

New Albany Master Plan Proposal

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— PATH TO PROGRESS: SCRIBNER PLACE PHASE II
MAIN STREET CORRIDOR PLAN CITY OF NEW ALBANY, INDIANA
DOUGLAS B. ENGLAND, MAYOR
JULY, 2009 REVISED OCTOBER 2009 PER NACC

The Planning Area

The Planning Area generally consists of the Main Street corridor from East Sixth Street west to the Interstate 64/Sherman Minton Bridge. It includes all properties fronting the north side of East and West Main Street and extends south to the flood levee. The planning area consists of all or part of 20 blocks and covers approximately 11 acres.

For the most part, commercial buildings begin at the edge of the right-of-way, while institutional and residential buildings are set back from the public sidewalks. The ‘street wall’ – the line of buildings along either side of Main Street -- is interrupted in places by surface parking and vacant lots. Public access to most buildings is from the principal street, with the notable exception of the YMCA and Community Aquatic Center, which inexplicably has its main entrance off State Street. Buildings vary in height from one to four stories. A substantial number of buildings have boarded windows in the upper stories leaving a moribund impression. Maintenance has generally been acceptable with a few notable exceptions.

The planning area was included in the Downtown Development Plan, an amendment to The City of New Albany and Unincorporated Two-Mile Fringe Area Comprehensive Plan, Year 2020. Although the Downtown Development Plan did not specifically identify a YMCA and Community Aquatic Center at the intersections of State and Main streets, the plan did promote the site as the location for a ‘major attraction’. The YMCA development – a public/private partnership for the development of the \$20 million, 80,000 square foot major attraction -- has indeed breathed life into the area. Major funding for the project was through a generous gift from the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County, Inc. Significant private investment, particularly in the restaurant sector, has been equally important in creating weekend and evening dining and gathering options for the City’s residents and guests.

This plan is intended to take that spark and ignite the public and private sectors to implement significant changes in the next four years to assure a vibrant, diverse future for the Main Street corridor.

Existing Conditions

Transportation

Main Street is an 80’-0” right-of-way, also known as State Road 111. It runs in a generally east-west direction through the 2,800’ of the planning area. It is improved with sidewalk and curbs on both sides, though most are in dire need of replacement. State Street, a 60’-0” right-of-way, is the principle north/south intersection in the study area. Although City streets, both Main and State streets are under the auspices of the Indiana Department of Transportation (InDOT). West Second (also known as Scribner Drive), West First, Pearl, Bank, East Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth streets, are City streets. All are 60’-0” rights-of-way and are improved with curbs and sidewalks and all but Bank and East Sixth streets terminate at the Norfolk-Southern railroad right-of-way south of and parallel to Main Street. Bank Street terminates in Black Street, a 60’-0” right-of-way that runs between Bank and State streets. East Sixth Street begins at Main Street, crosses the Norfolk-Southern and the flood levee before terminating at Water Street, along the Ohio River Greenway. On-street parking is permitted in the vast majority of the planning area and most is parallel, while a few

perpendicular (notably on Black Street) spots are also present. Traffic is controlled by two actuated signals (at State and at Pearl streets). Elsewhere, traffic on side streets approaching Main is controlled by stop signs. Parking, speed limit, and other signs dot the public landscape. Many of these are in poor condition and are often repetitive, creating a visual blight.

Twenty-foot wide alleys are located perpendicular to Main Street between the north-south streets in the planning area. The alleys provide access to the rear of various frontage properties and overhead as well as underground utility service. Alleys are typically in poor condition, but are a valuable asset in the future.

Land Use

Land uses in the area are varied and include institutional uses (including a museum, a fraternal organization, and two churches); commercial uses (serving both the local and regional markets); professional offices (particularly law offices, given the proximity to the Courthouse); warehousing and storage (generally in association with a primary permitted land use); residential; and, the YMCA and Community Aquatic Center. A number of buildings appear to be vacant. There are a number of surface parking lots in the area and a few vacant lots, especially south of Main Street.

Zoning

At present, there are four zoning districts in the planning area. Most of the area is zoned C-2, General Business, an intensive commercial zoning district that permits a limited range of other uses, including residential uses. South of Main Street, portions of the planning area are zoned I-1a, Light Industrial, which permits a variety of industrial land uses and medium density residential land uses by right. The far eastern portion of the site is zoned R-3, (HD), Multi-Family (historic district), which permits residential density of up to 12 dwelling units per acre. Finally, the property that encompasses Scribner Place, Phase I, is a Planned Unit Development District (PUDD), permitting the YMCA and Community Aquatic Center that recently opened at the corner of State and Main, as well as future commercial uses with typical urban development setbacks.

Railroad

The Norfolk-Southern Railroad is an active freight railroad that runs east-west through the area. The railroad appears to be located along an easement near the foot of the flood levee. Adjacent to the Norfolk-Southern, the City's Redevelopment Commission has acquired former railroad right-of-way, ranging from 20'-0" to 30'-0" wide. This right-of-way extends from near Scribner Place east to East Sixth Street and beyond.

Overhead Electric Transmission Lines

Duke Energy has 170,000-volt electric lines along the north side of Main Street. Through most of the planning area, this service is strung from 70' tall metal poles; east of Bank Street, Duke uses wood poles to continue this line eastward beyond the planning area. Lower voltage electric service also is located on the north side of Main, albeit on shorter wood utility poles. Bundles of wires cross Main Street at various locations.

Flood Protection System

The flood levee is the southern border of the planning area and extends the entire length from east to west. Beyond the levee lays the Ohio River and the recently dedicated Ohio River Greenway's Scribner Place Segment. As part of the Greenway project, a recreational path with bollard lighting has been constructed on top of the levee throughout the planning area. At Pearl Street, a walkway crosses the Norfolk-Southern tracks and leads to the top of the levee where the River Heritage Overlook, a steel-and-concrete structure, rises above the levee and overlooks the recently re-built Riverfront Amphitheater and the Ohio River beyond. The levee is currently being inspected to certify that its design, construction, and maintenance provide downtown neighborhoods of the City of New Albany protection against the One-Percent Chance Flood (sometimes mistakenly called the 100-Year Flood).

Historic Architecture

Architecture in the planning area includes numerous styles, including Federal, Egyptian Revival, Greek Revival, Italianate, and Art Deco, as well as newer buildings. Masonry is the predominant material for commercial buildings; frame buildings include the dwellings at the east and west ends, as well as The Scribner House – the first permanent home in New Albany. There are several modern intrusions in the area, notably steel warehouse type buildings. The planning area is partly located in the Downtown New Albany National Register District and partly in the Mansion Row National Register District. Most of the area is also designated as a local historic district, where exterior changes require approval from the New Albany Historic Preservation Commission.

Several landmark buildings are worth individual note. The Second Branch Bank of Indiana, built in 1837 and

known recently as The Parthenon, is an imposing Greek Revival temple form that is significant for its architecture as well as its important association with the City's, state's, and nation's economic history. The Scribner House is the first permanent dwelling built in the City and is open as a museum operated by its owners, the local chapter of the DAR. The building known recently as Abe's Rental, was originally a Sears Automotive facility built in the Art Deco style. The Second Baptist Church, formerly the Second Presbyterian Church, and known as the Town Clock church, has been a landmark for a century-and-a-half and an important landmark of the Underground Railroad. Finally, three masonry townhomes, near East Third Street, are in a high state of preservation that represent early urban life in New Albany while providing a guide to future single-family residential development in the downtown.

The Planning Process

Early in 2008, Develop New Albany, Inc., sought the assistance of Mayor England and his staff in updating the Downtown Development Plan. Over several meetings, it was determined that the DDP remained valid in its whole, that what was needed was a re-prioritization of the 'project bank' element of the plan. That was completed in early Spring as work was entering the final phases at The YMCA and Community Aquatic Center. Over the Summer and early Fall, private development interests began seeking a greater understanding of the physical environment in which they were contemplating investing. Questions such as 'What's going to happen on this or that block?' or 'What's going to happen with this or that building?' were being asked. After the economy faltered sharply in mid-September, it became essential to be able to answer such questions with specificity.

In November, 2008 a group of individuals representing numerous interests along the Main Street corridor met at the Library to begin a planning process that would set a course to answer specific questions about specific properties in the planning area. From that initial meeting, Larry Timperman, AIA, and staff at MTR Architects began pulling elements together for a land use vision of the planning area. In January, Timperman met weekly with some of the team members and Mayor England's staff to finish a draft land use map and other supporting materials. On January 29, the original group was re-assembled and the plan was presented and after comment, accepted.

The Plan now will be presented to the New Albany Redevelopment Commission for adoption, then to the New Albany City Plan Commission and the New Albany Common Council for adoption as an element of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Primary Goals

The primary goal of the plan is two-fold: to create a vibrant and exciting corridor for New Albany's citizens to work, shop, live, and enjoy, while also creating a 'sense of place' by building on the unique resources found in the district, burnishing those in poor condition, maintaining those contributing to the character of the planning area, and adding our own imprint on it.

Urban Design Element

One way to create a distinctive urban environment is through sustainability. A hallmark of sustaining the planning area is to preserve and reuse the corridor's historic architecture, which is seen as a unique strength. Property owners are strongly encouraged to take advantage of federal tax credits available through the Certified Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program via the National Park Service. This program ensures a high quality of design and construction while rewarding it with a 20% federal tax credit. Preserving and adapting these buildings helps maintain the 'sense of place' of the Main Street corridor, but it also protects the environment by reducing landfilled material and the need to expend non-renewable resources in new construction.

Also important is the streetscape, and indeed the importance of a well-designed and maintained streetscape cannot be understated. Crumbling sidewalks, curbs, and rusted signs are symbols of the moribund state of the corridor. New walks, curbs, pedestrian and bicycle amenities and street furniture, landscaping, and an intelligent, attractive system of signage should be installed to affirm the value the public sector places on public and private investments in the corridor. The plan calls for public efforts to remove illegal signage and prohibit signage disguised as street furniture. The furniture used in the rights-of-way should be distinctive,

durable, and attractive.

New construction may best respect historic architecture by avoiding the urge to copy it. New architecture should represent its own time, while being respectful of its neighbors. This can be successfully achieved by acknowledging the scale, materials, set-back and other character-defining issues of the existing urban form, but by using them in a way that presents a building that is new and unique.

The plan supports sustainability by encouraging design and construction in line with the environmental awareness known as “green building”. Reducing landfill deposits through adapting historic buildings, concentrating land uses, and providing pedestrian, bicycle, and transit options are important elements. Increasing energy efficiency and using renewable energy, increasing water efficiency, using environmentally preferable building materials and construction specifications, reducing wastes and toxins, and improving indoor air quality are also key elements of the process of “green building”. Individual buildings should – indeed must – be encouraged to participate as well. Tax incentives and incentives from utilities are available to assist property owners in building “green”. Although each project will have its own unique circumstances, collectively the development and redevelopment activities should strive for recognition as “green”.

Land Use Element

A mix of land uses are envisioned to enliven the Main Street planning area, including a wide variety of retail sales, services, and office uses, high rise apartments, a community water park, a parking structure and a public plaza linking Main Street with the Ohio River Greenway that will provide a unique place for public gatherings. The plan provides for an environment friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists, and envisions transit connections to our many neighborhoods and beyond. The plan takes advantage of the views of the Ohio River, the sculptural Sherman Minton Bridge, and views of Louisville, while protecting and strengthening the historic fabric along Main Street and the side streets.

Along the north side of Main Street, from I-64 east to East Fifth Street, the plan calls for retail land uses on the first floor and retail, office, or residential uses on upper floors. Vacant lots should be in-filled with modern architecture that respects the historic fabric without mimicking it.

Along the south side of Main Street, the plan envisions continued residential land uses at the east end, between East Sixth Street and East Fourth Street, where historic residential land uses predominate. These buildings should be preserved while infill may be added where appropriate. Some retail or office uses may be acceptable on a case-by-case basis.

Two significant private developments are being negotiated along the south side of East Main Street, within proximity of Pearl and Bank streets. Each envisions mixed-use development including retail sales, office developments, and high-rise residential construction.

An essential component of this development is the provision for off-street parking to accommodate full-time users and visitors to the site. This plan calls for the development of an 800-car parking garage designed in such a way as to provide infrastructure to support high rise buildings above the parking structure. These high-rise buildings, at seven stories tall, should be arranged so that they frame a unique public plaza. In its turn, the plaza should be designed in such a way as to provide access from Main Street to the top of the flood levee, as well as the Ohio River Greenway, while allowing for large gatherings as well as intimate meetings of small groups of friends.

Between West First Street and the Sherman Minton Bridge, the six acres on the south side of West Main Street are planned for a Community Water Park and Outdoor Fitness Park to compliment the adjacent YMCA and Community Aquatic Center. This outdoor facility would include a variety of pools, including an Olympic-sized pool and spray pools, with a fitness trail. The fitness trail could be a winding trail around the perimeter of the site with various stops designed to enhance cardiac and aerobic improvement.

Transportation Element

The plan calls for the development of Liberty Street, a new street located adjacent to the north of the Norfolk-Southern Railroad and extending from the Sherman Minton Bridge east to East Sixth Street. Liberty Street would be built on former railroad right-of-way acquired years ago by the Redevelopment Commission. The street would be a pedestrian and bicycle environment that tolerates automobile and truck traffic, through the use of traffic calming measures.

Motor vehicle storage – parking – whether resident, business operator, visitor, tourist, or company vehicle, will test the ability of the Planning Area to provide the ‘sense of place’ this plan calls for. Surface parking is unsightly but often coveted by a motoring public

Restoring the two-way system is supported by the plan, particularly where it improves north-south access in

the planning area. Currently, east-west travel is excellent in the planning area, while north-south travel is good only at State and Pearl streets.

The pedestrian and bicycle environment calls for improvements include replacing damaged sidewalks and curbs and making north-south pedestrian movements easier and safer. Improving the bicycle environment calls planning for and installing bicycle infrastructure, reserving bike lanes (as part of a larger bicycle planning effort) and including bike racks in improvements at various locations.

The plan also recognizes the need for enhanced transit options in the planning area as well as the community generally. Included in future land uses will be space for a transit station – central to the planning area -- which may make use of existing freight rail lines (as part of a regional rail transit option) or improved bus service over existing or planned streets.

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