements and by word of mouth. Do not undertake active recruitment activities until a thorough work plan is completed that details how many volunteers are needed to accomplish committee projects. Create a recognition program that would honor volunteers for their participation and quality of work.
- A comprehensive public relations plan for the DDA should be developed which outlines consistent and frequent opportunities to inform the public of the program goals and successes. Staff, board members and volunteers should implement this plan, so the community can get a sense of the broad based community volunteer effort happening behind the scenes.
- Produce an annual report to be distributed to downtown stakeholders and the community.
- Prepare and distribute more press releases on DDA projects and activities that are taking place and mention the Main Street program. The Main Street Program should be credited in all interviews for stories by the media. Use press releases to highlight accomplishments such as new building rehabilitations, promotions and business recruitment success.
- Continue with plans to expand the DDA boundaries and work for its adoption. The next step is to develop a realistic and effective work plan for the adoption of a PSD.

## Design

### Observations

- The design committee has had a successful year in implementing a majority of its work plan projects. The committee seems to be well-managed and has a compliment of volunteers but it is unclear how many are actively participating in work plan implementation. The current work plan does not have concrete timelines for project implementation or specific task assignments.
- Downtown Ferndale has seen several private building improvements since last year including a couple that have taken advantage of the BUILD incentive program. Most impressive of the projects was the complete façade renovation of an empty Nine-Mile Road storefront by Huntington Bank. The committee has not yet started to promote the successes of these projects to the general public.
- Streetscape improvements were a major focus of committee work plan initiatives. These projects included, but were not limited to, researching ways to improve the pedestrian environment along Woodward Avenue and Nine Mile, a new public signage display in the median along Woodward, conducting on-going streetscape maintenance and tree replacement in the downtown and the continual planning for improvements to the **Withington** parking lot.
- The committee is actively working on completing a set of downtown district design guidelines and held a successful public workshop to solicit community participation.
- Several projects not yet completed in their work plan are already being included in the next year's work plan. These projects include the development of a downtown wayfinding system and a charette process to determine reuse of the existing Nine Mile Road parking lot.

### Recommendations

- Continue to develop the committee's work plan to a more complete and usable format with activities, timelines, task responsibilities and budget determined. Strive in the coming year to delegate more of the work plan activities to other volunteers
- Encourage committee members who haven't received formal design committee training to attend future MSOC training workshops as well as the National Town Meeting on Main Street. The committee should also consider organizing its own training or orientation session, perhaps once or twice a year, for new volunteers. Consider purchasing from the NMSC or borrow from MSOC the *Design Committee Handbook*, which provides information and how-to advice on completing a work plan.
- Develop a full inventory of all buildings in the downtown development district. The inventory will help the design committee know many things about its downtown buildings including their condition, architectural styles, usable space by floor (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, etc.), existing use and ownership.

Include within the inventory historic photographs of downtown buildings.

- A clear first priority in the coming year is to complete the design guidelines. With interest by downtown property and business owners in the BUILD program increasing, the design guidelines become critically important if the committee is to make good substantive judgments on the quality of applicant projects going through committee review. Furthermore, the guidelines will also serve a function of guiding the quality of new infill development. While many community design guidelines are different, the design guidelines should consider at least the following components:
  - a) Introduction and history of downtown Ferndale
  - b) Downtown Ferndale's architectural history and building styles
  - c) Downtown district map
  - d) Building characteristics including height, rhythms and proportions, window openings and roofs
  - e) Storefronts
  - f) Signage
  - g) Infill development and new construction
  - h) Parking
  - i) Public improvements

In addition, include graphics and photos on what types of signage and awnings and proper storefront, facade and window rehabilitation procedures would be appropriate for downtown Ferndale buildings. Emphasize the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* as well as the NMSC's *Building Improvement File* as a starting point for including preservation standards and graphics. However, use as many local examples of good design as much as possible in the publication. Once it is completed, distribute the design guidelines to property and business owners and perhaps, hold a workshop, using the guidelines, to discuss good building rehabilitation methods.

- A second priority in the coming year is to improve and enhance the operation of the DDA's design assistance program. Consider the following additional elements:
  - a) Require that all applicants to the BUILD program receive some form of design assistance, either from the committee itself, from outside architects and other design professionals, or from MSOC's new design assistance program services. In this way, the design schemes submitted by applicants will be of higher quality and perhaps lessen the time that the committee will spend on review.
  - b) Continue to promote and utilize MSOC's design assistance program services to property owners and merchants who do not ordinarily have the resources to compensate outside design professionals. Though Ferndale is eligible for two projects per year, more drawings and services could be offered if the first round projects are successfully implemented during a given year.

- c) Add to the BUILD program fund to meet the anticipated number of project applicants in the coming year. Provide information on other building rehabilitation incentives.
  - d) Continue to expand on the list of local architects who are qualified and experienced in historic building rehabilitation and research their work so that their design qualifications are appropriate. Furnish the list to downtown property owners and merchants seeking design assistance and perhaps offer small grants to partially defray the cost of such services.
  - e) Develop a resource library on awning, paint and signage samples and collect historic photographs and pictures of appropriately rehabilitated buildings. These resources are educational tools to show merchants and property owners' good methods in historic preservation and building rehabilitation.
  - f) Produce and print a marketing brochure that describes the design assistance services and available incentives to downtown stakeholders. Include in the brochure information regarding the façade grant program and use the brochure to aggressively market available services.
  - g) Continue the committee's design review role in approving applications to the BUILD program.
- As a second year goal, strive to meet and work with building owners and merchants that are willing to make improvements, and with others that might be less interested and cooperative. Let the owners and merchants know about the committee's design incentive and assistance programs. Though there have been previous efforts, continue to find ways in which to work with the F&M and Old Navy stores on improving their building facades and window openings. Last, recognize also that not all property owners will be willing to participate in the DDA's design improvement efforts.
  - Though the design committee serves a design review function for those projects seeking assistance from the BUILD program, at the very least the committee should have an informal role in reviewing and commenting on all projects that may be happening in the downtown. Some of this function already occurs with the City's Appearance Review Commission so a decision should be made whether the Commission adopts the DDA's design guidelines when they review projects within the DDA district or should the design committee itself take on that role. Nevertheless, the overarching goal is to ensure that the DDA has some voice in how new development and building improvements, outside of the BUILD program, look within the DDA district.
  - Continue to include public improvement projects in the committee's work plan. Consider dividing these work plan activities into short and long-term projects as well as routine maintenance projects.
  - Work with the organization committee on developing an awards program for those property

and business owners that have improved their buildings over the past year.

## Promotion

### Observations

- Despite having no chairperson and a smaller number of volunteers relative to the other Ferndale DDA committees, the promotions committee was able to complete a number of activities including one new successful traffic-building special event. It appears, however, that volunteer participation in the organization of promotion activities was inconsistent and that the committee relied too much on the executive director to implement specific tasks.
- The Taste of Ferndale and Winter's Tale were two of the three major special events organized and produced by the committee this past year. The third one, the downtown Sidewalk Sessions was a new traffic-building event designed to highlight downtown's unique music-related business cluster as well as bringing customers and visitors downtown on regular basis during the summer. Despite having a short period for the event's planning and other problems with logistics, the committee believed it has much potential for future success.
- Though not completed this past year, the promotions committee is planning to reproduce an effective and existing downtown business directory.
- Successful efforts were made this past year to undertake cooperative advertising projects with downtown retailers. One specific project included the two-week advertising campaign with the *Metro Times* newspaper of which 18 businesses participated; another was the Detroit *Hour Magazine* advertising project.
- Overall, the promotions committee budget is healthy enough to support its existing activities as well as future new ones. Along with the DDA's overall efforts to adopt a PSD, the committee is on its way towards building a future budget that will support an increasing diversity of promotion activities.

### Recommendations

- Recruit more committee volunteers and work toward completing a thorough annual work plan. Continue to involve downtown merchants but recruit other downtown stakeholders and community residents to participate in implementing the work plan and organizing the promotion events. The committee may be relying too much on the merchant committee members and the executive director on putting together the events. Consider adopting a committee organization system where event chairs are appointed to produce individual events rather than have the entire committee organize all the events.
- Concentrate committee energies in the coming year on improving the existing events by adding a marketing or retail component to them. For instance, can there be a retail event activity associated with the Sidewalk Sessions and Winter Tales events? Last, strive to have the events supported and implemented by volunteers rather than by the same committee

members and DDA staff.

- When time, money and volunteer resources allow, consider adding additional events in the coming year to the promotions calendar. The committee is already considering adding an Art Fair but it should also look into new events that fill gaps in the current calendar, move merchandise for retailers at particular times during the year and others that can attract certain target customer groups that are not currently shopping in downtown Ferndale. For the latter, the promotions committee should examine relevant market analysis information to determine what customer groups exist within the trade area that are not shopping downtown but could be attracted to a downtown Ferndale event. Refer to the *Ferndale Resource Team Report* on recommendations for new types of events.
- Work in cooperation with the organization committee to help adopt and implement a Principal Shopping District. Plan for the mid-term to budget PSD monies to hire a part or full time downtown promotions and marketing director.
- Again, when time and money allows in the coming year, consider undertaking additional marketing activities. Think about radio and print advertising initiatives. Now, with the market analysis completed, the promotions committee can truly understand how to craft the marketing message to targeted customer groups.
- Transfer the website development project to the organization committee since it is essentially a public relations project for the DDA itself, not an overall downtown promotions activity.

## Economic Restructuring

### Observations

- Since the reinstallation of on-street parking along Nine-Mile Road, downtown Ferndale has witnessed the growth of several vibrant and diverse retail business clusters including apparel restaurants and entertainment, music and book stores. Overall, based upon observation, and from remarks made during the interview sessions, it appears that the quality of retailing has improved over the last year and that opportunities may exist to help existing business expand.
- Development interest in downtown Ferndale is apparent as a proposal to build on the existing Troy Street parking lot has been submitted to the DDA and the City of Ferndale. Such interest breaks new ground for the City and the DDA as they begin to grapple with how to implement a fair and appropriate development process and how to manage the various impacts on downtown design, parking and the retail mix such new infill development often bring. An RFP process has not yet been instituted for the Troy Street parking lot project.
- Overall, the economic restructuring committee has accomplished much its work program for the year even though it did not have a chair person in place. The work plan itself is realistic and appropriate.
- The majority of the committee's time has been appropriately devoted in the past year to undertaking and completing as many of the market analysis components as possible. The committee successfully received a \$9,000.00 grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to implement a downtown business survey through a customized survey instrument administered using Palm Pilots. The use of Palm Pilots is certainly innovative and will drastically reduce computation time. Completion of the business survey, along with a planned telephone survey, is scheduled for the spring/summer of 2003.
- Looking beyond the market analysis, the committee has begun to explore and plan business development initiatives. Some of the initiatives being discussed include a mentoring program for new businesses, a small business "SWAT" team organized in partnership with National City Bank, a retail broker's roundtable forum and a series of small business development workshops. The committee is also discussing the production of an information brochure that would describe all available DDA and outside small business development resources.

### Recommendations

- Appoint a formal committee chair to manage the committee in the coming year (*refer to the Organization section above*). The chair should have a job description and the responsibilities of overseeing work plan development and its implementation with committee volunteers.
- Require or encourage committee members who haven't received formal economic restructuring training to attend future MSOC workshops as well as the National Town

Meeting on Main Street. The committee should also consider organizing its own training or orientation session, perhaps once or twice a year, for new volunteers. Purchase from the NMSC or borrow from MSOC the *Economic Restructuring Committee Handbook*, which provides information and how-to advice on completing a work plan and the typical types of committee activities.

- Finish a work plan that outlines committee projects for the coming year. The work plan should say who will be responsible for which project, how much will each one cost, and when will it be completed. A thorough work plan will also determine the number of volunteers needed to be recruited.
- Work towards finishing the survey components of the market analysis and begin to interpret and compare the results with those of the trade area analysis. Both sets of information should begin to provide reasonable profiles of demographic groups, whether they're shopping in downtown or not, and comprehensive information on the current downtown retail business base. The business survey should also determine what business might be good expansion candidates.

Though the survey component of the market analysis is on the way to being completed in the coming year, the committee needs to start looking at planning to complete the other necessary components including the following:

- a A **shopper-intercept survey** is helpful in determining the attitudes and opinions of people who are already shopping in downtown Ferndale. The telephone survey may or may not be capturing people who are shopping downtown.
  - b A **demographic analysis** can help Ferndale determine the consumer groups that are shopping in downtown and what new consumer groups could be attracted with new stores and merchandise.
  - c A **cluster plan analysis** identifies where the business clusters and vacancies are located within downtown. This analysis, which is already in the committee's work plan, helps to show where new as well as old businesses can be ideally be located to take advantage of existing clusters.
- Once completed, publish and distribute relevant excerpts of market analysis data in DDA newsletters or other information pieces to retailers, property owners and other citizens. This will allow stakeholders to understand consumer groups and other target markets and see if there are additional markets to capture. Hold quarterly or semi-annual meetings with retailers to discuss the data.
  - After the entire market analysis is completed, the next priority for the economic restructuring committee is to use the results to craft realistic business recruitment and retention strategies. To be able to interpret the market analysis results and to develop the strategies, request a technical assistance service from MSOC and the NMSC.

- Since the vacancy rate is relatively low and the quality and diversity of emerging business clusters continues to improve, the committee should focus on business retention activities more than recruitment in the coming year. This recommendation reflects the one made in the *Resource Team Report (reference page)* in which the Ferndale community stands to gain more in maintaining its unique business clusters by helping them grow and prosper rather than spending more resources on recruitment. Retention is by far the best and most efficient form of Main Street business development. In that light the committee should focus its energies in the coming year on the following:
  - a) Follow-through on organizing a series of business development workshops focusing on topics such as merchandising and inventory control. Conduct the workshops once or twice a year.
  - b) Ask downtown merchants, through the business or separate survey, what kinds of business assistance and training topics would be best delivered.
  - c) In addition to the workshops, offer retailers an opportunity to receive in-store technical assistance from consultants or other outside professionals specializing in one or several aspects of retail business operations. Offer the in-store assistance in conjunction with the workshops.
  - d) Develop a strong relationship with the Oakland County Small Business Development Center, which can provide the resources to conduct business development workshops and one-on-one consultations with the retail businesses.
  - e) Implement both the proposed mentoring program and the small business development tour offered by National City Bank but be cognizant that not all downtown businesses will participate in them the first time around. Ensure that if both programs are being used to help businesses become more competitive that they use the results of the market analysis to help the business best reposition themselves.
  - f) Focus particular attention on businesses that are known expansion candidates. Work with these candidates on locating potential new space and finding the financing necessary to make the expansion occur.
- Once the committee has enough volunteer resources and has identified a concrete set of business recruitment strategies, then it can concentrate on recruitment activities. Form a recruitment team from the parent committee that will work closely with the DDA executive director on scouting and contacting new business prospects. Selling the prospects on the benefits of locating downtown would be the responsibility of both the team and the executive director.
- Produce a high quality business recruitment package to include a variety of information such as demographics, building and retail space profiles, concise market analysis information,

promotional events and other relevant data and information. Use this as a tool to solicit a particular business prospect during the recruitment process.

- Conduct passive recruitment activities by making the business recruitment package and other information, such as financial assistance and market analysis data, available to those prospects that call or walk-in.
- Consider developing a sister incentive program to the design committee's façade grants that would focus on providing funding for new interior building improvements or perhaps small grants for the first inventory purchase. While some communities may see these types of grants as unnecessary, a growing number of cities and villages are developing such programs as an added incentive to recruiting new retail businesses.

## **Conclusion**

The Ferndale Downtown Development Authority has made excellent strides in establishing its Main Street program since its acceptance into Main Street Oakland County. Board leaders are enthusiastic and have committed to effectively implementing the Main Street Four-Point Approach. The Executive Director is doing an outstanding job. Furthermore, committees have been formed, work plans have been developed and actual results are happening. There is no doubt that considerable work has been accomplished this past year.

However, much of the real effort remains ahead in order to go to the next level of implementation. With new work plans to be developed and a new DDA budget to be adopted soon, Ferndale DDA can look forward to even more substantial downtown revitalization projects and activities in the coming years. The Ferndale DDA has made the full transition between a public improvements funding program to one that comprehensively manages the downtown for the benefit of the community.