

Their town

Residents in Hudson, Ohio, had final say in downtown project

BY DEBRA HAZEL

Just because the 200-year-old downtown in Hudson was run down doesn't mean a lot of people didn't care about it. On the contrary, residents and officials in this Ohio city 30 miles southwest of Cleveland were very particular about the way it was to be fixed up.

Hudson, incorporated as a village in 1837, expanded over time and became a city in 1991. It still has a lot of its old charm, including a number of historic homes dating from the late 1800s on the edge of a traditional downtown.

But the downtown was showing its age in a less desirable way. Though a post office, a drugstore and other mostly service stores remained, residents were going to more modern places for their shopping, either to suburban big-box retailers nearby or to malls and lifestyle centers in Cleveland. Given that household income among the city's 22,000 residents averages about \$130,000 a year, that was adding up to a lot of lost sales tax revenue.

"Over time Hudson's downtown, like many small-town downtowns, had declined," said Randy Ruttenberg, a principal of Cleveland-based Fairmount Properties, co-developer of First and Main, as the mixed-use project designed to reverse the town's fortunes and set to open this month is called. "It's no different from a lot of small towns."

Without strong apparel retailers, "the traffic was not there," added Jody L. Roberts, communications manager for the city of Hudson.

Resolving to reverse the decline, in 1995 the city bought and demolished an old Morse Controls factory directly behind the Main Street retail district, opening up a 14-acre field. In 2001 it chose Fairmount to redevelop the site. At that point Tom Murdough, a 31-year Hudson resident eager to see the town center improved, formed the Hudson Village Development Co. to oversee the redevelopment. Together the city and Hudson Village Development hired Fairmount.

But the people of Hudson weren't about to leave all the decisions to a private developer, or even to city officials. This was to be a truly private-public partnership. The city held community meetings for the next two years to find out what people wanted and how best to deliver it. Fairmount had

Hudson, 30 miles outside Cleveland, might be a city now, but it's still a village to its residents. They are determined to keep it looking that way.

