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AMERICA’S MAIN STREET AWARD

This Five-Year Strategic Plan represents a year of planning, debating, and strategizing by the Lift Bridge Community Association (LBCA) and interested stakeholders to identify goals and strategies to take the Harbor Historic District to the next level. The June 2018 announcement that Bridge Street Ashtabula was selected for the “America’s Main Street” Award, plus the recent designation as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and headlines regarding the great restaurants in the District, provide amazing rewards for past efforts and a critical reminder that maintaining the Harbor Historic District as a special place is vital in today’s environment.

Perhaps the most significant change in this Strategic Plan from the 2012 Lift Bridge Community Association Revitalization Implementation Strategy is the comprehensive Mixed Use Goal #1. Early in the initial planning process, the need for both short-term and long-term residential development in the Harbor Historic District became apparent. Similarly, the need to “repurpose” former industrial spaces and vacant or underutilized buildings, especially spaces adjacent to water, were identified as offering unique opportunities for revitalization. While shipping, railroad, and storage activities are important economically, advances in automation and technology have dramatically reduced the number of jobs required to support these activities. In general, these businesses are no longer the important job creators that they once were.
Much like the conversion of the Cleveland Flats district, where a dynamic mix of commercial (medium- to high-end office space, restaurants, and bars) and residential (hotels, apartments, and condominiums) is replacing obsolete or vacant industrial facilities, the Harbor Historic District must repurpose non-productive facilities to maintain vitality and growth, which is the essence of the LBCA mission.

The history of Ashtabula Harbor is largely that of heavy, labor-intensive industrial activity, which lends a lasting character and feel to the Harbor. But times change and the Harbor needs to change with it. The specific steps in the Mixed Use Goal are essential, not only to the Harbor’s growth and vitality, but also to the growth and vitality of the City and County. This Plan does not deny the past; rather, it moves the Harbor Historic District into the future, while acknowledging its rich history. It identifies specifically what the LBCA and its partners should undertake in the next five years, by identifying five key goals.

Immediate Steps Needed

To be successful with achieving these goals, it is desirable that a Special Improvement District (SID) or Business Improvement District (BID) be created to raise the funds needed for implementation of these goals and strategies. This will require the LBCA and its partners to hire a consultant experienced with creating SID’s to assure that it gets completed in a timely and effective manner. Also, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) should be explored with any new developments to raise funds for infrastructure and other improvements that support the District.

Equally important, a director should be hired by the LBCA to coordinate the implementation of this Strategic Plan. Volunteers have done an amazing job to date, but to get to that next level, a person dedicated to implementation of projects and events, as well as management of the LBCA is required. (SID/BID proceeds could help pay for this person.)

Changing the environment from the old industrial area into a vibrant, exciting, lively, and aesthetically pleasing destination will require continued extensive efforts by the LBCA and its partners. Attracting new residential development and mixed uses to the District is desirable in the next five years. The City’s Zoning Code must be updated to help achieve this vision for the Harbor Historic District, and the architectural review process must be clarified and refined to make the process more effective.

Two key projects being addressed by others are also desirable to the future vision of the District: the completion of the North Shore Trail and Walnut Beach Park improvements. These two projects can attract a wealth of consumers to the Harbor Historic District, supporting the shops, restaurants, and other businesses that have given Bridge Street its new found glory.

It is imperative that the LBCA Board annually identify and prioritize three to five initiatives or strategies from this Strategic Plan that can realistically be implemented within the next twelve months.

As a result of this planning process, the LBCA is promoting the following five goals to continue the progress made over the past decade.
Five Goals for Five Years

Goal #1: Promote and support a mixture of land uses in the Harbor Historic District.

Goal #2: Aggressively pursue additional recreational and entertainment activities that utilize existing resources and entice visitors to the area.

Goal #3: Aggressively promote Clean, Green, and Safe practices to enhance the overall Harbor Historic District environment.

Goal #4: Capitalize on the “America’s Main Street” award to promote and market the Harbor Historic District.

Goal #5: Provide the capital improvements needed to stabilize and enhance the Harbor Historic District.

Accomplishments since the 2012 Strategy

- The 2012 Lift Bridge Community Association Revitalization Implementation Strategy focused on the National Register District for maximum impact. The success of that Plan has resulted in an expanded area as the basis for this Five-Year Strategic Plan. In 2012, LBCA had 75 members. Today, membership is at 160 members—more than doubling community support in just six years.

- A new public parking lot was constructed on Bridge Street, with landscaping and lighting; Hulbert Avenue north of Bridge Street was reconstructed with brick pavement, and 16 facades on 13 buildings were improved, all funded with Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and private investment. Another two facades were improved without CDBG funds.

- The steps and walking path behind the Coast Guard Station leading to Point Park have been replaced.

- The Architectural Review Board has developed guidelines, a sign ordinance, and an information packet, and is active in the design review process. Also, progress has been made on improved code enforcement by the City in the Harbor Historic District.

- The Cleveland Now Food Critic cited Bridge Street as “the best eating between Cleveland and Erie,” and the restaurants on Bridge Street have remained stable; a new brewery is planned to open on Bridge Street in 2018.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Several businesses have relocated to larger spaces, and new businesses have started, including the first business to provide access to the water.

- Walnut Beach Park has benefited from many improvements, and the Nature Conservancy and the City continue to install additional improvements, including reconstruction of the sand dunes. Funding exists to add a split rail fence through the dunes, along with a viewing platform.

- The North Shore Trail has been infused with a $1.16 million grant from ODOT and should be completed in 2019-2020, under the auspices of the Metroparks.

- Bridge Street festivals continue to grow as regional attractions and make money for the sponsoring organizations. The Wine & Walleye Festival has returned to Bridge Street and is now sponsored by LBCA.

- The first eight residential condos that are currently under construction on Bridge Street were designed to blend into the existing streetscape.

- Historic Preservation Tax Credits have now been used for a renovation project on Bridge Street, and the second floor of The Perk is out to bid for conversion to a new use. These projects indicate the serious commitment Bridge Street businesses and property owners have to the idea of historic preservation and restoration.

- The LBCA was designated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization by the Internal Revenue Service, allowing donations to LBCA to be tax deductible.

- A boutique hotel is being considered for a site at Goodwill and Morton Drives. Financing is still pending, but preliminary design is underway.

- Bridge Street Ashtabula won the 2018 America’s Main Street Contest, bringing home $25,000 in cash, $2,000 in sponsor gift certificates, and recognition through public relations and social media promotion by Independent We Stand, the program sponsor.

- The America’s Main Streets Contest highlights communities that preserve and support their downtown districts. Bridge Street Ashtabula has earned this victory by recognizing what makes its community special and working tirelessly to keep it that way,” says Bill Brunelle, co-founder of Independent We Stand. “The fact that online voters landed Bridge Street Ashtabula in the top 10 last year and in the top spot this year perfectly demonstrates the profound impact that hardworking Main Street groups can have on their communities.” Independent We Stand.
In order to transition from an old obsolete industrial area into a more vibrant, exciting, aesthetically-pleasing, and commercially successful area, efforts must focus on attracting a mixture of land uses to spur this rebirth. The Smart Growth Network has ten guiding principles, the first of which is to “mix land uses.” The Historic Harbor District has a unique opportunity in the next five years to promote a mixture of land uses. Mixed land uses would significantly benefit existing businesses, neighborhood residents, and local governments, while enhancing recreation, housing choices, transportation services, existing natural resources, and commercial opportunities, and still preserving historic properties and sites.

Most revitalizing commercial districts around the country today are promoting a mixture of land uses to stimulate redevelopment. Incorporating residential development into commercial districts is critical to creating "eyes on the street," positive evening activity, and an existing consumer market. The lake and river provide ample opportunities for recreational activities, and the historic district designation is helping to maintain the architectural and historic significance of key sites and buildings. The Harbor Historic District has tremendous potential for mixed land uses, and current and planned projects are leaning in that direction. Recommendations for the next five years include:

1. **Complete a Market Analysis.** A detailed professional market analysis is required to document the need for housing and mixed use development, including identification of specific retail and service uses that would succeed on Bridge Street and within the Harbor Historic District. There are two recently completed market studies:
   - The Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACCVB) completed a study that specifically addressed tourism and included the Harbor Historic District.
   - The City funded a second study that specifically evaluated the market for hotels.

However, a market analysis is needed that analyzes market demand, types of businesses that could be profitable on Bridge Street or within the Harbor Historic District, Returns on Investments (ROIs), needed incentives, etc. while also explaining the vision for the District. This type of retail area requires some high net worth people and experienced developers who are accustomed to working in historic districts. The market analysis should evaluate the potential for attracting this specific target population and these types of developers.

   - **This market study could be funded** by Civic Development Corporation (CDC), the Growth Partnership, a City Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grant, or a City and/or County Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) grant.
   - Once the market analysis is completed, the LBCA and its partners should have **one-on-one meetings with potential developers** (starting with local developers) to review the market data and the vision for the District, as well as to discuss potential incentives, partners, and funding sources.

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**The Smart Growth Network** is a partnership of government, business, and civic organizations seeking to improve development practices in neighborhoods, communities, and regions across the United States. It was formed in response to increasing community concerns about new ways to boost the economy, protect the environment and public health, and enhance community vitality. For more information on Smart Growth, visit [www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-network](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-network).
• GOAL I

2. **New land uses should support existing businesses.** The survey found that an overwhelming 91% of the respondents wanted to see additional commercial and retail uses on Bridge Street. In addition, over 60% of the respondents thought that service businesses would complement the Harbor Historic District, and over 74% would like to see additional residential development. It is obvious that the successes witnessed on Bridge Street over the past decade are appreciated, and respondents would like to capitalize on these successes with additional commerce.

When recruiting new businesses to locate in the Harbor Historic District, the LBCA and its partners should **recruit businesses that support and complement existing businesses**, or ones that will attract consumers to the area who will support existing businesses.

• It is generally agreed that the **upper floors** of existing buildings should be better utilized and could house offices for service businesses. Examples of service businesses suggested by survey respondents (for upper floors) include: realtors, financial planners, insurance agents, attorneys, and accountants. Other suggestions include: graphics or media companies, artist studios, non-profit organizations, counselors, fitness centers, tech companies, printers, and/or advertising agencies.

- Upper floors could be designed as professional shared office space (500 to 1200 SF) with common areas that include a receptionist, meeting rooms with current technology, rest rooms, copy machines, lunch room, and possible fitness center.

- Upper floors could also be used for moderate-priced residential for sale or rent, including smaller spaces for baby boomers and/or millennials.

• **Infill development should be pursued for all vacant lots** on Bridge Street and within adjacent neighborhoods. Mixed uses with retail on the ground floors is a popular option for Bridge Street. The current residential condo project is a perfect example of infill development. Vacant lots in adjacent residential neighborhoods could also be used for townhomes or condos (pending the success of the existing condo project), bed and breakfast operations, seasonal rentals, or moderate-priced...
single-family homes. The styles of new construction should complement adjacent buildings in terms of number of stories, roof pitches, materials, etc. Suggestions from the survey for potential businesses include a bank/ATM, doctors’ offices, other health practitioners, quilt/sewing shop, computer services, contractors, recreation equipment rentals, employment agencies, hair salons, and/or barbers.

• The City and the LBCA, working with property owners and businesses, should consider the need for second floor access to accommodate all second floors in a block along Bridge Street via a deck (similar to the ones accessing the public parking lot) or by installing a shared elevator that services an entire block and connects to all buildings by way of a deck (either open or enclosed). If the idea is amenable and affordable, grants could be sought to fund the project, matching local property owners’ contributions. One effort to provide access to four buildings along Bridge Street is currently underway, although issues with existing utility lines have slowed progress.

• The LBCA and/or the City should work with a realtor/developer who has experience in identifying/recruiting businesses. Some new business suggestions by survey respondents include: gift shops, restaurants, wine shop with tasting, convenience store, art galleries, exercise studio, and bank, in that order. Other possibilities include: specialty bakery, bookstore, general store, a small movie theater (reference the Cedar Lee theater in Cleveland—www.clevelandcinemas.com/location/6129/Cedar-Lee-Theatre), video store, unique second hand clothing store, toy store, in addition to the services listed above.

• As redevelopment occurs, existing residential should be transformed to more upscale residential (with some moderate-priced housing), by recruiting new residents, developing Bed and Breakfast establishments, and/or recruiting individuals to purchase several homes in one block to renovate them and resell or rent them. Over 70% of the survey respondents stated that they would like to see additional residential in the Harbor Historic District. They mentioned, in order of priority: Bed and breakfasts, condos, quality rentals, apartments, single-family homes, and moderate priced housing.
3. Specific sites should be targeted for redevelopment and repurposing. There are several sites within the Harbor Historic District that are underutilized, vacant, or do not support the future vision for the area. These sites should be studied, repurposed and redeveloped to support the future vision for the area. Key sites include:

- **Goodwill and Marina Drive areas:**
  - Some key properties in this area have been for sale in the past and provide proximity to the Ashtabula River. Their waterfront locations make them critical properties within the Harbor Historic District that could be redeveloped and repurposed to better meet the vision of the District. Steps to take include:
    - The LBCA and the City should work collaboratively with property owners whose properties are or may be for sale, and gain a clear understanding of the property owners’ interests.
    - This same small committee should identify and investigate other sites and provide any assistance needed, as well as potential incentives, at the appropriate time, to help with transitions in ownership.
    - Should any of the sites become available, a market analysis and incentives should be discussed with potential developers.

- **Marina Drive area** – The properties along Marina Drive include the public restrooms, pump station, garbage dumpsters, Sutherland Marina, and the road leading to the various marinas along the Ashtabula River.
  - The LBCA should explore avenues to reduce the visibility of the dumpsters and create an enlarged, pleasant parking area.
  - The northern most portion of Sutherland Marina is overgrown with trees and underbrush as it borders the Lift Bridge. The LBCA should work with Sutherland Marina to improve the overall appearance.
• Marina Drive is in poor repair. The LBCA should work with the City and the marinas to provide a safe and welcoming roadway.

• The east side of the River, which has historically been used for industrial purposes and is somewhat underutilized in certain areas at this time, provides amazing potential for new uses along the water. The south side of SR 531 provides the most potential for an immediate reuse with a mixture of land uses.

  o The City/LBCA and other partners should follow the same steps as identified above to prepare this site for revitalization.

  o The City should continue its efforts to identify and remediate any environmental issues so that the property is ready for redevelopment. The Port Authority, CDBG, other grants, and CDC are potential sources of funds to pay for Environmental Phase 1 and 2 studies and any required remediation. (Environmental Phases 1 and 2 have been completed on some of the property.) The new “Opportunity Zone” recently approved at both the State and federal levels will eliminate the capital gains tax on new investment. This provides a great incentive for redevelopment. Another incentive could be naming rights for a project or site.

  o It is critical that the City, County, or other economic development partners, do not bring a large industry into the east side of the river unless it is consistent with the vision for the Harbor Historic District. Although new jobs are always an enticement, a quick fix is not always the answer, if it is the wrong use for the area based on the community’s future vision for the area. To assure compliance with the vision, the current zoning should be re-evaluated.

  o Suggested uses for the east side properties from the surveys and stakeholder discussions include water-related businesses, mixed uses, restaurants, a public park or trail along the River, retail, and housing. Additional suggestions or elaborations include: residential condos with boat docks, quality retail, restaurants with outside dining along the River, uses affiliated with water sports, a boutique hotel, second homes or townhomes for boaters, greenspace or public gathering areas, services for boaters (that are not currently provided), and other activities and businesses that generate pedestrian and water-related traffic.
• **GOAL I**

- **The former Coast Guard building** should be redeveloped as a restaurant with outdoor dining, quality retail and/or a Bed & Breakfast or hostel type development, since sleeping accommodations already exist in the building. A hostel could attract mixed age travelers who may be enticed to return as permanent residents.

- **Existing businesses on the east side** of the River should be encouraged to become part of the LBCA and its vision for the future, especially if/when the immediate east side is redeveloped.

4. **Review and update the City's Zoning Code** to accommodate new concepts for development. The City’s Zoning Code has not been completely updated in decades, and much of it does not reflect current development practices. In order to entice the type of development desired in the Harbor Historic District, as well as other areas of the City, the Zoning Code must be updated.

The clearer the code is, the easier it is for developers to understand and address it in their initial design plans, and the easier it is for the City to enforce it. Clearer codes, in general, can reduce red tape, politics, and battles with City Council and Planning Commission, making life easier for everyone. Some suggestions for an updated Zoning Code include:

- The LBCA should work with the City and other partners to appoint a Task Force to focus on updating the Zoning Code, enhancing the architectural review process, and developing creative incentives (see below). The County enforcement officer, interested LBCA members, developers, residents with zoning experience, and business and property owners should be involved in this process. The City should also retain a consultant experienced in Ohio zoning regulations and newer zoning concepts to assist with this overhaul of the current Zoning Code and the architectural review process.

- The **pyramid zoning should be eliminated**. Specific permitted uses for each district should be defined. More current zoning models could be considered such as performance based codes or form based codes.

- **More current types of uses should be included as permitted uses** in the various districts, and
conditioned uses should be reduced in number. Uses that no longer exist should be eliminated.

• **Graphics should be used** extensively to illustrate the Code and a flow chart of the process provided.

• **The H1 Zoning District** does not state that it is an Overlay District. No permitted or conditional uses are listed for the H-1 District, and they should be, if it is not technically an Overlay District. Those uses permitted in the underlying zoning districts--light industrial and general commercial--are not necessarily what are desired in the Harbor Historic District. These underlying zoning districts need to be changed to reflect more of the mixed uses desired in the area if the H-1 District is to be an Overlay District. Or, if the H-1 District is a conventional district, then it should have its own list of permitted and conditional uses and development standards. There are ways to do either successfully (a conventional district or an overlay district) and they should be fully evaluated early in the updating process so that the best method is selected and utilized.

  o Also, there is no review procedure listed and no appeal mechanism. A “Plan” is mentioned, but there is no reference to where that Plan may be found. The H1 District also gives too much leeway to the Architectural Review Board, without adequate guidelines. More clarification is needed (see next section).

  o The eligibility criteria for ARB membership should be reviewed, clarified and enhanced so that members are well versed in the subject matter in order to better serve the purposes of the review board.

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**Overlay Zoning**

- Overlay zoning is a regulatory tool that is used to create a special zoning “layer”, which is placed over an existing base zoning district. This layer identifies special provisions in addition to those in the underlying base zone.

- Overlay zoning may cover one, or more, zoning districts.

- Overlay zoning may provide additional regulations or incentives within a zoning district to protect resources or guide development within a special area.

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• **The Harbor Historic District should be rezoned** to the existing “Special Commercial District” at a minimum, although a new district could be created to best suit this neighborhood. The M1 and M2 districts should be removed from all vacant or non-industrial properties. Early in the updating process, a list of permitted uses that
provide more options to property owners should be developed and shared with landowners and interested parties to get their input and buy-in.

- **The H1 District may need to be expanded** to encompass more of the east side of the River to address the vision for future redevelopment.

5. **Enhance the historic/architectural review process.** The Architectural Review Board (ARB) for the Bridge Street Historic District was created in 1978, and is under the City’s Administrative Code—Part One—Chapter 167. The ARB has created sign guidelines, an application process, and a brochure about the process. It utilizes the Secretary of the Interior’s Guidelines as a basis for their review, which is a good starting point. Although it has accomplished a lot, there are still many issues that should be addressed. For example:

- There are several **terms used for the Architectural Review Board.** One should be selected and used consistently throughout all documents.

- The **process** for zoning permits, building permits, ARB review and approval, Planning Commission review and approval, and Council approval **needs to be clearly defined and outlined** in a handout and on-line under a tab that is easy to locate on the City’s website. The sequencing of approvals should be clearly delineated. There are different ways to trigger architectural review, and they should be explored and discussed, and the best alternative selected for the City.

- **Chapter 34 of the Ohio Building Code** should be used as a basis for review for older and historic buildings.

- There should be **more clarity regarding the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards.** A CFR reference could be added and linked to the guidelines, rather than paraphrasing the Interior’s Standards.

- The **relationship between the City and the ARB needs to be clarified,** and the public needs to be educated on that relationship. The activities that each is responsible for should be clearly defined and enforced.

- **Regulations should be clearly stated** so that they are easier to understand and comply with, resulting in fewer meetings and less controversy.

- **Regulations addressing infill and new construction** are good. They could be much better if they were illustrated. Some of the standards for new construction (front setback, height, and parking lot location, as examples) should be part of the zoning requirements, not part of the guidelines.

- When the City updates its Zoning Code, these guidelines and this process should be part of that update, with the **necessary connections clearly identified** and improved.

- More extensive recommendations and comments are included in **Exhibit A.**

6. **Review and update incentives to entice development.** Whether we like it or not, incentives play a key role in enticing new development or redevelopment to most cities today. Communities compete for businesses by offering incentives to decrease development costs and increase returns on investment, or to encourage development in less than prime market areas. Although the Harbor Historic District is on the rise, incentives are still needed to compete with Cleveland suburbs like Beachwood and Shaker Heights and to increase property values or ROI’s. There are several opportunities the City could explore:
• The City could consider **expanding its CRA incentives** to higher limits (100%, 15 years are the maximums allowed by federal law) for a period of time (maybe ten years) to encourage mixed use development in the Harbor Historic District. State law requires that the school district is included in these discussions and incentives. A payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) may be required for schools.

• The City and County could consider **waiving fees** such as water and sewer tap in fees, zoning and building permit fees, etc. in order to entice development.

• **More aggressive marketing of** state, federal, county, and local incentives should be undertaken, especially when specific projects or developers are involved in desired mixed use development. The 503 Corp could assist with this effort.

• **New and creative incentives** should be investigated and adopted, as appropriate, to make the Harbor Historic District a unique place to do business.

• The **incentives available under the new “Opportunity Zone” designation** recently approved by the state and federal governments for the east side of the River should be marketed to potential developers and businesses to help implement the vision for the rebirth of that area.

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**Opportunity Zones**

**Defer capital gains under the Tax Reform Act**

The Opportunity Zones program was created through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, and is designed to be an economic tool that brings long-term investments in low-income communities.

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**• GOAL 2 •**

**Aggressively pursue additional recreational and entertainment activities that utilize existing resources and entice visitors to the area.**

The Lift Bridge Community Association’s mission is “To promote and develop the Historic Ashtabula Harbor as a major destination for tourism, recreation, and entertainment.” At an early preplanning meeting in 2017, the LBCA identified five target areas to explore further in this new five-year strategic plan, with the first being “recreational businesses and activities.” Thus, recreation is a critical component of this five-year strategic plan. It was the topic of many discussions and was included in several questions on the public survey. Recommendations include:

1. **Add more recreational and entertainment activities and projects.** Additional recreational and entertainment activities and projects should be included in the future vision for the Harbor Historic District, in addition to the walking, boating, kayaking, canoeing, and paddle
boarding activities that are prevalent now. Of the survey respondents, 94% said that they would like to see more recreational activities in the area. Survey respondents and stakeholders both mentioned a variety of additional activities that could be added, including:

- Jet skis
- Cruises and/or ferries from Conneaut to Ashtabula Harbor to Geneva on the Lake (similar to the Jet Express at Put-in-Bay), and dinner cruises
- Light house tours all summer long
- Fishing tube for 20-30 people, charging about $5 per person
- Miniature golf, a public park, nature areas, walking trails along the River, a small amusement park or Ferris wheel, adventure zone, and/or a zip line on the east side of the river.
- Audubon and Sam Wharram bird walks
- “Museum Mondays,” where all museums in the County are open on Mondays (this should be coordinated with open hours for restaurants and shops)
- A piazza or plaza (which could include a splash pool/ice skating rink) somewhere on Bridge Street as central gathering area; this could include a mini welcome center with a rest area and refreshments, especially when the North Shore Trail ends on Bridge Street

North Shore Trail status— Metroparks has been awarded a $1.16 million grant from ODOT through the Transportation Alternatives Program to complete the Trail. The route extends from West Avenue to Smith Field, around to Michigan Avenue to 8th/Laird Street, down 8th to the Harbor at Goodwill. From there it goes to Bridge Street and up the steps to Point Park (a bike trough will be added so people can roll their bikes up and down the steps), and head to Walnut Beach Park via Walnut Blvd.

Next steps—environmental review, revised scope of services, engineering design, review for historical, ADA and other federal requirements, public review of proposed plan, review and approval by Metroparks Board and ODOT, implementation probably in 2019-20.

A piazza or plaza (which could include a splash pool/ice skating rink) somewhere on Bridge Street as central gathering area; this could include a mini welcome center with a rest area and refreshments, especially when the North Shore Trail ends on Bridge Street

- A small amphitheater at the foot of south Hulbert Avenue at Bridge Street (if the City elects to close the street to vehicular traffic) or elsewhere
- A small movie theater with experiential events and an interesting selection of movies
- A fishing pier, with bait and tackle shop on it-- people would have to pay to go beyond the shop, and the vendor would pay rent for the shop
- Amenities for bikers, especially when the North Shore Trail is completed; bicycle riding, safety and repair classes could also be offered
- Life buoys along the River for safety
- More recreation-related retail shops
- A trolley service from Geneva on the Lake, Geneva State Park, wineries, and/or covered bridges to Bridge Street area
- Expansion of the Fleet Parade, possible adding fireworks and providing opportunities for groups or classes to assist with the decorating/undecorating of the boats

- An information kiosk for visitors and boaters to identify activities, shops, museums, dining facilities, equipment rental locations, etc.
- More public docks, possibly finger docks to add more boats
- The City should consider designating the Harbor Historic District an “Outdoor Refreshment District” or an “Outdoor Refreshment Area” as permitted by Ohio law as of May 2015 (ORC 4301.82). This would allow adults to legally walk outside with open containers of alcohol within the designated area. Several Ohio cities have already designated these areas and are experiencing additional vibrancy, especially during the evening hours and special events.

2. Add winter activities and/or projects. Suggestions for potential winter activities include:

- Cross country skiing, snow shoeing
- Bird watching
- Ice skating at a rink that could double as a splash pond in the summer
- A warming hut
- Ice carving festival or seasonal activities—light up the street
- Ice fishing contests
- More indoor entertainment activities during winter, possibly including a cookie stroll, continuation of restaurant week, more support for a bar crawl, shows or movies at a theater, etc.
- Christmas Marts at Walnut Beach Park, in conjunction with activities at Bridge Street merchants
3. Create the finest beach on Lake Erie at Walnut Beach Park (WBP). WBP is considered to be a hidden gem on Lake Erie, and its potential is monumental. The Master Plan completed in 2010 presented many creative and innovative ideas that would achieve this goal. With the passage of the parks levy, the assistance of the Nature Conservancy, and help from the City, WBP is getting more attention now than it has in recent decades, with many improvements being made, but so much more can and should be done.

The City has funding to add a split rail fence trail through the dunes area and to add a viewing platform. The Nature Conservancy received funds to add trees to the Park. The YMCA is providing activities at the Park, including sunset yoga during the summer months, educational boating trips, and nature walks in winter.

Over 79% of survey respondents identified improvements at Walnut Beach Park as the type of activity they would like to see added to the area. In order for this to happen effectively, the City should investigate more permanent management partnerships with other entities, such as the Nature Conservancy or Metroparks. Both survey respondents and stakeholders mentioned some interesting ideas that could instill additional life and activity into Walnut Beach Park. These include:

- Continue to implement the recommendations of the 2010 Walnut Beach Park Master Plan, seeking funds from all state, federal, and local sources
- Add more recreational and entertainment activities and services
- Undertake exterior renovation or reconstruction of the concession stand
- Construct an area for bands to perform—a gazebo, stage, or amphitheater
- Pave the parking area behind the breakwall
- Add a water bouncy slide
- Add food trucks and bands at WBP during “Walnut Wednesdays,” or have each restaurant take a weekend to showcase its menu
- Have festivals at WBP in conjunction with Wine and Walleye or other festivals on Bridge Street, making them more family oriented
• Work with the Art Center to do a “Paint at the Beach” day, and/or a “Theater at the Beach” such as the “Straw Hat Theater” that was moved into the Art Center building, or dinner theaters on the beach
• Rent chairs, umbrellas, cabanas, etc. for public use at the beach
• Add more “Bands at the Beach” (photo below)

It is critical that WBP and Bridge Street be connected both visually and physically, and that synergies between the two areas are capitalized upon whenever possible.

4. **Collaborate with existing organizations and businesses to enhance the recreational and entertainment experience and to provide needed services.** In order for additional recreational opportunities to be successful in the Harbor Historic District, the City and the LCBA will have to partner with, and depend on, others to provide certain services. For example:

• To assure that recreational equipment can be rented in the Harbor Historic District to support these activities and projects, an **equipment rental service is critical.** There is an existing small business, Harbor Yak, which currently rents kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards to the public. With future recreational improvements to the area, Harbor Yak is willing to rent bicycles, jet skis, cross country skis, snow shoes, ice skates, and other recreational equipment as may be needed. This could require that the business be open year-round, which is something the owners are willing to consider. Continued coordination with Harbor Yak is critical to this effort.

• Collaborate with restaurants and shops so that open hours are consistent with recreation and entertainment activities in the District.

• **Packaging activities** through various channels will help sell the Harbor Historic District to families and tourists. The YMCA could sponsor kayak classes, for example, and Harbor Yak could rent the kayaks as part of a recreational weekend, in conjunction with an overnight stay at a local hotel, and lunch and/or dinner at a local restaurant, with coupons for shopping at local shops. The Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACCVB) could be a partner in this effort.

5. **Retain a paid Recreation Director.** All of these recommendations require someone to be in charge of coordinating activities, writing grants, and administering programs. The
City of Ashtabula does not have a recreation director, although it does have a Park and Recreation Board. The LBCA obviously has no one who could fill this role, as members are either business owners or volunteers. Some interesting suggestions evolved from the stakeholder meetings, and include:

- The new **parks levy might be a source for funding** such a person in the future.
- The **YMCA might be willing to contract** with the City to be the recreation director for the City. This concept is worth pursuing, as the two entities could share costs for staff. Numbers should be run to see how this could work. This would be a great opportunity to market the many services of the YMCA and showcase an excellent partnership between the City and the YMCA, as well as other involved partners.
- The **Harbor Yak** is willing to spearhead some recreation efforts, assuming that there will be some financial incentive for the business to do so (such as more equipment rentals).
- The **Harbor Yak and the YMCA are willing to work together** to spearhead recreational activities, specifically classes that require rental of equipment.
- This recreation director could spearhead efforts and request grants for classes, equipment purchases, and other recreation and entertainment activities. He/she could also coordinate efforts to complete the **North Shore Trail** with the Metroparks, to accommodate bicyclists using the Trail as it enters the Harbor Historic District and Walnut Beach Park.
- The recreation director could also **coordinate marketing of recreation and entertainment activities** for the Harbor Historic District (See Goal #4).
• GOAL 3 •

Aggressively promote Clean, Green, and Safe practices to enhance the overall Harbor Historic District environment.

This five-year strategic plan adds a fifth component to the National Four Point Main Street Approach—Clean, Green and Safe. While a community, such as the Harbor Historic District, strives to implement the Four Points of Organization, Design, Economic Vitality, and Promotion, many communities add this fifth element. With a Clean, Green, and Safe component, LBCA strives to make the Harbor Historic District a more inviting place to live, work, and visit by enhancing the cleanliness, attractiveness, friendliness, and sense of security 24/7.

Clean, green and safe efforts in other communities across the country include: aggressively addressing blight and neglect, overseeing daily clean-up crews, managing and maintaining public property, employing an on-street ambassador, and contracting with private security and/or public police force for camera monitoring and bike, car, or foot patrol services.

On visual inspection, the Harbor Historic District, for the most part, is well kept. Survey respondents agree, with almost 65% stating that it is “generally clean.” However, additional areas of improvement were identified in this planning process for implementation during the next five years. Recommendations include:
1. Implement the “Disney Standard.” When thinking of a Disney-theme Park, the following adjectives come to mind: seamless, immaculate, manicured and funded. Disney has four keys to a great guest experience, which the Harbor Historic District also should strive to deliver. These keys (“traditions”) are safety, courtesy, show, and capacity/efficiency. All Disney cast members are trained at Disney University on these four traditions.

Some suggestions to accomplish this in the Harbor Historic District are:

- LBCA should work with Kent State, Heritage Ohio, NEO Fund or other organizations to offer new business/building owner trainings. These trainings could focus on the four Disney keys and the important role a building/business owner plays in a business district. Specific topics could include general upkeep of buildings and sidewalks, parking lot locations, employee parking guidelines (not in prime spaces), and funding opportunities for specific projects. As the trainings become more involved, additional topics such as merchandising, window displays, and employee attitudes could also be provided.

- LBCA should consult with legal counsel to determine if there is a mechanism for a proposed BID/SID to enter into memorandums of understanding between the BID/SID and new building and business owners to voluntarily agree to the four Disney keys and other issues.

- LBCA should work with the City, County, State and area non-profits to review annual funding opportunities to work toward implementing these four Disney keys.
2. **Designate additional gathering areas as a “Third Place.”** "Third Place" refers to places where people spend time between home (first place) and work (second place). They are locations where residents and visitors can meet to exchange ideas, enjoy a good time, and build meaningful relationships. A Third Place is a community builder. Bridge Street has become a Third Place, primarily because of operations like Harbor Perk, which is consistently open seven days a week. Additional public green space or gathering areas was listed as one of the top ten important improvements by survey respondents. Some suggestions to accomplish this are:

- Designate additional gathering areas, both active and passive, to include a pocket park, with furniture and plantings at the corner of Bridge and Goodwill Streets. Other pocket parks could include designated areas for bikes, bocce ball, shuffle board, and/or winter activities.

- **More consistent and expanded hours of operation** among all businesses are required to cement this important role in the community as a third place.

- **Highlight the riverfront** with this gathering area to include decorative fencing along the Southerland Marina property line, street furniture, seating, tables, and plantings. A water feature, brick paved area, or selfie picture site could draw additional residents and visitors.

- The **amphitheater or movie theater** mentioned earlier could also serve as a meeting area.
• Include green spaces as gathering areas on the east side of the River, especially adjacent to the water, with any proposed redevelopments there.

3. Clean up areas around Bridge Street. The City and LBCA should undertake a planned effort to clean up the area around Bridge Street and within the entire Harbor Historic District to make it safer, to encourage additional development, to entice new businesses, residents, and investment to the area, and to improve overall property values. Some suggestions to accomplish this:

• Undertake a lot by lot evaluation of the area, identifying vacant lots, vacant structures, dilapidated structures, underutilized buildings, buildings or lots for sale, and opportunities for acquiring and/or combining lots for resale.

• Work with the City and the Land Bank to identify structures/lots for acquisition and/or demolition, and begin the process. Information on the Land Bank, along with applications and instructions can be found at: www.co.ashtabula.oh.us/672/Ashtabula-County-Land-Bank

• Review the Housing Code to determine if it adequately addresses current property maintenance code issues. Assure that it is adequate and that it is being enforced in the Bridge Street area. Encourage the City and County (which inspects commercial properties) to be more aggressive with delinquent property owners, possibly by posting notices on delinquent properties giving owners ten days to make improvements or penalties start. (The City could make safety improvements and place a lien on the property for repayment. City and County staff may need to be supplemented to undertake such an effort.) The City’s housing code can be accessed at: https://codes.iccsafe.org/public/document/IPMC2015

• Working with the City and the Civic Development Corporation (CDC) or other funders, develop a “Renaissance Block” program, similar to the one that Jamestown NY has implemented. The Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) has started a similar program modeled after the Jamestown program for all of Erie County, PA. These programs provide matching grants to homeowners in designated areas who are willing to improve the curb appeal of their homes for eligible activities such as front porch upgrades, landscaping, window and door replacements, painting, awnings, etc. Targeted areas include those where property owners are not investing in their properties because of dilapidated and/or vacant neighboring properties. These are not worst case neighborhoods, but rather neighborhoods with the potential for reinvestment with some incentive. The City could pursue CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization grants to assist with this effort, matching it with grants from local foundations. Information on these two programs can be found on the Jamestown and ECGRA websites at:

  http://jamestownrenaissance.org/neighborhoods/reinvest/renaissance-blocks
  https://www.ecgra.org/uploads/resources/364773_renaissance-block-program
4. **Improve trash collection in the Harbor Historic District.** Trash collection was mentioned as an issue on Bridge Street. Participants want daily trash removal and utilization of uniform receptacles, as well as better facilitation, organization, and collection of trash. These efforts should expand into the entire Harbor Historic District. Suggestions to accomplish this are:

   - Purchase **trash receptacles and recycling bins** that match the bike rack design and locate them throughout the District.

   - **Identify specific convenient areas for shared dumpsters** for businesses, and add fences and landscaping around these dumpsters. Areas that do not occupy parking spaces are preferred.

   - Use BID/SID resources for daily emptying of small trash receptacles along Bridge Street for collection and removal by the City.

   - Encourage the City to **enforce residential trash violations**, specifically to require landlords to provide trash collection services to tenants.

   - **Include training with business and building owners** on the impact that trash has on the overall environment in the Harbor Historic District—this could be part of new business and building owner training program mentioned above.

   - Implement a **recycling program** to go along with trash collection.

5. **Add more police presence to enforce safety.** Safety is a critical factor in the revitalization of any area, especially when trying to attract residents and visitors to eat, shop, play, work and live in that area. If the area is not perceived as safe (whether it actually is or not), residents and visitors will not invest in, or visit, that area. None of the survey respondents felt unsafe on Bridge Street during the days. However, 11% felt unsafe in the evenings and nights. Even if this is just a perceived issue, as determined after further discussion with City officials, it is one that needs to be addressed. Some suggestions to improve safety are:

   - **Add more street lighting** to light up the area. If public street lighting is not an option, explore a uniform system of lighting on buildings.

   - **Install a security camera system**, tying the cameras into the City police force and/or private security force, as necessary.

   - Review the ability of the City police force to **add additional bike, pedestrian or vehicular police presence** during the evening and night.

   - Develop a **neighborhood watch program**, organizing a network of building owners, business owners, and the police force.

   - Create a **communication system with building and business owners** in the District. This could be as complex as a Nixle system (using email or texts).
• GOAL 3

or as simple as Facebook/Twitter feed blasts. Nixle keeps participants up-to-date with relevant information from local safety departments with delivery of real time messages.

• Install **visible pedestrian walkway signage**. Participants called for clear, visible, and powerful signage requiring vehicles to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks. Public education and enforcement may also be necessary to make this successful. Three recommended choices would be Pedestrian Push Buttons and Heads, Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons, or Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons.

• Work with the industries on the east side of the river to **educate their truck drivers** that they must stop at all pedestrian crosswalks, which may encourage them to use an alternate route rather than driving through the Harbor Historic District on Bridge Street. This could include working with ODOT to **identify and designate an alternative truck route**.

Sample pedestrian crossings

Identify alternative trucks routes for industries
• GOAL 4 •

Capitalize on the “America’s Main Street” award to promote and market the Harbor Historic District.

“It’s official – Bridge Street Ashtabula has won this year’s America’s Main Streets Contest! For the northeastern Ohio community of Ashtabula, the title represents a sweet victory. Last year, Bridge Street Ashtabula earned recognition as a semifinalist but couldn’t clinch the coveted title. This year, the community rallied around its downtown organization to claim the top spot, just as the community has rallied around its historic port to revitalize and restore Ashtabula to its former glory.

For its win, Bridge Street Ashtabula will take home $25,000 cash and additional sponsor-supported prizes aimed at helping the community continue its work. Those additional prizes include a $1,000 STIHL outdoor power equipment certificate, a $500 Do it Best Corp. shopping spree, a $500 PPG Paints® shopping spree and recognition through public relations and social media promotion.”
How about this “claim to fame” to help market the Bridge Street area over the next five years? Starting in June 2018, the Harbor Historic District now has bragging rights to a national award that can help entice visitors and locals to the area. In addition to all the other positive projects underway, this designation, and the national attention it will bring, can serve as an impetus to take current marketing efforts to a new level.

Currently, the Lift Bridge Community Association and its many partners have marketing strategies in place. The LBCA has a $7,500 annual marketing budget and promotes the Bridge Street area through:

- Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACCVB) co-op program
- Lake Erie Living Travel Guide, including one quarterly edition
- Greater Ashtabula Chamber guide
- Star Beacon guide
- Gazette News guide
- Ohio Wine Producers’ Association Wine Trail guide

In addition, the LBCA has a Facebook page and a website. Individual businesses occasionally do promotions that mention the Bridge Street area, and the ACCVB often promotes special events and activities in the Harbor Historic District.

Although the Harbor Historic District is becoming better known to locals, there is still a disconnect with some local residents, as well as other areas and populations in the region and state. Other opportunities for marketing exist in the region, and to some extent, the LBCA is maximizing synergies with these groups, but there is always room for improvement. The LBCA must continue an aggressive marketing program to preserve, protect, and enhance existing businesses on a year-round basis. It is especially important to increase marketing of the District’s biggest traffic generator—the unique concentration of diverse, eclectic places to eat and drink, and that they are open year round.

Suggestions include:

1. **Collaborate more closely with the ACCVB to market the area.** The ACCVB actively promotes the County on a regional basis, and working more closely with them will help market the Harbor Historic District. Some suggestions include:

   - Bridge Street should be part of the FAM tours, which involve travel writers, and are sponsored by the ACCVB. Marketing of the unique places to eat and drink on a year-round basis should be emphasized.
   - The ACCVB also has a five-year signage plan, and the LBCA needs to be part of that process.

   **Concierge services** should be considered to help package plans for visiting the County. These packages could include the many restaurants and bars in the District, coupled with other recreational and entertainment activities, as well as shopping excursions.

Restaurant can be part of visitor packages

Signage needs to identify the District

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**The Ones To Watch:** Small-town Tourism Meets Social Media

**Best Practices**

Tourism expert Sarah Page explained that a fam tour is “a short tour geared toward the press or travel trade to familiarize them with the attractions of a particular area. The hope is that after the tour the press will write stories about the area, and the travel trade will begin to book tours there.”

There are more and more tourism destinations every day on Twitter. Ultimately, I think this is a good thing. Social media, including Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc., are simply just another channel available for marketers, and are valuable tools to include as a part of your marketing arsenal. Yet, there are still too many destinations that haven’t embraced the concept of social media marketing. In most states at least, these tend to be the smaller towns.
• The Harbor Historic District should be placed on the ACCVB’s list of “Top 5 things to do,” emphasizing the numerous restaurants and bars, unique shops and boutiques, and other recreational and entertainment opportunities.

2. Establish wayfinding and gateway signage for the area. (Refer to Goal #5.)

3. Work more closely with local Chambers of Commerce (chambers that represent the city, county, and communities within the region), regional networking groups such as Adventures in Northeast Ohio and Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, and local grassroots groups such as Ashtabulous and Ashtabula Eats. This is a great opportunity to jointly market the Harbor’s unique dining and drinking establishments, boutique shops, and various recreational and entertainment activities.

4. Continue to work with merchants for better coordination and promotional efforts. This is always a tough process, but it is a critical one. Some suggestions include:

   • Expand efforts to recruit additional LBCA members from existing merchants and business owners. (Membership has increased from 20 members in 2008 to 160 in 2018.)

   • Continue to push for joint advertising and cross promoting among local businesses. Although this is a difficult undertaking since not all merchants see the importance or value of marketing, the educational process should continue, especially capitalizing on the success of the many restaurants and bars in the District. Tracking the successes of these promotional efforts in any possible way could help show reluctant business owners why they should participate. Statistics from other communities may be helpful as well.

   • Work with NEOF to provide training sessions for landlords and businesses regarding how to start and operate a financially successful business, how to identify and recruit successful businesses as tenants, and other similar topics.

   • Emphasize the importance of restaurants advertising year round and remaining open year round, as these restaurants create the foot traffic needed to support other retail businesses in the District.

   • Continue to press merchants to participate in events. Every event should involve local merchants, restaurants, and service businesses to have a tent, special activity, promotion, coupons, or something to bring people from the street activities into their businesses.

   • Continue to strive for consistent hours and evening hours. This is always a difficult practice to get independent businesses to accept. However, there are reasons why malls and shopping centers succeed and one of them is the requirement that all businesses
Lift Bridge Community Association Five Goals for Five Years 2018-2023

5. Utilize social media more effectively. A consistent campaign that is liked and shared by all LBCA members could have a huge impact at little/no cost.

- Develop an app for the Bridge Street area that is accessible by smart phone, tablet, and computer. Advertise this app on all promotions.
- Emphasize the need for businesses to utilize e-commerce and on-line tools for both shopping and marketing, including Twitter, Snap Chat, Instagram, etc. to reach today’s modern shoppers and increase sales. These tools are needed for shopping as well as for marketing.
- Place more articles on Google, emphasizing the year-round status of the District, especially its many bars and restaurants and unique shops. Promoting the food business twelve months of the year is critical for the entire District.
- Create a menu of itineraries for visiting the County and place them on social media.

6. Construct an informational kiosk with a map of the area and place it in a strategic location or at several locations (more could be added each year as the area develops) to inform people of where they are and the locations of stores, dining and drinking establishments, services, recreational activities, museums, public restrooms, boat docks, recreational equipment rentals, etc. The format for the kiosk should be such that it can be changed frequently as businesses and activities change.

- Some of the content of the existing kiosk near the bridge could be incorporated into a new and more aesthetic kiosk at that location, while other information could be showcased in more appropriate venues, such as a plaque in one of the existing or proposed riverfront gathering places.
- The kiosk should be compatible with other existing historic markers in the area.

7. Provide trolley or bus service. Work with the County transit authority and private companies currently providing wine shuttles on weekends to provide trolley or bus service to the Harbor Historic District from key locations such as Geneva State Park, the wineries, and other communities within the County. Such a
program could be started on special occasions such as “Shop Small Saturdays” or in conjunction with festivals.

8. **Create more synergies with the wineries.** Develop stronger relationships with the wineries to capitalize on their markets and share clients. Build on a few small initiatives such as table tents and wine pairings during festivals or on specific weekends during the year.

   • Invite the Ohio Wine Producers Association to create a tasting room on Bridge Street in conjunction with special events or on special days.

9. **Market recreation and entertainment in the Harbor Historic District.** There are many entities currently marketing Ashtabula County, the City of Ashtabula, the covered bridges, the wineries, and northeast Ohio. The LBCA has benefited greatly from mutual agreements with these agencies and will continue to do so. Some additional steps to consider include:

   • Continue to **develop brochures** about the Harbor Historic District and specific activities and events and provide these brochures to the Ashtabula Yacht Club and other yacht clubs for distribution to the boaters who frequent their facilities.  
     A downloadable pdf of the brochure should be available on the LBCA website, so visitors can print their own copies in advance of a visit.

   • Create and market a **Harbor Historic District app for smart phones**, including a walking tour of Bridge Street businesses and the historic district residential areas.

   • Add an **info kiosk** close to yacht clubs for boaters.

   • Work with partners to more aggressively promote the **Lake Erie Circle Tour**, plus the state and national **scenic byways** along SR 531.
GOAL 5

Provide the capital improvements needed to stabilize and enhance the Harbor Historic District.

The City and the Lift Bridge Community Association have been diligent in updating the infrastructure on Bridge Street and within the Harbor Historic District. The City was successful in acquiring three Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) in 2013 for a total of $678,200—Critical Infrastructure, Downtown Improvements, and Allocation grants. These funds were used to replace north Hulbert Avenue (a stone street with no comprehensive improvement since its 1913 construction) with a concrete base and new brick. A public parking lot was constructed on the south side of Bridge Street with 50 parking spaces, five decorative street lights, and landscaping. Finally, grant funds were used to install 240 linear feet of walkway, “elephant” stairs and handrails from the riverfront to Point Park. The majority of the infrastructure on Bridge Street dates back decades, so there are still many needed improvements.

At an early preplanning meeting in 2017 and a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) strategic planning exercise in 2018, the Steering Committee identified infrastructure as one of the five goals to explore further in this new five-year strategic plan. Key person interviews were held with City management regarding infrastructure to better understand the current situation and any planned improvements in the Harbor Historic District in the near future. The public survey also asked questions specific to infrastructure on Bridge Street.
A visual inspection of Bridge Street reveals an area with historic charm, including buildings dating from the late 1800s, vibrant planters during the summer months, a few brick streets, and changes in topography. However, some of the infrastructure still requires repair or replacement, including sidewalks, streets, curbs, signage, streetscaping, and green space.

Survey respondents were asked where the LBCA should concentrate its efforts for infrastructure improvements. The responses were as follows:

• “Additional parking improvements” was selected as the #1 priority by 28% of respondents. (54% of respondents felt that parking was not adequate or accessible on Bridge Street. This could be a function of the changes in topography, or because some of the parking is behind buildings. Better signage could help identify existing parking areas.)

• “Burying or relocating of electrical lines” was selected as #1 priority by 18% of the respondents.

• “Additional streetscaping” was selected by almost 16% of the respondents.

• “Additional public green space” by almost 12%, and

• “Wayfinding and identification signs” by 11%.

Road reconstruction was not ranked highly in the survey, but was discussed at length in the stakeholder interviews as being a high priority project.

Survey respondents also mentioned that they would like to see additional landscaping on Bridge Street (72%). Key persons with knowledge and responsibility for infrastructure were interviewed and provided insight into this issue. The City does not own the waterline on Bridge Street; however, there have been no pressure or other issues reported at this time. The City does have total or some level of control over sanitary sewer, storm drainage, streets (except when ODOT is involved), parking, electric, lighting (with the Illuminating Company), streetscaping, signage, Walnut Beach Park, walkways, parking, and green space. Based on this conversation, along with stakeholder and public input, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Address new parking opportunities.** Parking should be addressed with **directional signage and additional spaces** where possible. Whether parking is a real or perceived problem, it becomes a detriment to consumers if they perceive that there is no place to park. As new development continues, the need for more parking will be greater. Some recommendations include:

   • As a first step, the LBCA and the City should assure that existing parking lots and spaces are **clearly identified, signed, and striped**. Signage should be scaled to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Night time parking seems to be in higher demand than daytime parking, therefore lighting, signage, and safety are issues to address. All parking lots should be striped to allow for maximum usage.

   • The City suggests that new parking spaces be added in areas that are not developable as commercial or other space as a first priority. Several sites have been identified for new parking areas, including:
• GOAL 5

○ West 3rd Street and Hulbert Ave. Streets—the vacant house and empty lot could be converted to a new public parking lot.

○ The Goodwill parking lot is vacant during events. Allowing public parking during events could be a fundraiser for Goodwill (or future owner) by charging a minimal fee for parking.

○ The green space between Marina Drive and Goodwill Drive could accommodate a second row of parking on the east side, with enhancement of the green buffer in the center.

○ Current parking on east side of Marina Drive could be reworked to allow for more spaces, possibly with parallel parking along the fence line.

○ Some limited “loading zones” should be designated for 15 minute parking in key areas for deliveries to local businesses.

• Handicapped parking spaces should be evaluated and addressed.

2. Clean up electric and other wires along Bridge Street. There is consensus that electric lines should be cleaned up along Bridge Street. This is one of the top complaints in any older business district. Three concerns were discussed regarding the potential of burying of electrical lines: the high cost; bringing buildings up to code to accommodate new electrical connections; and the amount of infrastructure already buried underground along Bridge Street. If the City did undertake such a costly project, each building would need to be retrofitted to accommodate new connections prior to the electric company completing the project. A more realistic goal may be to clean up the existing electrical
and other wires, with the hopes of relocating the electric lines to the rears of the buildings, although topography may be an issue in many locations. With these thoughts, the following recommendations are made:

- The City and LBCA should initiate discussions with the Illuminating Company to determine if electric and other wires can be cleaned up or relocated to the backs of buildings on Bridge Street, what the real issues are, what the process would be, and what the estimated costs are for doing so.

- If cleaning up or relocation of electric and other wires seem financially feasible, plan logistically for this to occur. Constant communication with building and business owners will be critical. Financial assistance should be sought to lessen the burden on the City and the property owners.

- If/when existing sidewalks are replaced, conduit should be placed underground to prepare for burying electric lines and other wires at a future date, if it cannot be done simultaneously.

3. Add additional streetscaping. Streetscape describes the natural fabric of the area and helps define the design quality of the street and its visual impact. A street is a public place where people engage in various activities. This ties in directly with the notion of Bridge Street being a “Third Place” for residents and visitors (as discussed in Goal #3).

The south side of Bridge Street along the new City parking lot should be a model for streetscaping improvements on all of Bridge Street. The sidewalks have been replaced, the parking lot is paved and striped, with curbing and decorative street lighting, and mulched beds with decorative grasses and shrubs. However, the other side of the street has broken and dangerous sidewalks and is devoid of streetscaping.

The lower Bridge Street area is a good example of impressive streetscaping, with hanging baskets, benches, flowering pots and some trees and shrubs in or near parking lots. Since there is not a lot of room for additional streetscaping along Lower Bridge Street, areas just off Bridge Street and Upper Bridge Street should be targeted for new streetscaping. Specific recommendations include:

- Extend the flower baskets and planters to the western parts of Bridge Street and eventually through even more of the Harbor Historic District, especially within parking lots, as funding becomes available, especially for maintenance, particularly watering the baskets and pots.

- Repair and/or replace sidewalks along Bridge Street, making this a priority for safety and streetscape value, and then continue these improvements outward throughout the District.

- Replace existing benches and trash receptacles with black iron ones to match the iron fence along the riverfront as well as existing black iron bike racks. Utilize the Lift Bridge logo as often as possible to evoke continuity and a sense of place.

4. Add new and enhance existing greenspace on Bridge Street and within the Harbor Historic District. Greenspace, streetscape, and public gathering spaces go hand in hand with creating a viable and welcoming business district environment. It is important to provide greenspace in business districts to break up the hardscapes of the streets, parking lots, and buildings, to add shaded areas, color, and nature to the area.
Specific recommendations include:

- **A new public greenspace could be developed on the east side of the River.** This new greenspace could activate this area, drawing residents and visitors to the other side of the River. (See Goals #1 and 2.)

- **Explore the potential for the vacant land between the former DeFina's shop and Café to transition** into a seating area. Artwork and/or murals could be added to this space, and a pedestrian connector could be added to the upper parking lot and the Briquettes alley walkway. Pavers from the Hulbert Avenue reconstruction could be used and identified for historical reference.

- **The area near the pump station** at Goodwill/Marina Drive/Bridge Street could be developed as a greenspace and/or gathering area (as mentioned earlier). The dumpsters should be located elsewhere or properly screened and maintained to prevent odors, the chain link fence should be replaced with a more attractive wrought iron fence, and if needed, cameras or other technology could be added for security reasons.

- **South Hulbert Avenue could be vacated and converted into pedestrian access only.** Small seasonal or pop-up shops (as seen at malls at Christmas time) could be located in this area. This could also be a new location for the Farmers Market, if/when it may have to relocate from its current location. This space could also be used for outdoor dining space for Rennick or a potential restaurant associated with the proposed boutique hotel. (The City should consider buying the one remaining property that has a driveway onto Hulbert Avenue.)

5. **Install a comprehensive wayfinding and gateway signage system.** Wayfinding systems encompass all the ways in which people orient themselves in physical space, and navigate from place to place. Wayfinding is important in complex built environments such as business districts, healthcare facilities, educational campuses, and transportation facilities. Establishing gateways into special places is key to establishing one's identity. This is critically important for the Harbor Historic District, as it is off the beaten path and is
not Ashtabula’s more established and well known downtown.

Communities, business districts, and neighborhoods use wayfinding and gateway signage systems to assist residents and visitors with locating special places and getting around. With signs of uniform shape, coordinated color schemes, and branding (use of logos for example), wayfinding systems invite residents and visitors (in vehicles or as pedestrians) into an area and direct them where to go. Some suggestions to accomplish this for the Harbor Historic District are:

• **Utilize the County “A” signage system icons** whenever possible for the Harbor Historic District. Continue to work with the ACCVB to be an integral part of its countywide wayfinding system. Many of the County signage system icons are relevant to the Harbor Historic District, as indicated below.

• **Develop a wayfinding system for the Harbor Historic District** that, at a minimum, includes clearly marked entrances to the District to help establish its identity with both locals and tourists. Locations include:
  - Directional signage at the SR 11 and SR 531 intersection pointing to Bridge Street to direct traffic coming off I 90 and SR 11.
  - Gateway signage along SR 531 to identify the eastern boundary of the District.
  - Gateway signage at Lake Avenue and Laird Drive to identify the beginning of the District from the west.
  - Directional signage at Bridge Street and Lake Avenue to direct traffic to the east.
  - Signage for public parking lots.
  - A sign on I-90 identifying the Harbor Historic District for shopping, dining, and boating, as well as Walnut Beach Park for swimming and other activities.

• Work with the City to **replace existing street signs** in the District with the standard brown signs including the LBCA logo. (Brown is the traditional color for historic sites.)

• **Signage should include beautification efforts**—plantings and flowers to match those in the commercial area of Bridge Street would help unite the area visually. Each year, the plantings could be extended as funding is available and new property owners take ownership of the concept. The City and/or other partners should participate in the maintenance of these beautification efforts.

• Efforts and monies should be leveraged with other organizations to make signage more affordable.

• Banners could also be used to advertise special events, being attached to light poles, telephone poles, and/or buildings.
6. Repair and/or repave streets. Some of the streets in the business district are in need of repair or total replacement. The City recognizes that some of the streets are an issue; however, improvements will depend on funding availability. Based on conversations with City management, the following recommendations are made:

- **Bridge Street will be paved** within the next four years as a joint project with ODOT, so the City and LBCA will need to prepare for this. Advertising the use of back entrances, having special “construction sales or events,” and otherwise making the most of the construction situation will be needed to keep consumers coming to the area. (The LBCA has experience with this, since it began as a result of the closing of the bridge for repairs.)

- **The lift bridge is scheduled for repair** again in the short-term future. LBCA should work closely with ODOT and the City to assure that the bridge is not closed during the summer months, and that the project takes no more than four months for completion.

- **Hultbert Avenue (south) is not well utilized** and the condition of the road is dangerous for both vehicles and pedestrians. The City will need to decide a course of action to be taken, either to reconstruct the street or to close it and let it become a public or retail space. (See #4 above.)

- The condition of the **following roads will need to be reviewed** based on their importance in the Harbor Historic District: Marina, Henry, Morton, and Ferry. Repair and/or replacement of these streets will be required as funding becomes available. (Local industries should be asked to assist in maintaining a heavy duty road for their trucks.)

### Wayfinding systems can include signage as follows:

- **Roadway/Path Signage**
  - Major artery and secondary routes
  - Vehicular directional signs
  - Post and panel directional signs
  - Vehicular direction (on mast arm)
  - Banners

- **Gateways/Entry point Signs**
  - Major corridors
  - ODOT highway signage
  - Exit ramp signage

- **Directional Signage**
  - Pointing toward points of interest (Walnut Beach Park, lakefront, riverfront, North Shore Trail, museums, shops, etc.)

- **Trail Blazer Signs**
  - Signs to reinforce and validate routes to major destinations
  - Identification Signage
  - Freestanding signs with numbers, letters or lot name

- **Regulatory Signs**
  - Street names
  - Speed limits
  - Pedestrian/bikeway
  - Pedestrian crossings
  - Stop/yield signs

- **Other**
  - Street light banners
  - Storefront signs
  - Pets on leash
  - No bikes on sidewalks
  - Evacuation routes
  - Informational kiosk
  - Gathering areas
7. Provide public WiFi and an audio/public address system. An accessible public WiFi network is a necessity to the Bridge Street area from the western boundary near the Iroquois Lounge to the eastern boundary of the lift bridge and transient dock. There are currently a handful of merchants or restaurants that offer guest access to their patrons, but nothing serves those outside, resting on a bench or park, or at dockside where and when boaters could use it most. Technology drives millennials and generation X folks to spend greater amounts of time in a particular place. This would encourage visitors to meet others on Bridge Street, and tourists to return because of such friendly amenities.

A public address system would benefit the Bridge Street area similar to those of other first-class shopping destinations. Christmas music during the holidays might be a nice addition for shoppers. The public address system with microphone would provide opportunities for announcements at events throughout the Bridge Street area, as well as for small solo acts to “plug-in” and “play” their instruments and mic.

James Jones, Artist
This Strategic Plan is intended to assist the Lift Bridge Community Association and its partners with making informed short- and long-range decisions for improving the Harbor Historic District. It is the product of substantial local public engagement and reflects best practices in “Five Goals for Five Years.” This section summarizes the major proposed initiatives—goals and strategies that are essential to the success of the LBCA and the Harbor Historic District as they continue into the future. Strategies to achieve the individual goals are divided into high, moderate, and general priorities. Potential partners and potential funding sources are also listed.

Once again, it is imperative to understand that the LBCA Board must prioritize three to five of these strategies each year, identifying what can be reasonably achieved and financed within the next twelve months. It is also critical that an LBCA director be hired to help implement this Plan, and that a consultant be retained to assure that the SID/BID is effectively created in a timely manner, to help fund some of these initiatives.

**GOAL 1:** Promote and support a mixture of land uses in the Harbor Historic District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1.1</strong></th>
<th>Complete a Market Analysis that analyzes market demand and types of businesses that could be profitable within the Harbor Historic District.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action Steps:</strong></td>
<td>• Compile a list of issues to review in a Market Study, including but not limited to housing, mixed uses, retail and service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential Partners:</strong></td>
<td>Lift Bridge Community Association (LBCA), Ashtabula County Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau (ACCVB), City, County, Consultants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential Funding Sources:</strong></td>
<td>LBCA, SID/BID, Civic Development Corporation (CDC), ACCVB, Growth Partnership, City Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), City and/or County Revolving Loan Fund (RLF).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1.2</strong></th>
<th>Ensure that new land uses support existing businesses.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action Steps:</strong></td>
<td>• Meet with potential developers and realtors.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recruit development for upper floors of existing buildings for service businesses and moderate-priced residential housing.</td>
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<td>• Recruit infill development for all vacant lots.</td>
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<td>• Work with property owners to provide second floor rear property access.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with property owners and/or developers to transform existing residential into higher quality residential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential Partners:</strong></td>
<td>LBCA, Private Property Owners, City, Realtors, Developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential Funding Sources:</strong></td>
<td>CDBG ED, City and County RLF, SBA 504, Federal and State Historic Tax Credits, EB-5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1.3</strong></th>
<th>Target specific sites for redevelopment. Work to identify best and highest use for property, especially closer to waterfront.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action Steps:</strong></td>
<td>• Compile property specifications for prime properties that are, have been, or may be listed for sale, the east side of the river, and the former Coast Guard building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue communication with key property owners to determine if implementation of the vision is possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential Partners:</strong></td>
<td>LBCA, Private Property Owners, City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential Funding Sources:</strong></td>
<td>In-Kind, LBCA, Foundations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.4 Review and update the City’s Zoning Code.

**Action Steps:**
- Appoint a Task Force.
- Retain a Consultant fluent in Ohio zoning law.
- Eliminate pyramid zoning and investigate performance-based or form-based zoning.
- Include more current types of uses as permitted uses.
- Address inconsistencies with the H-1 District, overlay zones and lack of review procedures and appeals mechanism.
- Provide illustrated regulations.
- Rezone the Harbor Historic District and/or create a new district and expand it.

**Partners:** City, County, Consultant, Key Developers.

**Potential Funding Sources:** In-Kind, CDBG Allocation, City and County RLF or general funds.

1.5 Enhance the historic/architectural review process.

**Action Steps:**
- Agree on and use consistent title of “Architectural Review Board- ARB.”
- Agree on sequencing of ARB application and approval process.
- Use Chapter 34 of the Ohio Building Code (OBC) for review of older, historic buildings.
- Conduct training for ARB and City staff regarding ARB process, using a flow chart outlining all roles, responsibilities, and timeline for reviewing and approving Certificates of Appropriateness.

**Partners:** LBCA, City, ARB, Consultant.

**Potential Funding Sources:** City, LBCA, Private Foundations, CDBG.

1.6 Review and update incentives to entice development in the Harbor Historic District.

**Action Steps:**
- Prepare a comprehensive list of existing incentives.
- Consider increasing CRA limits to 100% for 15 years.
- Waive development fees (water and sewer tap in, zoning, and building permit) when needed to entice development.
- Examine new and creative incentive programs (federal and state tax credits, DDA, TIF, SID/BID, EB-5, etc.)

**Potential Partners:** LBCA, City, Consultant, 503 Corp, Growth Partnership.

**Potential Funding:** Private Foundations, City, County, Federal and State Grant/Loan Programs.
### GOAL 2: Aggressively pursue additional recreational and entertainment activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1</th>
<th>HIGH PRIORITY</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Add more recreational activities and projects in the Harbor Historic District. New activities should complement existing activities. | Action Steps:  
- Pursue additional water-related activities and the availability of rental equipment.  
- Pursue additional cultural activities.  
- Pursue additional recreational/greenspace activities.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, City, County, YMCA, Private Business Owners, Private Developers.  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.2</th>
<th>MEDIUM PRIORITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Add winter activities and/or projects in the Harbor Historic District. | Action Steps:  
- Pursue cold weather activities.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, Business Owners, City, YMCA, Metroparks.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH PRIORITY</th>
<th>MODERATE PRIORITY</th>
<th>LOW PRIORITY</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **2.3** Create the finest beach on Lake Erie at Walnut Beach Park (WBP). | **Action Steps:**  
- Implement recommendations from the 2010 WBP Master Plan.  
- Consider entering into a management agreement with an entity capable of managing and enhancing the park.  
- Add more recreational and entertainment activities and services.  
- Undertake exterior renovation or reconstruction of concession stand.  
- Construct an area for performances.  
- Pave the parking area behind the breakwall.  
- Add food trucks and/or bands during Walnut Wednesdays and during festivals on Bridge Street.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, City, County, Nature Conservancy, Metroparks, YMCA, Arts Center, Wine and Walleye Festival Committee, Rotary, Walnut Wednesdays Committee.  
Potential Funding: Parks Levy, Metroparks, Nature Conservancy, City, County, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Transportation, CDBG Allocation, Private Foundations, Local and national Businesses (e.g. Lowe’s), Rotary International. |  |
| **2.4** Collaborate with existing organizations and businesses to enhance recreational and entertainment experiences and to provide needed services. | **Action Steps:**  
- Facilitate equipment rental to support increased recreational and entertainment experiences.  
- Work with Bridge Street business owners to implement open hours consistent with recreation and entertainment activities.  
- Package recreation and entertainment activities through partnerships to sell the Harbor Historic District.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, City, Private Businesses (e.g. Harbor Yak), ACCVB, YMCA, County.  
Potential Funding: Parks Levy, City, County, In-Kind. |  |
| **2.5** Retain a paid Recreation Director. | **Action Steps:**  
- Facilitate partnerships between City, YMCA, private business owners, and non-profits to fund a paid staff person to be responsible for spearheading increased recreational activities.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, City, County, YMCA, Private business owners, Metroparks.  
Potential Funding: Parks Levy, City, County, YMCA, CDC, Foundations. |  |
GOAL 3: Aggressively promote Clean, Green, and Safe practices to enhance the overall Harbor Historic District environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH PRIORITY</th>
<th>3.1</th>
<th>Implement the “Disney Standard” of the four “keys” to create a great guest experience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Action Steps:** | - Work with experts in the field of historic commercial districts and offer new business/ building owner training.  
- Facilitate memorandums of understanding between BID/SID and new business/building owners on roles/responsibilities.  
- Review annual funding opportunities to implement the four “keys.” |
| **Potential Partners:** | City, LBCA, Heritage Ohio, Kent State University, Leadership Ashtabula County, Private Building/Business Owners. |
| **Potential Funding:** | Heritage Ohio, LBCA, City, CDC. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODERATE PRIORITY</th>
<th>3.2</th>
<th>Designate additional gathering areas as a “Third Place.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Action Steps:** | - Designate additional gathering areas to include a pocket park at the corner of Bridge and Goodwill Streets.  
- Work toward more consistent and expanded business hours of operation to assist in making the Harbor Historic District a “Third Place.”  
- Highlight the riverfront as gathering areas by making improvements including seating, water feature, brick paved area or selfie picture site.  
- Add amphitheater and/or movie theater to facilitate gathering.  
- Work toward greenspace as gathering areas on the east side of the River. |
| **Potential Partners:** | LBCA, City, Building/Property/Business Owners, Residents. |
| **Potential Funding:** | City, LBCA, ODNR NatureWorks, CDBG Allocation |

| 3.3 | Clean up areas around Bridge Street. |
| **Action Steps:** | - Undertake a lot by lot evaluation of the area.  
- Work with City and Land Bank to identify structures/ lots for acquisition and/or demolition and start necessary procedures.  
- Review the Housing Code to assure that it adequately addresses property maintenance code issues.  
- Develop a “Renaissance Block” program. |
| **Potential Partners:** | LBCA, City, Land Bank, CDC, County. |
| **Potential Funding:** | In-Kind, CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization/ CHIP. |
### 3.4 Improve trash collection in the Harbor Historic District.

**Action Steps:**
- Purchase trash receptacles and recycling bins that match the bike racks.
- Identify and map specific convenient areas for shared dumpsters in parking areas or behind buildings, and screen the areas aesthetically.
- Work with City to enforce residential trash violations.
- Provide training to business/building owners on methods to address trash.
- Implement a recycling program to complement trash collection.

**Potential Partners:** LBCA, City, County Solid Waste District, Building/Business Owners.

**Potential Funding:** City, County Solid Waste District, Ohio EPA Recycling and Litter Prevention programs, BID/SID.

### 3.5 Add more police presence to enforce safety.

**Action Steps:**
- Add more lighting, utilizing lighting on buildings when street lighting is inadequate.
- Install security camera system that ties into the City police department.
- Add additional bike, pedestrian or vehicular police presence, especially during evenings and nights.
- Develop a neighborhood watch program.
- Create a communication system with building and business owners.
- Install visible pedestrian walkway signage.
- Spearhead an educational program for industrial truck drivers to observe pedestrian crosswalks.
- Work with ODOT to identify and designate an alternative truck route.

**Potential Partners:** LBCA, City, City Police Department, Building/Business Owners, Industries on east side of the River, ODOT.

**Potential Funding:** City, SID/BID, US Department of Justice/Community Oriented Policing Services, ODOT Transportation Alternatives/Safety/Surface Transportation Programs.
GOAL 4: Capitalize on the “America’s Main Street” award to promote and market the Harbor Historic District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Action Steps:</th>
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</table>
| 4.1 | • Work to add Bridge Street to year-round Familiarization (FAM) Trips.  
• Work to add Bridge Street to the ACCVB Five-Year Signage Plan.  
• Develop concierge services to package plans for visiting the County.  
• Place the Harbor Historic District on ACCVB’s list of “Top 5 Things To Do.”  |
| Potential Partners: LBCA, City, Business/Building Owners, ACCVB, Travel Providers.  
Potential Funding: In-Kind, LBCA, ACCVB, CDC. |
| 4.2 | (Refer to Goal #5.5) |
| 4.3 | • Develop partnerships with other chambers that represent city, county, and communities in the region, as well as regional networking groups and local grassroots groups.  |
| Potential Partners: LBCA, Adventures in Northeast Ohio, Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, Ashtabeautiful and Ashtabula Eats.  
Potential Funding: In-Kind, CDC, ACCVB. |
| 4.4 | • Recruit additional LBCA members.  
• Push for joint advertising and cross promoting among local businesses.  
• Press merchants to participate in events with special promotion.  
• Continue to strive for consistent business hours and additional evening hours.  |
| Partners: LBCA, Business/Building Owners.  
Potential Funding: In-Kind, Heritage Ohio Technical Assistance, BID/SID. |
| 4.5 | • Develop an app for the Harbor Historic District.  
• Place more articles on Google about the Harbor Historic District.  
• Create menus of itineraries for the County and place them on social media.  
• Promote more e-commerce for both shopping and marketing.  |
| Potential Partners: LBCA, Kent State University, Leadership Ashtabula County.  
Potential Funding: In-Kind, ACCVB, CDC, Foundations. |
| **4.6** | **MODERATE PRIORITY** | Action Steps:  
- Agree upon style and location as part of a District wayfinding signage system.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, City, ACCVB, County.  
| --- | --- | --- |
| **4.7** | **GENERAL PRIORITY** | Action Steps:  
- Work to develop a stop in the Harbor Historic District from wineries, Geneva State Park and other communities in the County.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, County Transit, Private Transit Companies, Geneva State Park Lodge.  
Potential Funding: City, County, BID/SID, Transit Companies. |
| **4.8** | **GENERAL PRIORITY** | Action Steps:  
- Develop stronger relationships to complement area wineries.  
- Work with the Ohio Wine Producers Association to do tastings on Bridge Street or develop a local tasting room.  
Partners: LBCA, Local Wineries, Ohio Wine Producers Association (OWPA).  
Potential Funding: In-Kind, Wineries, OWPA. |
| **4.9** | **GENERAL PRIORITY** | Action Steps:  
- Develop brochures about the Harbor Historic District and place a downloadable pdf on LBCA's website.  
- Create and market a Harbor Historic District app.  
- Add informational kiosks for boaters.  
- Work with partners to more aggressively promote the Lake Erie Circle Tour and State and National Scenic byways along SR 531.  
Potential Partners: LBCA, Local Yacht Clubs, Kent State University, Lake Erie Circle Tour.  
Potential Funding: In-Kind, CDC, ACCVB, Foundations. |
GOAL 5: Provide the capital improvements needed to stabilize and enhance the Harbor Historic District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH PRIORITY</th>
<th>Action Steps:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.1</strong> Address new parking opportunities.</td>
<td>• Assure existing spaces are clearly identified, striped and signed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Add new public parking spaces or facilitate shared parking spaces at West 3rd &amp; Hulbert, the Goodwill Parking Lot, Marina Drive &amp; Goodwill Drive, and east side of Marina Drive.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Designate some “limited loading zones.”</td>
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<td>• Evaluate and address handicapped parking spaces.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential Partners: LBCA, City, Building/Business Owners.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential Funding: City, City in-kind, CDBG, SID/BID.</td>
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<tr>
<th>GENERAL PRIORITY</th>
<th>Action Steps:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.2</strong> Clean up electrical and other wires along Bridge Street.</td>
<td>• Initiate discussions with the Illuminating Company to determine the feasibility.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Plan logistically for cleaning up the wires with all parties.</td>
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<td>• Place conduit underground as sidewalks are replaced.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Potential Funding: BID/SID, CDBG, ODOT Transportation Enhancements.</td>
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<tr>
<th>HIGH PRIORITY</th>
<th>Action Steps:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.3</strong> Add additional streetscaping in the Harbor Historic District</td>
<td>• Extend flower baskets and planters to western parts of Bridge Street and the entire Harbor Historic District.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Repair and/or replace sidewalks along Bridge Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Replace/add benches and trash receptacles with black iron to match existing bike racks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential Partners: LBCA, City, Garden clubs, Local nurseries, Lowe’s/Home Depot.</td>
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<tr>
<th>HIGH PRIORITY</th>
<th>Action Steps:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.4</strong> Add new and enhance existing greenspace on Bridge Street and within the Harbor Historic District.</td>
<td>• Develop new public greenspace on the east side of the river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explore potential development of seating area on vacant land between former DeFina’s and the Café.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop greenspace and/or gathering area at Goodwill/Marina Drive/Bridge Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explore potential to vacate South Hulbert Avenue and convert into pedestrian access only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential Partners: LBCA, City, Building/Business Owners, Residential Home Owners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential Funding: ODNR NatureWorks, CDBG Allocation, Downtown, Neighborhood Revitalization, BID/ SID.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERATE PRIORITY</td>
<td>PARTNERING AND FINANCING OPTIONS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.5</strong></td>
<td>Install a comprehensive wayfinding and gateway signage system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Steps:</td>
<td>• Develop a wayfinding system for the Harbor Historic District.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Replace existing street signs to include the name of the district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Add additional beautification efforts with plantings/flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leverage efforts and monies for wayfinding signage with other organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create banners to advertise special events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Partners:</td>
<td>LBCA, City, County, ACCVB, Walk (Your City).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Funding:</td>
<td>ODOT Transportation Alternatives, Sign Research Foundation, Knight Foundation, Kickstarter Campaign.</td>
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<tr>
<th>MODERATE PRIORITY</th>
<th>PARTNERING AND FINANCING OPTIONS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.6</strong></td>
<td>Repair and repave streets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Steps:</td>
<td>• Work with building/business owners during upcoming Bridge Street repaving to keep business as usual during the construction project.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with ODOT and the City when the lift bridge is repaired to assure it is not closed during summer months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Address South Hulbert Avenue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review condition of the following roads: Marina, Henry, Morton and Ferry, and pursue upgrades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Partners:</td>
<td>LBCA, City, Building/Business Owners, Residents on South Hulbert Avenue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Funding:</td>
<td>In-Kind, BID/SID, TIF, Ohio Public Works Commission SCIP/LTIP programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>MODERATE PRIORITY</th>
<th>PARTNERING AND FINANCING OPTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.7</strong></td>
<td>Provide public WiFi and a public address system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action Steps:</td>
<td>• Work with local providers to provide WiFi for the entire Harbor Historic District.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Install a public address system on Bridge Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Partners:</td>
<td>LBCA, City, Spectrum/ Viasat/ Windstream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Funding:</td>
<td>BID/SID, Local Foundations, Google.</td>
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Stakeholder and Public Input

Stakeholder engagement and public input is a critical part of any planning process. A viable and implementable plan requires a process that emphasizes consensus building, to allow broad support, effortless adoption, and agreement on goals and action steps. At the end of this planning process, it is hoped that all parties will agree on the major ideas and support the proposed implementation strategies. To ensure strong public input, the LBCA utilized Strategic Planning Committee meetings, stakeholder interviews, Board meetings, a public survey, and a public meeting to acquire input and spur creative thinking. Similar themes, ideas, strategies, and goals surfaced across the various input methods.

Stakeholder Meetings.

The Lift Bridge Community Association coordinated three meetings of the Strategic Planning Committee over three months starting in December 2017. [December 14, 2017, January 25, 2018 and February 22, 2018.] Approximately 20 community leaders and interested citizens identified several key strategic objectives for the LBCA to focus planning efforts on and to implement over the next five years. The goal of these meetings was to develop a short list of goals and strategies that will have the greatest positive impact on the LBCA’s mission over the next five years. These meetings created the “five key goals” for the next five years, which served as the basis for the planning process. A list of these individuals, as well as LBCA Board members & consultants can be found in Exhibit B.

The December 14th meeting focused on “thinking big and creatively,” emphasizing a new plan, not a revised or plan update. Resulting ideas included: redevelopment of the old Coast Guard Station; establishment of Special Improvement District (SID) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF); promoting mixed uses on Bridge Street; uniform business hours; more of a focus on recreation and entertainment; additional beautification efforts; a greater police presence; development of east side of the river; cleaning up electric and other wires; second floor residential; and executive housing or more upscale housing in general.

The January 25th meeting was a SOAR exercise (Strength, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results) led by Ms. Marta Stone. SOAR was chosen over SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) due to its appreciative inquiry approach. Committee members reviewed the following:

- **Strengths:** What are the greatest strengths of the district? What is doing really well, what are its greatest assets and what have been the greatest accomplishments in the district? What do people value about the district?

  Identified strengths included: local trends; paradigm shift; timing; recreation; wildlife; lake and water; eating and drinking establishments; history; people (supporters, visionaries, volunteers, workforce, tourists); intergenerational entertainment; neighborhood amenities; boating and marina access; accessibility; shipping and industry port; confidence and commitment; regional success; diversity; culture (museum, visual arts); quality; available space; architecture review board; infrastructure; scenic setting; owner/operators; marketing; funding (internal and external); low barrier to entry (investments); and collaboration.

- **Opportunities:** What external circumstances could be improved? Any threats or weaknesses reframed into possibilities? What “connection” opportunities exist? Where can value be added to benefit others?

  Identified opportunities included: east side of the river for development and/or redevelopment; organization connections and connections to other markets; more...
beautification (trees, vacant buildings); safety with better enforcement/perception issue; more pedestrian friendly/walkability; welcoming corridors; natural resources; second floor businesses; more events; more partners; additional high-end businesses; expand to west on Bridge Street; recreational businesses; shoulder seasons; info/marketing/advertising; leveraged financing/private capital; higher space productivity; transportation/accessibility/connections to other places (water taxi, trolley); and diversify development.

• Aspirations: What is the preferred future? What can the Harbor become? What do we desire it to be known for?

Identified aspirations included: self-reliant community; property maintenance enforcement; partnerships; transportation; wayfinding signage; local and regional destination; waterfront destination; cleaning up electric and other wires; new sidewalks; best and highest uses of all buildings; greater open access to water; better parking availability; east side of river development; year-round recreation; connected partnerships; and special improvement district.

• Results: What are the indicators or measures that will let us know we are achieving the preferred future? What will be different for people living, working, serving, and visiting the Harbor Historic District? Who will be responsible for making things happen?

Identified results included: increased property values; increased residential/commercial population; storefront stability; live/work environment; infrastructure improvements; home ownership increases; job increases; second homes; paid manager; land bank success; upscale housing; decrease in vacant land/buildings; more utilization of incentives; local perception increases; more usage of assets; increase business numbers; number of hotel rooms; number of new events; expansion of Bridge Street footprint; increased LBCA membership; results of educational efforts; number of volunteer hours; number of façade improvements; number of tourists (determine where from with license plates, zip codes); and media features.

The February 22nd meeting discussed Operations and Organization; Beautification and Design; Strategic Planning and Economic Development; Marketing and Promotions; and Clean, Green, and Safe issues. Members gave suggestions for each category, narrowing the focus down to five key goals and strategies to implement those goals.

Interviews.

Group interviews or conference calls were conducted with “key stakeholders” identified by the LBCA on each of the five key issues--Infrastructure; Recreation; Clean, Green, and Safe; Marketing; and Mixed Use Development. Having “key stakeholders” in the same room or in the same conversation was beneficial in fleshing out existing concepts and ideas and in identifying new concepts and ideas. The persons participating in the interviews are identified in Exhibit B.

Board Meetings.

The LBCA Board continued to meet monthly during this planning process and devoted some of each meeting to discussing and refining the planning process. At the May 14th Board meeting, members were presented with the five key issues identified through the planning process to date: Mixed Use Development, Infrastructure, Recreation, Marketing, and Clean/Green/Safe Issues. These issues were presented on charts with action steps listed under each issue. Board members were asked to rank action steps under each goal so that the consultants could start to prepare a draft Five-Year Strategy for the next step in the planning process.
Public Survey.

A survey was developed targeting these five key goals and containing related questions in April 2018. Approximately 140 responses were collected over a three-month period. The survey was posted on City and LBCA websites and was done through SurveyMonkey. A complete listing of the survey results can be requested from the LBCA. Some highlights include:

• Walking (76%) and Boating (43%) were the top recreational activities conducted in the Bridge Street area. Other responses included: kayaking, paddle boarding and canoeing.

• An overwhelming 94% of respondents want more recreational activities added to the area. Suggestions include Walnut Beach Park improvements; walking trails; kayaks, jet skis, canoes, and paddle board rentals; and fishing piers. Other responses included live music/amphitheater, tennis courts, and bike rentals.

• An overwhelming 91% want additional commercial/retail uses on Bridge Street. Some suggestions included: gift shops, restaurants, wine shop/tasting room. Also mentioned were: brewery, specialty shops, specialty grocery, fishing tackle and supplies, recreational equipment rental, and breakfast restaurant.

• Over 60% of respondents want additional service businesses on Bridge Street. Suggestions include: a bank, realtor, financial planner, and doctor’s office. Also mentioned were a fishing charter, ATM, and unique services. (Since an existing fishing charter already exists, more publicity may be required.)

• Over 74% of respondents said they want additional residential development along Bridge Street. Suggestions included: condos, bed and breakfasts, upscale rentals, and single-family homes. Other responses mentioned included: hotel/motel/extended stay facilities; housing that does not block the view; and townhomes, condos, and/or apartments on second floors.

• Suggestions for development of the east side of river included: mixture of uses, water-related businesses, restaurants, and a public park and/or trail. Only office use was ranked low (almost 14%). Other responses mentioned included: a boardwalk, hotels, amphitheater, and parking.

• 65% of respondents felt that Bridge Street is generally clean. Only 2% of respondents said it was always unkempt.

• 72% of respondents would like to see more landscaping on Bridge Street.

• 42% of respondents said they feel very safe, 48% said generally safe, and 11% said feel unsafe in evenings/night only. Additional lighting, security cameras and additional police presence ranked as the top three improvements to make respondents feel safer. Responses such as noise levels from people and cars, drunks, and jaywalkers made the area feel unsafe. Respondents stated that additional street lighting was needed at the Hulbert Street parking lot and along Morton Drive.

• 69% of respondents said pedestrian connections are adequate. However, other respondents mentioned that better delineation of crosswalks, more signage, ticketing offenders, repainting of crosswalks, speed bumps, and new sidewalks were needed.

• Almost 54% said parking is not adequate and/or accessible. Other responses included: additional public parking lots, better signage, more parking spaces, additional handicapped parking spaces, and investigating the east side of the river for additional parking lots.

• Infrastructure projects ranked (highest to lowest in importance): Additional parking, additional streetscaping, burying/relocating electrical lines, addition of period lighting, and wayfinding signage.
Respondents are attending the following events: Wine and Walleye Festival, Farmers Market, Beach Glass Festival, Small Business Saturday, Arts on Bridge Street, and Restaurant Week.

Respondents would like to see the following additional events: a multi-cultural festival; family events; music festivals and/or concerts; wintertime activities; food festivals; parades; fireworks; dancing in the street; fishing and boating events; art festival; car shows; and outdoor movies.

Suggestions for using Bridge Street during non-tourist months include: a large Christmas tree; keeping stores and restaurants open late one night per week; keeping sidewalks clear of snow and ice; designating meeting places for classes and presentations; a New Year’s event like Port Clinton has; winter festivals; ice skating rink and/or a sledding hill; fishing tournaments; more marketing; stores should be open for tourists; more hotels and b&bs; and partnerships with KSU to entice students to frequent Bridge Street.

Approximately 84% would support consistent business hours. Other comments about business hours varied, with some saying it should be up to the individual business owners, and others saying that some businesses should be open later.

**A majority of respondents support a BID/SID.** (This is critical!)

- 71% of respondents are not LBCA members.

- 41% of respondents live in Ashtabula County, while 42% of respondents live in the City of Ashtabula.

- A majority of respondents visited Bridge Street weekly (32%), followed by 24% visiting daily. Almost 55% of respondents said that the #1 reason they visit Bridge Street was for eating. The next largest category was for working (11%).

- A majority of respondents were ages 60-69 (27%). The next largest category was ages 30-39 (almost 21%).

**Public Presentation**

A presentation of the proposed Five Goals for Five Years Strategic Plan was presented to key stakeholders, participants in the planning process, local government officials, agency representatives, and members of the public at a meeting at the Public Library on August 14, 2018. A PowerPoint presentation was provided and copies of the Executive Summary were given to participants.
National Register District Historic Review Process

The creation of the Design Review Board (called the Architectural and Restoration Review Board or ARRB) is under the City’s Administrative Code--Part One--Chapter 167. Section 167.01 states that the ordinance affects only the National Register Properties within the historic district. It is not clear if this means only the contributing buildings within the district or all buildings within the district. It should include both contributing and non-contributing structures. This should be made very clear.

Chapter 167.06 refers to the powers and duties of the Board in reference to Chapter 1137-- District H-1 Harbor Historical District. This is one of the City’s established zoning districts. However, as pointed out earlier, it does not include permitted or conditional uses. It states that permitted uses “are subject to the review process as set forth in this chapter.” However, there is nothing set forth in the chapter regarding uses. This needs to be addressed; otherwise potential legal problems could result.

The definition section (1137.01) needs to be expanded to include other terms such as alter, alteration, demolition, architectural detail, etc.

The ordinance refers to the US Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings in erroneous ways (1137.02 (d)) and makes reference to the standards as coming from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (1137.04 (d)). The references should be properly stated.

The triggering mechanism for ARRB review is also not clear. Most ordinances trigger the ARB process through the building permit process. This one does not. A triggering mechanism should be stated.

There is no mention of a Certificate of Appropriateness that most Design Review Boards (DRBs) issue when the activity has been reviewed and approved. These certificates are usually posted alongside the building permit on the structure while the work is getting done.

The demolition process is a little unclear. It references review by the Planning Commission but then states that the ARRB has the exclusive power to determine whether a structure gets demolished or not (exempting declared public nuisances). It is not clear if the ARRB can prohibit a demolition outright or whether the ARRB can impose a waiting period like some other ordinances.

The appeals process is cumbersome. The Planning Commission is the appeals board to the ARRB but the Planning Commission decision can also be appealed. Most ordinances have the decision of the appeals board go to the courts.

The ordinance has no sections on penalties, maintenance requirements, demolition through benign neglect, or a severability clause.
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