

Master Plan for the Liberty District



Master Plan for the Liberty District



Prepared for
Columbus Georgia
Consolidated Government

At the risk of slighting others who were involved and gave freely of their time and talents and without whose efforts the Master Plan for the Liberty District would have been less successful, the following is presented as a partial list of those who materially contributed to this project:

- Hon. Sanford Bishop
- Hon. Calvin Smyre
- Hon. Carolyn Hugley

All participating Stakeholders, with special credit to:

- Pastors of Liberty District Churches
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Columbus Housing Authority
- Muscogee County School District
- Historic Columbus
- Lower Chattahoochee RDC

Interested citizens who gave freely of their time to participate in the development of this Liberty District Master Plan

Local elected officials and staff, including:

- Robert "Bob" Poydasheff, Mayor
- Evelyn Turner-Pugh, Councilor
- Nathan Suber, Councilor
- Evelyn "Mimi" Woodson, Councilor
- Carmen Cavezza, City Manager
- Richard Bishop, Deputy City Manager
- Isaiah Hugley, Deputy City Manager
- Lynnette Gross, Community Reinvestment
- Will Johnson, Planning

For more information about the Liberty District and this Master Plan:

www.columbusga.org

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
GOALS FOR THE DISTRICT	1
THE PLANNING PROCESS	2
OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CONDITIONS	3
Decline of the District (1984-2003)	3
Historic Resources and Districts	3
Land Use: 2003	4
Zoning: 2003	4
Vehicular Access and Traffic	5
Flood Hazard Areas	5
II. BUILDING A STRATEGIC CONCEPT	7
ASSETS	7
LIABILITIES	7
VISIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES	8
STRATEGIC CONCEPT	8
Actions Essential to the Strategic Concept	9
REDEVELOPMENT POLICIES	11
General	11
Community Character	11
Liberty Center	12
Commercial Areas	12
Housing	12
Pedestrians and Environment	13
Transportation and Parking	13
Parks and Open Space	13
Gateways to the District	13

III. PHYSICAL PLAN FOR REDEVELOPMENT	15
OPEN SPACE	15
LAND USE	17
Commerce and Entertainment	17
Public and Institutional Uses	17
Residential Redevelopment	18
Industrial Uses	19
ACCESSIBILITY	20
Streetscapes	20
Pedestrian Circulation	21
Parking	22
IV. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	23
RESPONSIBILITIES AND EARLY ACTIONS	23
Public Sector	23
Private Sector	24
PRIORITIES AND SEQUENCING OPTIONS	25
ZONING	26
DESIGN STANDARDS	26
General Standards	27
Buildings and Spaces	27
Housing	28
Commerce	28
Landscape and Planting	28
Parking Lots	29
Lighting and Utilities	29
Street Environments	29
MARKETING STRATEGIES	30
V. CONCLUSION	33

**Master Plan
for the
Liberty District**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Liberty District has declined significantly over the past several decades, and the Columbus Consolidated Government determined the time was right to engage in an “opportunity-based” process to plan for appropriate public/private redevelopment. Local leaders intend to preserve, protect, redevelop and enhance the historic Liberty District as a significant commercial/ business center, a place of government support services and a cultural and entertainment center that serves not only as a destination for tourists, but also as a major congregation center for local people—an enjoyable place to meet others, to celebrate and to participate in special events

GOALS FOR THE DISTRICT

The Liberty District is a very diverse place with a variety of stakeholders. In anticipation of their needs and ideas, the Columbus Consolidated Government outlined the following goals at the outset of the planning process, committing itself to returning the District to the status of a fully involved and productive part of the community:

Overall

- Restore and maintain the viability of the area
- Promote a sense of identity, pride and confidence
- Provide a safe, livable and desirable neighborhood
- Provide incentives for reinvestment and rehabilitation
- Rezone designated areas for appropriate, planned uses
- Encourage private-market reinvestment and adaptive use

Residential

- Conserve existing standard housing
- Promote affordable, standard-quality housing
- Provide areas for new residential development
- Demolish substandard units and blighting influences

Commercial and Industrial

- Provide convenient neighborhood shopping to support residential uses
- Encourage retail and office development, retention, expansion and recruitment
- Retain employment in local industries

Accessibility

- Improve and maintain public road facilities
- Develop pedestrian and vehicular movement systems
- Provide adequate public transit service through the area

Culture and Entertainment

- Promote entertainment, the arts and cultural activities

Preservation

- Preserve structures having historical, architectural and cultural significance
- Support Liberty Theater, Ma Rainey House and Spencer House conservation

Recreation/Green Space

- Provide adequate open space and recreational opportunities to area residents
- Develop and maintain a variety of recreational and green space areas

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Local people came together in a year-long redevelopment planning process, during which they shared their ideas and values with each other. It began with an inventory of local conditions—everything from flooding conditions to historic resources, from land use to zoning, the condition of housing and commercial buildings to the presence of heavy industry and railroad yards and tracks and a historic slave cemetery. With basic inventory and maps of existing conditions in place, city officials, local residents and property owners and other interested people came together in series of planning workshops to share their ideas about the District with one another and with the consultants.

The first workshop took the form of a “town meeting,” in which the participants analyzed and evaluated the District and its resources—its assets and liabilities, their own personal visions for its future, the opportunities they perceived and constraints that may have to be overcome. The results of that workshop led to a Strategic concept—an overview of critical resources of the District and ways these could be used as the backbone to engage, support and shape its redevelopment.

The second workshop was devoted to a serious review and critique of the Strategic Development Concept and the ways it could be transformed and fleshed out into a Master Plan. These ideas were used to modify and enlarge the Strategic Concept into a draft of the Master Plan for redevelopment.

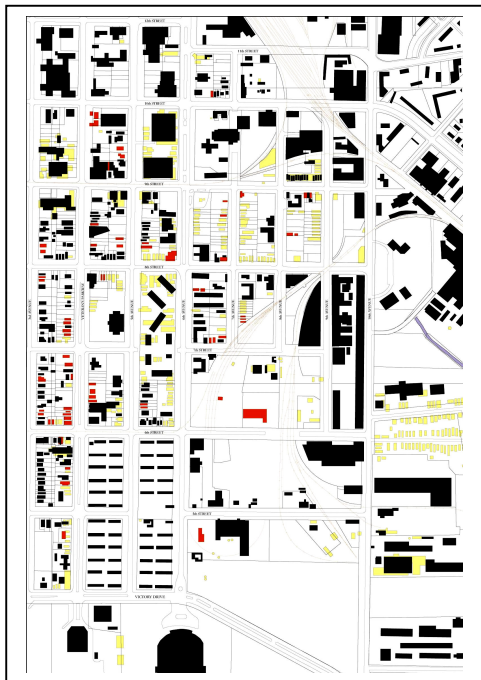
The draft redevelopment plan was reviewed at a third workshop, during which representatives of the housing authority and many of the churches joined others to offer thoughtful suggestions for improving the plan and to assure that plan implementation

concepts were sound. Following that workshop, the consultants, city officials and representatives of the housing authority considered the powers and capabilities of the public and private sectors and tested a number of implementation options and scenarios. The resulting plan is presented in the following pages.

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

To many local people, the Liberty Theater and its immediate surroundings *is* the Liberty District. However, the District is far more than its core attraction. It serves as a “bridge,” connecting the oldest historic residential District of Columbus, located just east of downtown, and the extensive railroad yards and industrial District at the base of the hills further east.

The Liberty District is home to a wide variety of buildings, places and activities besides the famous Liberty Theater. These include successful local industries such as Tom’s Foods, important historic structures, including the Ma Rainey House and six major churches, extensive salvage operations, active rail lines and extensions of the rail yards, state and local government offices including the labor department, a municipal annex, library, public safety operations building and jail, and the Columbus Housing Authority’s Booker T. Washington (BTW) apartment complex.



Decline of the District (1984-2003)

The District has declined in its condition over the past twenty years, and buildings have been demolished as they reached a state of dilapidation. The structures shown in black were present at the beginning of 2003. The additional structures illustrated in red were demolished after 1995 and those shown in yellow were torn down between 1984 and 1995. This is simply one physical indicator of the deterioration that has taken place over the decades. Except for a few single-family detached houses and isolated businesses, much of what remains standing today is owned and maintained by a public agency, a church or another non-profit institution.

Historic Resources and Districts

The recently created historic Districts demonstrate a simple reality of the Liberty District: the response to the continuing loss of historic resources was too little and far too late. Most of the parcels within the

historic District boundaries are vacant, and the dominant pattern is one that cannot be seen or appreciated on the ground—that is, the mix of residential lots of varying widths on most blocks.

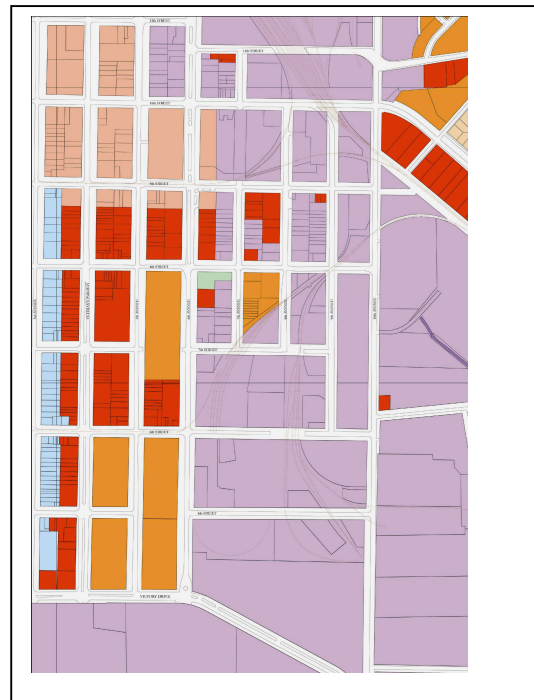
Land Use: 2003

The uses of the structures present at the beginning of the planning process are shown at right in standard land use and zoning map colors: yellows and oranges for housing, red for commercial, blues for government and institutional uses, green for parks and purple for industry. The map illustrates a very strong pattern that reflects the history of the District and its traditional function as a transition area between industrial uses adjacent to the rail yards on the east and commerce and housing to the west. The District's traditional commercial and entertainment heart was located in the north central portion of the District, while housing was mostly located to the south and west.



Zoning: 2003

The pattern of zoning Districts shown to the right is very different from that of current land uses—and very different from what local people expect the Liberty District to become. Except for the edge of the Columbus Historic District (located to the west of the commercial uses that front the west side of Veterans Parkway), colors on the zoning map reflect the same uses as shown on the land use map above. This demonstrates that the pattern of the present zoning encourages displacement of the current patterns of land use. It permits industrial uses to the south and east, a relatively small area of housing mostly toward the southwest, and would allow commercial uses (for which there is little demonstrated demand) to take over several additional blocks. This reflects an outmoded concept of the District (especially considering the movement of industrial activities away from older, heavier industrial sites) and its surroundings and of the ways in which the District



should be used and developed.

Vehicular Access and Traffic

The District is blessed with a practically complete network of streets, interrupted (mostly in the southeast) by the railroads, industrial activities and cemetery. Traffic counts indicate what most everyone knows intuitively: Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway are the major arterial streets that carry most of the traffic. Tenth Avenue is a significant north-south route, especially for industrial and employment traffic. Most of this network consists of local streets that have relatively low traffic counts that reflect the District's high percentage of vacant property.



Flood Hazard Areas

One of the major conditions contributing significantly to the conditions of the Liberty District is the hazard to property from flooding. The map to the left depicts the extent of the so-called 100-year and 500-year floods in the area. District redevelopment will depend greatly on a solution to this serious constraint.



II. BUILDING A STRATEGIC CONCEPT

To kick off the public planning process, the consultants joined local officials in bringing together leaders who have been active over the years in supporting the Liberty District and its various notable historic resources, including church leaders and representatives of the housing authority. As noted in the introductory chapter, the participants were asked to analyze and evaluate the District and its resources—its assets and liabilities, their visions for its future, the opportunities they perceived and the constraints that may have to be overcome in order to bring about their collective vision for the Liberty District.

ASSETS

The participants defined the following as *assets*—places, buildings and conditions that define the District in a positive way—those that are up to local standards:

- Liberty Theatre
- Area Churches:
 - Friendship
 - First African
 - St. James
 - Holsey Chapel
 - Mt. Sinai
 - Greater Beulah
- Ma Rainey House
- Liberty Gardens
- Mildred Terry Library
- Funeral homes:
 - Huff
 - Sconiers
 - Kimbrough
- BTW Housing
- Porter Social Club
- Cemeteries:
 - Porterdale
 - Old Slave
- Masonic Lodges:
 - Modern Free
 - Prince
- Top Hat Restaurant
- Pierce Medical Building
- Royal Café
- Sconiers Building
- Spencer House
- Stockade
- Farley Realty

LIABILITIES

The participants shared that the following places, buildings and conditions define the District in a negative way—they are not up to local standards:

- Flooding
- Housing
- Economic base
- Lack of retail (ex. drugstore, grocery)
- Zoning
- Parking
- Sidewalks
- Structures
- Signage
- Landscaping and streetscape
- Salvage yard
- Railroad
- Lummus Building
- Sense of community
- Veterans Parkway gateway quality

VISIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Participants shared their own visions for the Liberty District by thinking ahead—perhaps ten or more years—to when the redevelopment process would be well underway, envisioning conditions at that time, then listing characteristics of that vision presently missing from the Liberty District. As the participants shared with one another their own sense of what is missing from the collective vision for the District, they were asked also to recast those ideas into a list of the opportunities there may be within the redevelopment process to bring those missing pieces into the Liberty District. The following is a combination of those ideas:

- More people
- Optimizing the Liberty Theatre
- Security
- All incomes, races and ages
- Basic services
- Performing Arts Center and High School
- Additional venue for CSU Performance
- Exterior lighting
- Quality sidewalk environment
- Sustainable activity / vitality
- Lively arts District
- Village green
- Historic trail
- Family entertainment
- Post Office
- Mixed housing types and income
- Entertainment – Night Club and Restaurants
- Grocery stores
- Mixed retail businesses
- Increased public investment
- Attracting visitors and retail development
- Positive impact on BTW residents

STRATEGIC CONCEPT

The results of the public planning workshop led to preparation of a Strategic Concept for redeveloping the District. That concept provides an overview of the ways in which the Liberty District will build on the heart and structure of the neighborhood as it engages, supports and shapes its own future.

The Strategic Concept updates the historic pattern of development that emerged and continued over several decades in the early part of the last century. The District's traditional commercial and entertainment heart was located in the north central portion of the District, while housing was mostly located to the south and west. The Strategic Concept strengthens that pattern with a complementary mix of uses supporting the Liberty Theater and a variety of housing types and densities, and augments the quality of life with a public realm that links a series of parks and open spaces to the potential for an active community street life.

Actions Essential to the Strategic Concept

- Maintain the Liberty Theater as the heart of the District
- Develop Liberty Center surrounding Liberty Theater as a mixed-use commercial, civic, entertainment and residential anchor
- Restore and enhance the commercial core of the District centered on the intersection of Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue
- Encourage development of a community and recreation center on the historic Spencer High School site
- Enhance Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue with major streetscape improvements as the primary access corridors of the District, intersecting at the center of the commercial core
- Improve several key gateways to the District as part of an overall wayfinding system
- Redevelop the north side of Victory Drive, focused on serving community commercial needs with live/work commercial and housing units as appropriate
- Redevelop both sides of Veterans Parkway as a commercial seam, focused on knitting together and serving the local commercial needs of the Liberty and Historic Districts with live/work commercial and housing units as appropriate
- Redevelop the Housing Authority's BTW property for residential and mixed uses to include the Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway corridors as noted above
- Provide parking to support commerce, Liberty Center and the churches
- Restore the street network by reopening Fifth and Seventh Streets between Fifth and Sixth Avenues and opening Seventh Avenue between Fifth and Seventh Streets
- Develop a landscaped sidewalk and pedestrian pathway system
- Organize new housing to face the streets in a traditional manner to focus many eyes on the streets and the activities in them
- Convert the site of the historic Slave Cemetery to an appropriate Village Green
- Separate industrial uses from single-family detached residential development through the use of landscaped greenway buffers
- Improve the intersection of Victory Drive at Tenth Avenue with a traffic signal to avoid the routing of trucks through the District via Sixth Avenue

The Strategic Concept, as illustrated on the next page, shows the heart of the District is and should remain the Liberty Theater, expanded to become Liberty Center. The theater is the most important remaining historic structure in the District, and a renewed sense of community will emerge from enhancing its position as the heart of a revitalized, mixed-use neighborhood.



To support revitalization of the District's heart, redevelopment must first help create a neighborhood. That will require improving the overall quality of life in the District by investing in revitalized streets and public spaces to serve as a support system for a renewed, healthy housing stock.

To build the perception of quality, residential development should be returned to the types that will focus more eyes on the street. This may be accomplished through infilling of vacant areas and converting incompatible development to traditional, street-front mixed housing. At the same time, residential quality of life includes accessibility to commerce, services, open space and recreation. The Strategic Concept returns all of these essential aspects of a neighborhood to the District.

Implementing this strategy and its details as outlined in later chapters will require attracting diversified investment through creation and support of public-private partnerships. Nevertheless, several significant constraints also must be overcome to bring about the District envisioned by participants in the planning process. These include: the inertia of absentee ownership; hazards to life and property posed by flooding problems; reducing a large number of abandoned and little-used railroad tracks crossing the District; correcting the misperception on the part of many people in the community that the Liberty District is *For Blacks Only* rather than a place for everyone; and modifying the present Zoning Ordinance and map, both of which are incompatible with the vision of a viable District.

REDEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Redevelopment will take place over a significant period, meaning there may be need to modify certain aspects of the Strategic Concept—and details of the physical plan for redevelopment—to account for changing circumstances and values, and perhaps to take advantage of opportunities not foreseen during the planning process. For that reason, the following policies are provided as a general guidance system to continuing redevelopment.

General

- Provide a physical framework that retains and strengthens the District's economic and cultural health and makes provision for reasonable future growth
- Preserve and augment the visual mixture, diversity and interest of the District while retaining the traditional character of historic structures through preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive use
- Strive for a high percentage of residential owner occupancy
- Provide and maintain a quality environment to attract and retain office and retail establishments, including especially smaller independent business

Community Character

- Plant and maintain trees along all District streets and walks

-
- Preserve, in general, the existing building height patterns of one and two stories; identify limited opportunities for higher buildings as architectural accents
 - Relocate historic and older, interesting buildings, if they need to be moved, for rehabilitation and reuse in a compatible environment

Liberty Center

- Focus redevelopment continually on the Liberty Theater as the core of the District
- Provide cultural, residential, commercial, recreational and entertainment facilities at Liberty Center as a focal point of the District
- Develop the Liberty Theater and the block to the east across Eighth Avenue as Liberty Center, a mixed-use area of loft housing, commerce and entertainment focused on an urban space open to the community
- Design and construct all structures in Liberty Center to be no taller than the Liberty Theater
- Design both ends of the Eighth Avenue block in front of the Liberty Theater to be closed temporarily to accommodate special events and theater overflow

Commercial Areas

- Promote mixed uses in the commercial core area, reserving the first floor for retail and dining and upper levels for housing, offices and galleries
- Eliminate surface parking between the fronts of buildings and the street edge, moving this function into the center of the block behind buildings insofar as possible to allow infill of commercial and mixed use functions that extend to the back of the sidewalk
- Encourage development of commercial uses on the fronts, and housing on the upper stories over parking structures

Housing

- Provide a mix of housing types and styles, with densities decreasing from north to south and from west to east across the District, to include loft housing in live/work units along Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway
- Encourage and enable residential uses throughout the District in upper stories of commercial buildings in Liberty Center, the Core Commercial Area, and the commercial corridors of Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway
- Redevelop residential properties facing wide streets in such a way as to focus eyes on the street and to help overcome the perception of excessive width (and the tendency to speed on such streets)
- Phase residential development in a manner that population growth may attract appropriate business investment to the commercial core centered on the Eighth Street/Sixth Avenue intersection

Pedestrians and Environment

- Give pedestrians priority and encourage walking by making the District a varied and exciting place to be
- Treat streets and pedestrian ways as important components of the public realm
- Improve existing streets by providing trees, benches and other street furniture, pedestrian-scale lighting and improved sidewalks (street sidewalks will remain the primary pedestrian routes)
- Maintain and enhance safety from crime by designing improvements with appropriate lighting, visibility and access

Transportation and Parking

- Enhance the existing street pattern by opening selected streets to improve vehicular and pedestrian character and circulation
- Provide facilities to encourage and enhance the use of bicycles through connection to the citywide bicycle trail system
- Coordinate all off-street Liberty Center, commercial, shared and mixed use development parking as a public or cooperative enterprise
- Provide parking structures at strategic points within easy walking distance of major activity areas
- Locate all off-street, surface parking to the interiors of blocks and away from intersections

Parks and Open Space

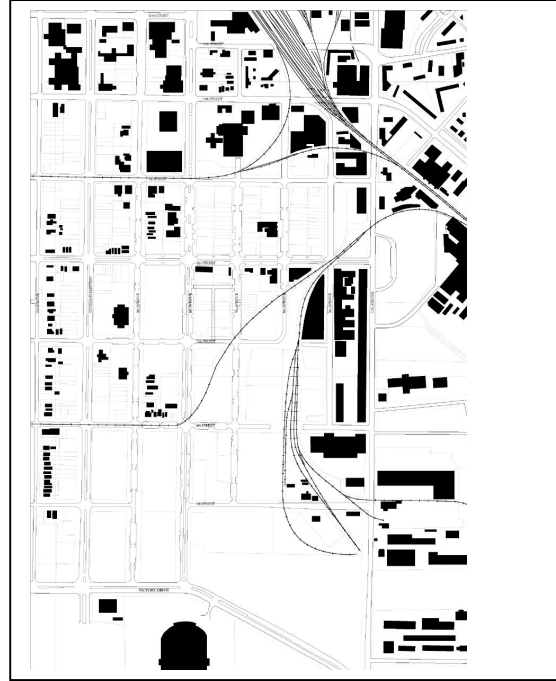
- Enhance the area around the old slave cemetery site, providing a village green or passive park area that commemorates its historic use
- Treat sidewalks and other pedestrian paths as urban parks

Gateways to the District

- Provide a wayfinding system that includes appropriate signage to direct visitors to the Liberty District and Uptown, especially from Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway
- Encourage commercial intensification on Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway with a mix of housing and commercial facilities
- Accent the entries and gateways to the District

As a final note regarding the Strategic Concept, the consensus of the workshop was that several assets of the District should be conserved. These include the Liberty Theater, the Ma Rainey and Spencer Houses and all other significant historic structures, all six of the historic churches, the Mildred Terry Library and also such local commercial landmarks as the Top Hat and Royal Cafes.

The map to the right indicates these and other existing structures that are planned to remain.



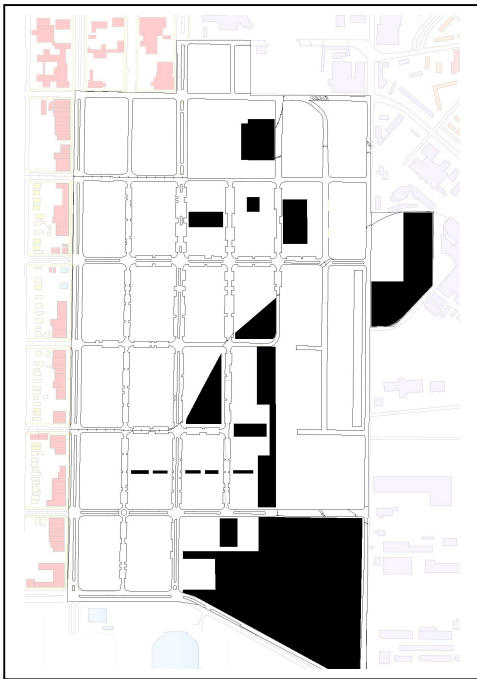
III. PHYSICAL PLAN FOR REDEVELOPMENT

Redevelopment of the Liberty District will be a complex undertaking and will take many years to complete. Thus, some of the proposed improvements may be taken rather literally (the public streetscape investments, for example) and other aspects (such as the widths of residential lots and the footprints of commercial buildings) are meant as suggestions to individual property owners, the redevelopment authority and the housing authority. The intention is to provide a formal vision for the Liberty District that will advance the values, ideals and convictions expressed by local leaders, public officials and others who participated in the series of planning workshops and review meetings that guided this planning process.

The Physical Plan for Redevelopment, illustrated on the next page, is organized through the use of three major systems: open space, land use and accessibility.

OPEN SPACE

Open space and recreation areas are important parts of the public realm, and so a recurring theme of the Master Plan is to provide appropriate public spaces in which to come together as a community. Open space is an integral part of the Physical Plan for Redevelopment. It is used in several ways: to organize and separate the uses of land; to provide view corridors and lend identity to the various areas of the District; to allow and encourage pedestrian accessibility and movement; and to provide space for active and passive recreation activities.



Several small passive and active parks are scattered around and adjacent to the residential areas of the District. There are also two larger open spaces in blocks where existing railroad tracks will be removed, one of which is the historic site of a former slave cemetery. There is a significant amount of more formal open space recommended in and around the Liberty Center as a part of that mixed-use commercial, entertainment and residential development.

Also proposed is redevelopment of a portion of the Lummus property and the former school at the east end of Eighth Street as a community and recreation center.

LAND USE

Planned land uses in the District include residential, institutional, retail, office, and entertainment. All of these are intended to be integrated with one another and fully accessible by motorists and pedestrians. They are organized into a pattern in accord with five major premises:

- Existing public and private institutions and facilities will remain, as will all the critical resources noted earlier as suggested by planning workshop participants, and the industrial eastern edge of the District
- Liberty Center, a mixed-used living/working/entertainment on two blocks at and adjacent to the Liberty Theater, will be the symbolic heart of the District
- The mixed-use commercial core of the District, centered on the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street, will focus on providing daily local retail and services needs and will feature loft housing above the commercial spaces
- Residential densities will be highest at and adjacent to Liberty Center and the commercial core, while to the south of the core housing densities will be highest facing Fifth and Sixth Avenues and will decrease toward the east
- Commercial uses to meet community retail and services needs, with potential housing above, are located along Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway, the latter serving as a seam to bind together the Liberty and Columbus Historic Districts



Commerce and Entertainment

Liberty Center, with a variety of entertainment and a mix of commercial and residential uses, focused on the Liberty Theater, forms the heart of the district. Local commercial uses provide an east-west corridor to link Liberty Center with Veterans Parkway and Uptown along Eighth Street, and serve local trade at the extreme north end of the District.

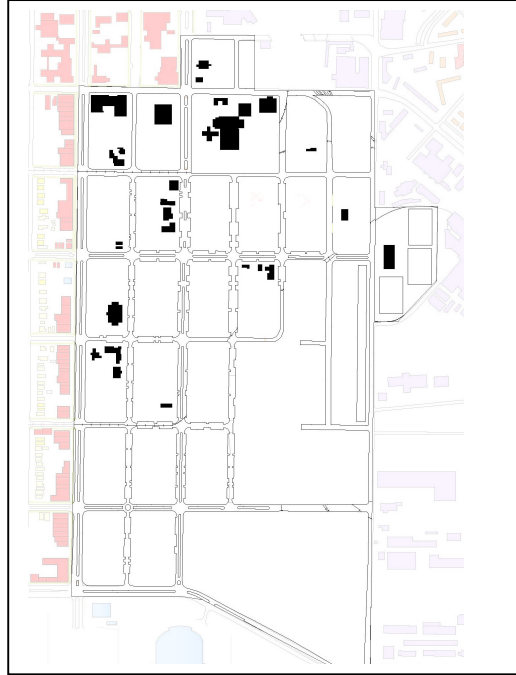
Veterans Parkway is upgraded to form a combination neighborhood/community scale retail and service corridor. The north end forms the easterly edge of Uptown, while to the south this corridor provides an appropriate link between Uptown and the city's major civic activities located adjacent to the intersection of the Parkway with Victory Drive

Public and Institutional Uses

The Liberty District's significant existing public and institutional uses all remain. These include the six historic churches, fraternal organizations, state and city administration, library and justice facilities.

Two additions proposed are a community center at the east end of Eighth Street and a small welcome and public information facility on the east side of Liberty Center.

It should be noted that the churches are an important, stabilizing force in the District, and thus encouraged and supported, and not precluded from expanding. Nevertheless, such expansion should be in accord with the other physical plans for the District. This is especially the case with parking, which should be developed and used on a shared basis with commercial and Liberty Center uses.



Residential Redevelopment

Housing is organized into single-family detached and attached units—mostly to the south and west—multi-family apartments to the immediate west of Liberty Center, and the potential for a significant number of live/work units above commercial uses in Liberty Center, the Commercial Core and much of the frontage along Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway.

The planned variety of housing types and locations will provide opportunities to develop up to 515 new dwelling units of several types and sizes. This will allow for a mix of household types, resident ages and income levels to live in new housing in the District. It should be noted that the lot lines shown on the physical plan map on page 16 are for illustrative purposes only.

The detail below illustrates a portion of the



blocks between Sixth Avenue to the edge of the industrial area, centered on the mid-block pedestrian walkway between First and Sixth Streets. Note the following typical characteristics:

- To the left are single-family attached units (townhouses or row houses) facing Sixth Street, each with front and rear yards and detached alley-access garages
- Housing density changes at the alley, allowing the detached garages to face one another and provide a service area between
- Facing one another across Seventh Avenue are single-family detached units, each with front and rear yards and detached garages
- Access to the garages on the east is also via an alley system adjoining a landscaped buffer that includes a portion of the pedestrian walkway system



Industrial Uses

Primary employment is essential to the health of Columbus and to the Liberty District. A significant portion of the District is presently utilized for industrial purposes—mostly Tom's Foods. This industrial operation, and others located in the northeasterly corner of the District, should remain through the life of the redevelopment process. In contrast, the scrap yards presently located in south central part of the District are not compatible with its long-term redevelopment as a viable neighborhood. Such industries that are located to the west of the railroad tracks as shown on the Physical Plan for Redevelopment should be purchased, cleaned to residential standards and redeveloped in accord with the plan.

ACCESSIBILITY

The accessibility system is a complete network of through streets, sidewalks, trails and alleys, all fully interconnected. For wayfinding purposes it is organized around two major axes, Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street, which have planted medians.

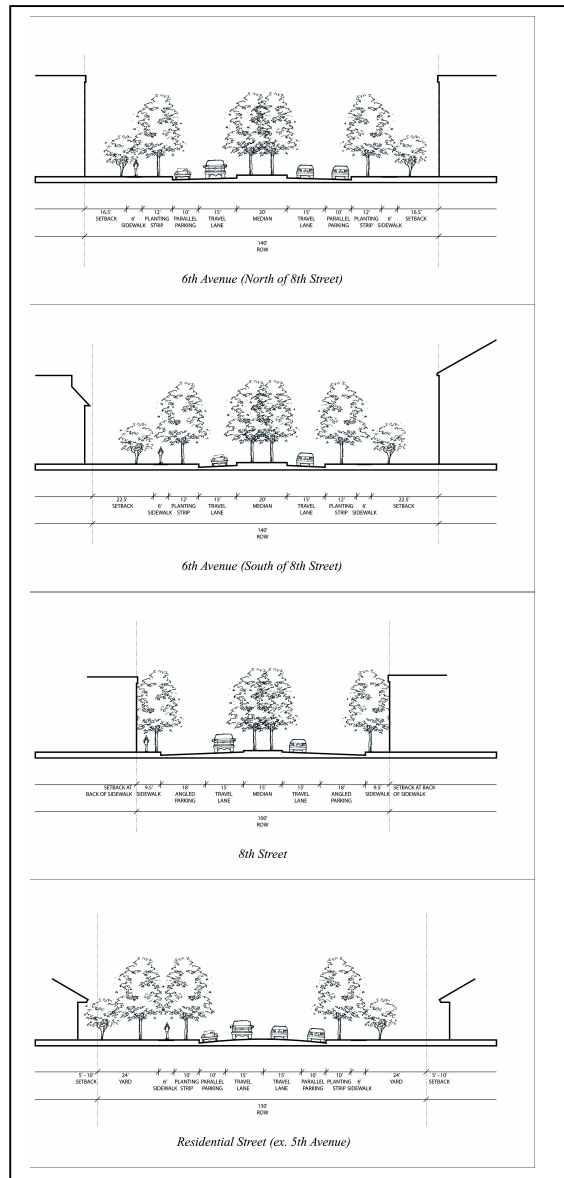
Streetscapes

The largest element of the public realm in the Liberty District is the street network. The image of the street and sidewalk sets the tone for development of private property that is dependent for access upon the public street system. Thus improvement to the image of all streets in the District is critical.

All streets in the District should be among the best in urban Columbus. They should include not only good driving surfaces appropriate to the type and speed of traffic, but also sidewalks, pedestrian-scale lighting and landscaped edges (and medians in the case of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street).

The accompanying sections provide four samples of recommended standards to be followed for District streetscape improvements. Each demonstrates ways in which the generous width of these streets may be redesigned to provide a more intimate, pedestrian-friendly walking and driving experience, especially in relation to the types of development typical to each.

The top two depict Sixth Avenue to the north and south, respectively, of Eighth Street, and the third illustrates the commercial corridor of Eighth Street. Each of these streets is planned for various combinations of commercial,

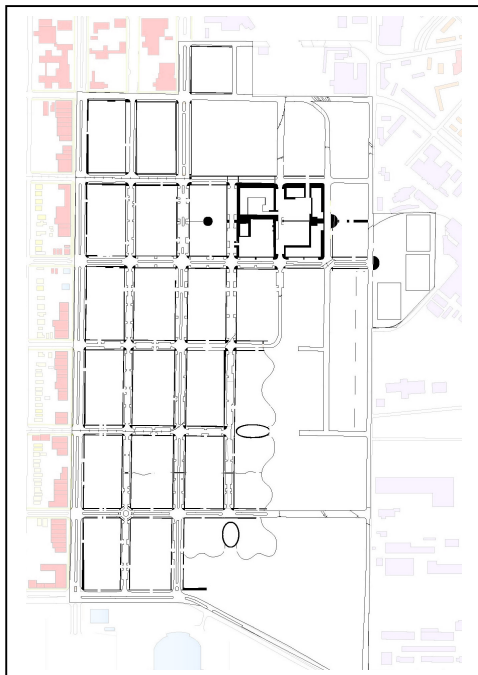


institutional and residential development, and so each illustration depicts a slightly different approach to the design of appropriate medians and the ways in which the types of buildings in each of these situations may be placed in relation to the property lines and the driving and walking areas of the street.

The bottom illustration on the facing page depicts a typical residential street in the District. Houses with front yards and front porches front both sides of the street. In most cases, residential street rights-of-way in the District are wider than necessary to accommodate the amount of paving, sidewalks, parking strips and street trees appropriate to the neighborhood and the traffic volume. The illustration demonstrates how the houses may be set forward on the property much further than is usual by narrowing the required front setback and shifting the front yard to occupy a portion of the right-of-way.

Pedestrian Circulation

The system for pedestrian circulation is at least as important as that for vehicles. Sidewalks should form an interconnected network of accessibility throughout the District. Giving pedestrianways priority will encourage walking and interaction in the public realm. All of the District's streets should have sidewalks to serve as the primary pedestrian routes. These are to be augmented by pedestrianways located in the buffer areas between residential and industrial areas and those that interconnect residential blocks via greenways.



All pedestrianways should be human-scaled, attractive and compatible with residential neighborhoods. All traditional sidewalks and other pedestrianways should have trees, benches and other street furniture, and pedestrian-scale lighting. Many eyes focused upon the sidewalks—and the activities taking place there—will support the pedestrian system.

This all relates to residential development planning and design and the need for housing that addresses the sidewalks in a traditional manner—with porches, front yards and accessibility to one's neighbors and neighborhood. The District will be safer as a result.

Parking

The District's parking system consists of on-street parking, off-street surface parking and structured parking. All are illustrated in the diagram to the right.

There is the potential for hundreds of on-street parking spaces, whose presence can help improve the perception of pedestrian safety.

There are over 2,000 off-street surface parking spaces arrayed on over 18 acres. Much of this parking should be owned, operated and maintained by the city to assure free and open access to all spaces as an incentive to developers.

The off-street surface spaces are supplemented by hundreds more parking spaces to be constructed in parking structures that are freestanding and those associated with the development of Liberty Center, redevelopment of the commercial core and its associated apartments, and the construction of live/work units along Veterans Parkway and Victory Drive.

Much of the off-street parking in and around Liberty Center and the commercial core will be organized and operated as shared parking between commercial uses and the many churches nearby. These uses typically have complementary hours and should share the benefits as well as construction costs.



IV. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The most important aspect of this Master Plan is how it will be carried out. Plan implementation will require cooperation between the public and private sectors that separately, lack the money and power necessary to complete all that must be accomplished. However, joined together they will have all they need to capture market potential and convert the District into a new asset for Columbus, whose officials and other leaders intend to commit significant political will, financial resources and regulatory powers to its implementation.

Both private and public sectors can begin immediately with small actions that have the potential to create big impacts. High profile locations—gateways, District edges, high visibility locations—can intensify the impact of even small projects, with the understanding that each must be a vital piece of the whole.

Implementation of the concept outlined in this plan requires coordination as well as commitment. Coordination will include funding, property availability, private sector interest and participation, the ability and willingness to issue bonds and secure other forms of gap financing, and cooperation from local utilities and other levels of government. This will require involvement in a redevelopment process, which may be simple in concept, yet often is difficult to accomplish. The continuing test will be one of sustaining commitment by public and private sector leadership.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND EARLY ACTIONS

The following priorities are suggested as public and private sector responsibilities and a logical progression for the early actions proposed to carry out the Master Plan. Each of the actions and priorities should be reviewed on a regular basis based on current development opportunities, community need, potential return-on-investment and the gains that may accrue from project visibility. Implementation must certainly be tailored to fit current needs and circumstances.

Public Sector

The public sector includes all government agencies at all levels. Their role is to protect and promote the public health, safety and welfare, and they have powers conferred by the federal and state constitutions and statutes that enable them to play an essential role in redevelopment. They also have key redevelopment responsibilities that include:

- Advice and Education
- Operations and Maintenance
- Regulation
- Infrastructure Investment
- Incentives
- Eminent domain and site clearing

Early Actions of the Public Sector

- Adopt the Redevelopment Master Plan
- Appoint, empower and charge a champion with implementation of the plan
- Revise the 1998 *Comprehensive Plan for Future Land Use*
- Revise the zoning ordinance and map to support the plan
- Prepare and adopt mandatory redevelopment design standards
- Invest in streetscape improvements on Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street
- Clear the private uses in the Liberty Center blocks
- Invest in drainage improvements
- Revise the sign ordinance

Private Sector

The private sector, for purposes of this discussion, includes all private citizens, for-profit and non-profit corporations and organizations. Their roles vary considerably according to their structure and the goals of those involved in their governance. They also have powers conferred by the federal and state constitutions and statutes that enable them to play an essential role in redevelopment. They also have key redevelopment responsibilities that include:

- Organization in support of redevelopment
- Promotion of the Liberty District
- Design and construction
- Restructuring of the District economy in accord with the plan
- Capital investment to support the uses outlined in the plan

Early Actions of the Private Sector

- Consolidate private organizations in support of Master Plan adoption
- Press for supportive zoning ordinance revisions with mandatory design standards
- Seek and support appropriate infill residential and commercial development
- Press for public infrastructure improvements
- Support revision of the sign ordinance

PRIORITIES AND SEQUENCING OPTIONS



Redevelopment will take place as a complex series of investments over a significant period of time. The overall strategy for redevelopment is to coordinate and manage public investment and private development in ways that take maximum advantage of the significant interest in the Liberty District that local leaders have displayed during the planning process.

The sequence of redevelopment could take any one of a number of paths to success, because the options are many and varied at the outset, and shifting market conditions could play a major role. Of course, the highest profile improvements and investments will be those directly associated with Liberty Center, Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway, and reconstruction of the primary internal corridors of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street. The first public investment will be improvements to the storm drainage system and reconstruction of those two primary access corridors, and that will help open up the heart of the District.

Liberty Center will require sequential direct public and private investment, including significant property acquisition and clearance of incompatible adjacent structures. Critical also will be securing appropriate arrangements with adjacent property owners, who may desire to participate in the redevelopment process.

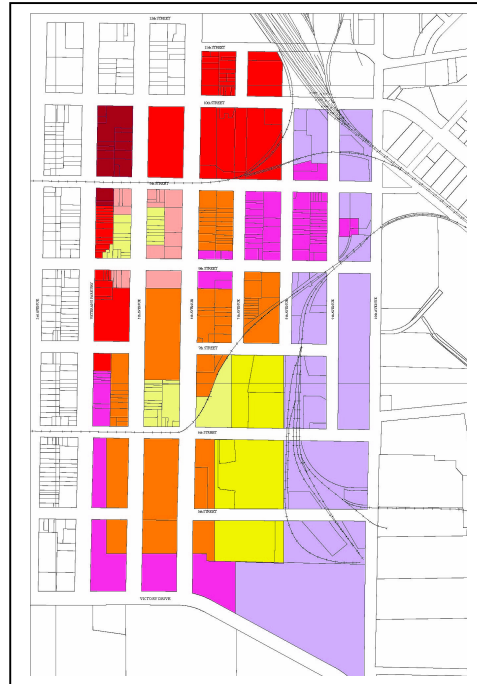
The key to early success will be to build up a threshold population to support retail trade. That will require a shifting of BTW residents over time, the sequential sale and redevelopment of BTW property for housing and housing-over-commercial development along Victory Boulevard and Veterans Parkway.

Brownfield cleanup and conversion will be required for the existing scrap yards and all railroad rights-of-way to be included in redevelopment. All else said, the most important aspect of plan implementation will be to approve or allow any physical investment or development project (no matter how “temporary” its sponsors may claim its presence will be) that does not fit with the Master Plan, whether it be the present document or an overall revision that will accomplish the redevelopment goals set by the Consolidated Government.

ZONING

The current zoning is not conducive to appropriate redevelopment of the District. In response, the illustration to the right is a recommended pattern of zoning districts, based on current options available in the Columbus Zoning Ordinance.

- Existing single-family detached residential areas recommended for conservation and infill, together with their associated open space: R-3A
- Proposed single-family detached residential area in the southeast portion: R-3B with a front setback variance to allow for narrowing the effective street widths and allow for front yard uses on the public right-of-way
- Proposed row houses, townhouses and apartments: R-4
- Small-scale commercial area along Eighth and Ninth Streets: C-2
- General commercial area along the mid-portion of the east side of Veterans Parkway: C-3



The R-4 District language should be revised or variances should be allowed in accord with the Master Plan to allow single family detached, row house and townhouse units to be located closer to the rather wide streets of the District in a manner shown on the typical street cross-sections. The present ordinance does not appropriately address planned redevelopment to include vertical mixed uses. To correct this deficiency, there should be added to the ordinance a Planned Redevelopment District that would allow mixed use and special development in accord with a Master Development Plan compatible with this Master Plan.

DESIGN STANDARDS

Redevelopment will take place over a significant period of time. This means there may be a need to modify the Physical Plan for Redevelopment to account for changing circumstances and values, and perhaps to take advantage of opportunities not foreseen during the planning process. For that reason, the following written design standards are provided as a detailing of the overall goals and policies for redevelopment. *Before redevelopment activities begin, these conceptual design standards should be fleshed out fully into a complete set of design standards to accompany all redevelopment proposals.*

General Standards

- All public and private improvements in the Liberty District shall be of human scale, organized to be compatible with and attractive and accessible to pedestrians and residential neighborhoods
- There shall be several, diverse centers of activity in the District, to include the Liberty Theater, the Ma Rainey and Spencer Houses, parks, churches, the library and retail areas
- Prominent sites shall be reserved for important civic and institutional functions. Building and spaces for meetings, education, religion and culture shall be located in the various centers
- Small playgrounds and natural green areas shall be located throughout the neighborhood, interconnected by sidewalks and trails
- Changes in land use shall be made mostly at alleys or buffered by a mix of open space and landscaping, allowing like uses to face one another across streets
- Design and construction of private improvements shall reflect the care taken by the city to invest in the planned public areas and streetscapes of the District
- Materials and colors shall be compatible with good quality buildings of the dominant period of the District's historic development

Buildings and Spaces

- Buildings shall be placed close to the edges of the District's wide streets to create a strong sense of space and place
- Parking lots and garage doors shall rarely front the streets directly
- All buildings and spaces shall be designed to promote social exchange and the human experience
- All buildings and spaces shall be oriented primarily toward the streets and sidewalks, although secondary access may be to the side or rear
- Houses facing wide streets shall include porches that extend to the property line and front yards shall be allowed to extend into the right-of-way
- Most commercial buildings shall be built to the property lines on the front and sides, or aligned with adjacent buildings as appropriate
- All building facades shall be designed toward achieving a unifying effect along the streets, rather than made to conform to any particular stylistic theme
- Street level and upper stories of commercial buildings shall reflect the same style
- Rear detached garages shall be set back from the alley a minimum of four feet and a maximum of eight feet

Housing

- There shall be a variety of dwelling types in the District—detached and attached houses, apartments and live-work units (dwellings located above shops and offices)
- There shall be diverse living spaces for younger and older people, for singles and families from different stages of life and income levels
- Housing shall address the streets in a traditional manner—with porches, front yards and accessibility to one's neighbors and neighborhood, with many eyes focused upon the streets and the activities taking place there
- Development along wide streets shall be placed close to the front property line, with front yards extending into the right-of-way, to narrow the effective width of the street

Commerce

- There shall be shops and offices at both the core and the west and south edges of the District. The shops shall be sufficiently varied to supply many daily and weekly household needs
- Signs shall be simple and direct, yet strive for creativity and neighborliness compatible with the context of the District and its residential neighborhoods
- Signs shall be responsive and complementary to the architecture and overall streetscape, rather than be a dominant feature of the District or adjacent commercial streets
- Shops and offices shall be encouraged to create adjacent urban spaces for such pedestrian activities as sidewalk cafes and sitting areas

Landscape and Planting

- Large street trees shall be planted in all blocks in support of the character of the District and its civic, commercial and residential areas
- All plantings in civic and commercial areas shall be urban in character, extremely hardy and have very low maintenance requirements
- Plantings compatible with the commercial and civic areas of the District shall be included at the edges of and within all public and private parking lots
- All residential development specifications shall include a minimum planting requirement for front yards, to include at least one street tree per single family unit and one tree per 40 feet of multi-family unit street frontage
- Street trees (those between the sidewalk and curb) shall be only as specified for the particular street by the Columbus Consolidated Government
- Trees and shrubs shall be required planting for all alleys
- Low picket fencing shall be allowed in front yards
- Privacy fences shall only be allowed for rear yards and shall be set back from the alley right of way a minimum of four feet

Parking Lots

- On-street parallel parking shall be allowed on all residential streets
- All public and private parking lots shall be clearly organized and striped to maximize the accessibility of parking spaces without using adjacent streets for circulation
- Parking shall not be allowed on alley rights-of-way
- Plantings compatible with the commercial and civic areas of the District shall be included at the edges of and within all public and private parking lots in trees islands

Lighting and Utilities

- Lighting shall be selected carefully to respond to the unique character of the corridors and set them apart from their surroundings, yet relate also to the adjacent Columbus Historic District
- All structures accessed from alleys shall provide lighting for the principal structure and alley
- All pedestrian trails shall be lit with bollard and/or pedestrian-scale overhead fixtures to provide visibility and safety
- All wiring shall be placed underground or in alleys or other rear service areas insofar as practicable

Street Environments

- Streets shall form an interconnected network of accessibility throughout the District to provide a variety of routes and disperse traffic congestion
- Streets shall all have sidewalks and shall be shaded by trees to provide an environment suitable for pedestrians and bicycles as well as motor vehicles
- Street environments shall be human-scaled, attractive to pedestrians and compatible with residential neighborhoods
- Street furnishings shall be selected and installed to reflect unity of character, scale and color
- Public trash containers shall be of a traditional type, provided at logical and convenient locations
- Street calming improvements, such as roundabouts, speed tables, sidewalk landings at crosswalks and raised crosswalks, shall be allowed

MARKETING STRATEGIES

A critical component of plan implementation will be the direct marketing of redevelopment opportunities for developable land in accord with the concept outlined in this plan. Columbus will promote redevelopment of planned uses and locations at the same time that it asserts regulatory control over the District through use of zoning and design standards. Marketing efforts will be based on the key economic forces that favor overall development of the District, and designed not only to promote desired redevelopment within the District, but also invoke substantial control over what can and cannot take place along its edges.

The steps that should be considered include:

- *Attempt to control key parcels of property* either through purchase or option and limit incompatible development on adjacent and other key parcels. Columbus can exert far greater control over what happens on a parcel of land that it owns than on one it does not. For example, it can offer to sell or lease the land to a developer subject to very strict redevelopment guidelines including detailed plans and specifications, all set forth in advance. As the owner, Columbus would have much greater leverage over the design including such things as the density, open space and parking ratios, types of materials and overall design. These items and many others are important to the overall image and success of the project. Consequently, it is important for Columbus to control, by purchase or option, key parcels of land throughout the District.
- *Use rezoning as a tool* to decrease the supply of property available within the District for commercial uses, increase the supply of property available within the District for mixed-use and residential uses. To prevent premature and inappropriate development in and around the District, the Zoning Map must be revised significantly as outlined earlier in this chapter. There is presently too much property zoned for commercial and industrial uses in the Liberty District. While rezoning will adjust the supply of property available for various uses, it is also important to try to increase the demand for these desired uses.
- *Provide incentives to increase the demand for commercial, mixed-use and residential property.* Public participation may be used to encourage developers to take risks they might not otherwise be willing to take. Such incentives could take the form of subsidized land prices, public ownership and development of parking facilities, participation in onsite construction cost, improvements on the public rights of way such as sidewalks, lighting and landscaping, public parking lots and parking decks, a freeze on certain property taxes, a rebate of certain sales taxes, or waiving certain fees such as plan review fees and building permits. In sum, incentives could be classified into the following types: When considering incentives, it is critical to remember that the basic economics of the project must be sound, even without incentives, and that the project must provide a net benefit to the public. Moreover, quality of life is the most important incentive—it indicates strong civic leadership, makes it easier to recruit new business and is critical for attracting new residents
- *Prepare specific plans for redevelopment of targeted properties* based on this redevelopment plan for the District. It is essential to prepare specific plans and designs, in advance of redevelopment, for key parcels within the District. Such plans should take

account of all aspects of the redevelopment plan and include standards and specifications as well as the participation and other incentives Columbus would bring to the project.

- *Solicit redevelopment proposals* by means of a Request for Proposal for developers to develop the targeted parcels in accord with the specific plans for redevelopment. Once a property is under control and after the rezoning has taken place and specific plans and designs and specifications are in place, Columbus could issue a request for proposals (RFP) to selected developers to develop key parcels under its control. The RFP should be well thought out and thorough in its detail and in its specificity with regard to expectations. The goal is to attract developers who have a high degree of experience, are financially strong enough to assure that the project is a success and are creative and visionary in their approach to redevelopment. This approach will of course depend to some degree on ability and willingness to control key parcels of land. The critical aspect of project sequencing in each case will be to plan for a logical order of procedure. That may require shifting the order of the elements suggested above to one that will allow Columbus to maintain an appropriate degree of control of highly visible, image-enhancing redevelopment projects in the Liberty District.



V. CONCLUSION

The long-term success of a redevelopment effort can be a fragile thing; if not nurtured it may easily be lost. Constant vigilance, ongoing experimentation and visionary leadership are necessary to make and keep the District vital. As a result, the plan text and illustrations are the result of months of effort involving community leaders, city staff and others. The purpose of the plan is to provide a Strategic Concept for revitalization of the District and to illustrate a long-range vision for the District as a guide to public and private investment. Most of all, the Redevelopment Plan is intended to demonstrate the potential of the District and to set in motion the means to convert that vision into reality.

The most important aspect of this plan is how the public and private sectors will carry it out cooperatively. Separately, they each lack the money and power necessary to complete all that must be accomplished. Together, they will have all they need to capture market potential and convert the District into a new asset for Columbus, whose officials and other leaders intend to commit significant political will, financial resources and regulatory powers to its implementation.

Several actions should be initiated immediately and carried out continuously:

- Organize and commit to district redevelopment
- Appoint, empower and support a redevelopment champion
- Coordinate the efforts of the public and private sectors
- Keep the big picture in mind
- Coordinate all regulations
- Make sound investments
- Do something every day
- Monitor the results and fix anything that does not work
- Take charge!

To repeat a continuing theme: the Liberty District is a complex physical, social, economic and political place, and that means redevelopment will take place over a significant period of time in a complex series of public and private investments. If either sector waits for the other to take more than a few steps without the other, the process will stagnate. Thus, the overall strategy for redevelopment must be to coordinate and manage public investment and private development to take maximum advantage of the significant interest in the Liberty District that has been displayed by local leaders during this planning process.

As noted earlier, the highest profile early improvements and investments within the District will be those directly associated with solving the flooding problem, serious investment in mixed use development of Liberty Center, supported by upgrading the internal corridors of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street. This should be supported by redevelopment of the edges along Victory Drive and Veterans Parkway. The key to early success will be redevelopment of housing, in order to build up a threshold population to support retail trade. The key to Liberty Center will be direct investment in property acquisition and clearance of the

incompatible adjacent and nearby structures, and making appropriate arrangements regarding development and shared parking with adjacent major property owners. And continuing success will require that the city allow no investment or demolition that will interfere with Master Plan implementation.

As the process of transformation continues through public and private investment and cooperation, the Liberty District will emerge as a vital commercial District, a focus of local and regional government, one of the city's centers of cultural activities and events, a place where people go to enjoy entertainment, dining and music. It will contain some of the favorite meeting places of the Columbus community and its visitors.

As one participant in the redevelopment planning process noted at the outset,

I will know we are successful when the time comes, a few years from now, that the concierge at an Uptown hotel suggests to a guest that the best opportunity in town for an evening's entertainment would be to walk just a few blocks east to the newly revitalized historic Liberty District.

That degree of success will come from private reinvestment stimulated by public reinvestment in a neighborhood that consists of a healthy mix of housing, commerce, the arts and entertainment and supported by the entire community. That is the focus of this Master Plan for redevelopment of the Liberty District.

