

**Imagine Downtown Akron 2025**  
**Economic Development / Cultural Facilities Work Group**  
**Final Report – February 28, 2005**

**Priority - The Urban Plan (Master Plan)**

All work on the Cultural Facilities group always reverts back to the need for an Urban Plan that dictates the direction that Economic and Cultural development will take. It is important for the city to develop a plan for downtown as a whole, and to clearly communicate that plan to developers and entrepreneurs in downtown and the general public. A strong overall vision or action plan for downtown would give developers confidence that individual projects will add up to a more viable future for downtown Akron as a whole.

**Action Plan:**

- Develop a conceptual plan for Downtown Akron
  - Refocus on the Urban Land Institute (ULI) analysis and report as a guide. Most of the work has been done.
  - Formalize the “Active Areas of Development” for housing and new business
    - Map out housing development works in progress
    - Conceptually map out other downtown areas for potential development opportunities
    - Make this information available to retailers/businesses/developers whose businesses can support these areas.
    - The City of Akron must be prepared to step up to the plate and provide financial support for installing the infrastructure needed for site development, improve the public spaces and develop the required parking facilities.
  - Cultural Facilities
    - Keys to the long term success of downtown cultural facilities:
      - Critical Mass – high concentration of people that live and/or work downtown
      - Job Retention and Creation
      - Housing
      - Strong School System
    - Entertainment District
      - Most facilities are in place including Theaters, Parks (Towpath, Greenspace at L3L), Restaurants, Bars, Art District (Art Museum, Art Space)
      - Add facilities to create a day and night atmosphere (i.e. Family friendly events and areas as well as Night Life for adults):
        - Arts Incubator: to be built in Art District (Keep the Art District centered at Art Museum: Utilize space at ArtSpace for Incubator)
        - IMAX Theater and/or Movie House
        - Aquarium
        - Children’s Interactive Facility/Adventure Playground

- Arena/Sports Complex
- Keep the Urban Plan Alive
  - Appoint a Private Sector Advocate to facilitate the Urban Plan
    - This person would interface with the city, Akron Chamber of Commerce, Akron Tomorrow, Downtown Akron Partnership, and other institutions to gather and disperse information about development in Downtown Akron
  - Appoint a City of Akron “Point Person” in the development or planning department to work together with the private sector advocate, developers and entrepreneurs in developing future downtown projects.
  - Bring collective energies together:
    - We need downtown CEO’s and other decision makers to provide feedback, support, and financial assistance. Cultivate relationships -
      - Downtown Corporations
      - Akron Public Schools
      - The University of Akron
      - Akron area hospitals
      - Summit County
      - Akron Area Foundations
  - Engage the support of Akron Tomorrow
  - Engage the support of Akron Chamber of Commerce
    - The support of these organizations is instrumental to the success of the Downtown Development.
    - If Akron Tomorrow cannot provide direct or indirect financial assistance to fund the “Private Sector Advocate”, we need to rely on the Chamber of Commerce to direct the interaction with the city and the private sector.
- Both positions (Private Sector Advocate / City Point Person) must be identified and appointed by 12/31/05.

**Priority - Lock 3 Block Development (Entertainment District)**

- Lock 3 Block is the “heart” of everything going on Downtown. This area is the driving force to the success of changes to Downtown and will draw the “Critical Mass” that will change Downtown Akron

**Action Plan:**

- Currently a Work in Progress – ensure the following:
  - Support New Housing Development in the Lock 3 Block
    - This is the ideal location for new housing where “Quality of Life” venues are already in place
    - Add “support” business as outlined in Urban Plan (drug store, dry cleaning, coffee shops, and specialized markets/groceries).
- Make this highest priority – incorporate the ideas, priorities, action plan and timeline identified in the Urban Plan to continue the proposed development of this block.
  - This area brings North and South Main Street together
  - This area is in walking distance from the proposed Art District

- Adding some family friendly venues keeps the Entertainment District *vibrant* both day and night.

#### **Priority - The University of Akron**

- Include The University of Akron in Urban Plan
- The Urban Land Institute's report identified the university as the city's greatest "underutilized asset" for the rejuvenation of downtown.
  - Actively seek out what the university's plans are:
    - South and East vs. Downtown
    - Arena – a downtown arena could be a tremendous asset that would dramatically transform the downtown "bar district" into an attractive, distinctly urban commercial area serving the campus.
- The benefits of downtown to the university may not be as obvious initially, but they are no less important. As the quality of downtown improves, the school's attractiveness to faculty and students also improves
- If downtown expansion is not a priority for the University then foster a relationship where we "Integrate" the University with Main Street.
  - Foster PR w/ Student Body to include entertainment district/recreational opportunities
  - Recruit New Graduates/ Graduate Students to new housing being planned for Lock 3 Block.

#### **Action Plan, Timeline and Resource Needs:**

- **All three priorities identified are intertwined to such a degree that they all require the same or similar action plan, timeline and resource needs.**
  - **Action Plan - Identify, Appoint/Hire a "Private Sector Advocate" and a City of Akron "Point Person" to be the driving forces in successfully establishing a plan and process to accomplish the goals outlined in the Urban Plan.**
  - **Timeline - The positions must be in place by the end of this calendar year (12/31/05) – The plan and process would be developed and in place during the 2006 calendar year.**
  - **Resource Needs / Future Committee Support – Once the City of Akron, Akron Chamber/Akron Tomorrow succeed in identifying strong candidates for the positions suggested the plan will be driven by these two individuals. The individuals must be "proactive" versus "reactive" and forge ahead to accomplish the long term goals established in the overall Downtown Akron 2025 Project.**

**We have come to the conclusion that Akron has the bigger chance to make an impact in Northeast Ohio than Cleveland or any other surrounding municipality. The opportunities are there – we need to take advantage of those opportunities, continue to be proactive, not reactive, and move forward with the ideas and action plans put in place by the Downtown Akron 2025 Project.**