

DRAFT

January 2023



# Downtown Franklin master plan





Page left intentionally blank.



# Acknowledgments

The Downtown Master Plan is, first and foremost, a product of this community. It could not have been possible without the voice and vision of the Franklin people. **We thank everyone that joined in envisioning and planning for tomorrow's Downtown!**

## City Council

Brent Centers, Mayor  
Todd Hall, Vice-Mayor  
Michael Aldridge  
Denny Centers  
Paul Ruppert  
Deborah Fouts  
Mathew Wilcher

## Planning Commission

Brent Centers, Mayor  
David Hopper  
Christine Piro  
Brian Graves  
Paul Ruppert  
Jason T. Hall  
Kyle Crocker

## Citizen's Advisory Committee

Rod Litteral  
*Downtown Business Owner*  
Rachel Ruppert  
*Franklin School Board/Attorney*  
Adam Colon  
*Police Chief*  
Amy Hudson Estep  
*Resident/School District*  
John Wolfenbarger  
*Community Member*  
Tom Cloud  
*Henkle Schueler*  
Betsy Westendorf  
*Special Events Committee*  
Brian Graves  
*Resident*  
Martha Bush  
*Franklin/Springboro Library*  
Kyle Crocker  
*Planning Commission*

## City Staff

Jonathan Westendorf  
*City Manager*  
Karisa Steed  
*Assistant City Manager*  
Khristi Dunn  
*Clerk of Council*  
Barry Conway  
*City Engineer*

Robert Alexander  
*Community Member*  
Julie Kellis  
*Harding Museum*  
Charlie Samaan  
*Business Owner - JD Legends*  
Rodney Roberts  
*Franklin City Schools*

Susan Stewart  
*Alamo Enterprises*  
Tom Wiggerhaus  
*WesBanco Bank*  
Peggy Darragh-Jeromos  
*Franklin Area Chamber of Commerce*  
Holly Fedders  
*Community Member*

## Consultants



Elizabeth Fields, AICP  
*Project Manager*  
Swapna Natesh Babu  
Kyle Gibbs  
Sophia Ferris-Rowe  
Jason Kieth

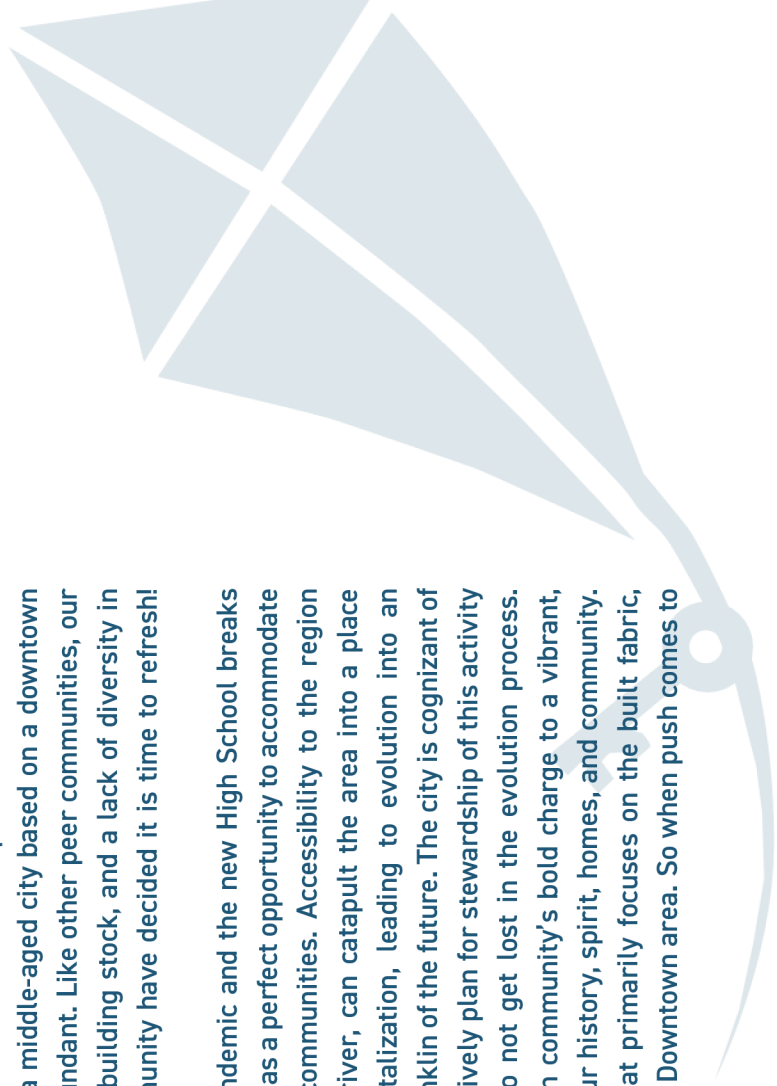


# Executive Summary

## WHAT'S NEXT, FRANKLIN?

An outsider visiting Franklin for the first time might be surprised to discover the charm and unique history of the Downtown area. It is entirely walkable with pockets of quaint and exciting visual treats at unexpected turns, like a game of peek-a-boo with rich, historic architecture and vibrant murals. The Great Miami River lies only one block from Main Street and presents plentiful views and direct access to the highly popular Great Miami Riverway bike trail. The Downtown area hosts most of the city's civic services alongside the bulk of Franklin's commercial, office, and retail enterprises. An enthusiastic and invested community further supports these attributes. However, it also has to be noted that these strengths are not contiguous and absolute throughout the area but rather present in nodes and clusters around Downtown. It does not help that Franklin is a middle-aged city based on a downtown model that is slowly but steadily becoming outdated and redundant. Like other peer communities, our Downtown is troubled by vacancies, under-utilization, dated building stock, and a lack of diversity in dining and entertainment options. And so, the city and community have decided it is time to refresh!

In 2022, as the world moves forward from the COVID-19 pandemic and the new High School breaks ground, Downtown Franklin is fast coming under the spotlight as a perfect opportunity to accommodate recent, changing trends and desired lifestyles for modern communities. Accessibility to the region and affordable housing, along with access to the trail and river, can catapult the area into a place of tremendous potential for considerable growth and revitalization, leading to evolution into an increasingly desirable place to live, work, and play for the Franklin of the future. The city is cognizant of the forthcoming development interests and is looking to decisively plan for stewardship of this activity to ensure that Franklin's unique character and strengths do not get lost in the evolution process. This plan does just that and is the spearpoint in the Franklin community's bold charge to a vibrant, successful, and exciting future, a future that is built around our history, spirit, homes, and community. It presents various ideas and strategies for revitalization that primarily focuses on the built fabric, inter-local connections, and overall feel and experience of the Downtown area. So when push comes to shove, we are primed and ready for the future!



# Contents

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Plan Context.....           | 2   |
| Understanding Downtown..... | 14  |
| The Approach.....           | 28  |
| Place.....                  | 34  |
| Connections.....            | 74  |
| Experience.....             | 90  |
| Take Action.....            | 102 |





# 1 Plan Context

# Introduction

This Downtown Master Plan establishes an aspirational vision for the future of Downtown Franklin. It addresses various aspects of the downtown fabric, such as the built environment and character, connectivity and access, and the area's experience, image, and perception. It represents the Franklin community's desire to remake Downtown into a vibrant and thriving ecosystem, with plentiful options for living, dining, shopping, working, and recreation while improving the overall experience of the area to become a safer, more comfortable, and inviting destination for families.

In 2020, the city of Franklin voted to officially establish a Downtown moratorium that would halt development and improvement projects within an identified Downtown boundary (which also serves as the focus extents of this plan). The purpose of this moratorium was to allow the city to pause and take stock of the current conditions and trends that influence growth in this area to determine the underlying issues, opportunities, and potential. This strategy allows the city and community to plan appropriately for the future by identifying innovative strategies to pursue bold changes. This Master Plan is a product of that initiative and seeks to present a daring approach to help Franklin grab hold of its opportunities and remake Downtown into a happening and exciting place.

It is important to note that the master plan only presents a vision and guidelines. Development might occur differently than it is envisioned here. The ideas and recommendations outlined in this document capture the horizon and extent of change desired by the community. **These are our BIG ideas. Our BIG dreams!**

Our Future  
Downtown

# WHAT IS THE DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN?

This Downtown Master Plan reflects the future vision for Downtown Franklin. It is an effort by the city and the community to build a bold vision and framework for revitalizing Downtown into a unique, attractive, and vibrant center for the city. It will help guide and direct developmental interests and steward the Downtown area's future growth and redevelopment efforts. It can also be used by residents, visitors, investors, developers, and other interest groups for increased awareness of local opportunities and to get actively involved in the future of Downtown.







# HOW WAS THE PLAN CREATED?

The community and you created the plan! This effort was initiated by the city of Franklin in late 2021 and culminated in December 2022. The city engaged the services of planning consultants McBride Dale Clarion to support the planning process, which includes a thorough analysis of the existing conditions of Downtown. The planning team also collected and dissected concerns and desires that the public voiced to help form the goals and strategic recommendations that are the crux of this plan. The process included a review of plan goals and direction at key points with the City Council, the Comprehensive Plan's Citizen's Advisory Committee, and the general public through an Open House event and an online survey.



Public Open House, May 2022

## WE HEARD YOU THROUGH...



ONLINE SURVEYS



VISUAL PREFERENCE EXERCISES



COUNCIL & CAC DISCUSSIONS



THE OPEN HOUSE EVENT

JAN '22

### REINVENT FRANKLIN - SURVEY (380+ responses)

The Comprehensive Plan update process asked the community to provide input about key priorities for Franklin's future. The survey garnered more than 381 responses. The questionnaire asked respondents about various aspects of the city. 25% of respondents indicated that Downtown represents the image and reputation of the city, while an overwhelming 85.5% agreed that Downtown revitalization should be prioritized in Franklin's future. Many respondents also emphasized the need to improve riverfront access for walking, boating, and other recreational activities.

FEB '22

### COUNCIL RETREAT

The Downtown planning team was invited to the Council Retreat in February 2022 to present the initial findings, analysis, and preliminary recommendations for the approach and vision for Downtown. The Council participated in a review of the proposed Downtown Planning Areas and a detailed visual preference exercise to determine the density, heights, uses style, and other such aspects of desired future development.

APR '22

### CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) MEETING

The CAC meeting in April 2022 discussed the Downtown Master Plan. The presentation included a progress update and a discussion on the proposed Downtown Planning Areas. The committee also took visual preference surveys to provide further input on planning areas and potential build-out scenarios.

MAY '22

### OPEN HOUSE EVENT (40 + attendees)

Plan progress and recommendations for the different planning areas within Downtown were presented to the community at a Public Open House in May 2022. The event helped the team gather valuable input and gauge the community's response to the proposed plan recommendations. The public participated in reviewing ideas and strategies for Downtown improvements along with various visual preference exercises.

OCT '22

### COUNCIL RETREAT

The Downtown planning team was invited to another Council Retreat in October 2022 to review the findings and recommendations for the riverbank, the riverfront development, and the proposed Downtown zoning regulations.



# WHAT WE HEARD.

## MAKE DOWNTOWN A SAFE AND FUN DESTINATION.

The Franklin community enthusiastically engaged with the process and provided expansive input on needs, desires, and ideas for Downtown's future. The responses to the various surveys and visual preference exercises show that the community is primarily cohesive in the ideas, key priorities, and overarching vision for Downtown. Themes of making Downtown a destination with diverse dining options, safe and active public spaces, convenient parking and circulation, and a fun place for families resonated throughout the feedback received.

| We Like and Want                                       | We Need to Address                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| > A FAMILY FRIENDLY DOWNTOWN                           | > VACANCY AND UNDERUTILIZATION                                  |
| > MORE RESTAURANTS, CAFES, & BREWERIES                 | > AGING NEIGHBORHOODS                                           |
| > AN ACTIVE RIVERFRONT                                 | > PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE & CONNECTIVITY TO SURROUNDING AREAS |
| > A SAFER ENVIRONMENT                                  | > UNSAFE AND UNDESIRABLE ACTIVITIES SUCH AS DRUGS AND CRIME     |
| > PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC LANDMARKS                   | > GENTRIFICATION                                                |
| > EXPANDED USE OF THE GREAT MIAMI RIVER AND BIKE TRAIL | > ACCESSIBILITY                                                 |
| > MURALS AND PUBLIC ART                                |                                                                 |
| > PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS                               |                                                                 |





# PAST & CONCURRENT PLANNING EFFORTS

The city of Franklin has engaged in various planning efforts in the past and in the present to evaluate and improve diverse aspects of the city's services and areas. These initiatives play a prominent role in the identity that Franklin is pursuing in the long term. They each provide insight into the conditions present in their study area and the recommended strategies to help realize Franklin's full potential.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

In 2021, the city began working with the Warren County Planning staff to update the 2009 Comprehensive Plan. The Reinvent Franklin Comprehensive Plan will address land use management, economic growth, transportation and infrastructure, parks and recreation, and city facilities. The planning process relies on public input and regular guidance from city staff and the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC is a group of community stakeholders, local business owners, and residents to represent the voice and will of the community in creating the overall vision and guiding principles for the City of Franklin.





## MAIN STREET STREETSCAPING

The City of Franklin has approved plans to update the water supply infrastructure layout below the Main St. corridor within the next few years. To fully utilize the time and other resources allocated to this reconfiguration, the city is also proposing to update the streetscaping of Main St. to reflect the community-identified vision established in the Downtown Master Plan. This streetscape plan will address pedestrian pathways, street trees, furniture, lights, crosswalks at intersections, and other such aspects of the pedestrian realm in detail and provide recommendations for the design and layout that can be incorporated into the future Main Street experience. A consultant group, Human Nature, is leading this project.

## ZONING CODE UPDATE

The city is pursuing an update to the city's Unified Development Ordinance in concurrence with the Downtown Master Plan to ensure swift and effective realization of the plan once the downtown moratorium expires. To this end, the development ordinance update has also been drafted by the team that worked on the Master Plan; this ensures that the code accurately reflects the overarching goals outlined in the plan. This code update focuses specifically on the Downtown area and the new zoning districts and standards that will implement the recommendations of this plan.

## DOWNTOWN BUILDING ANALYSIS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING ANALYSIS

In 2021, the city hired CT Consultants to study and evaluate the buildings' conditions in Downtown and adjacent residential neighborhoods. The study defines and presents the conditions of the buildings in the study area using nationally accepted metrics and standards for blight and underutilization. The Downtown Master Plan relies on the findings in this study to help identify development opportunities within Downtown.

## RIVERFRONT FEASIBILITY STUDY

The city commissioned Stantec in early 2022 to evaluate the river edge adjacent to Downtown and explore the feasibility of safe and convenient access to the water. The consultant is also tasked with presenting the capacity for development in the area between Fourth St. and Sixth St., bound by the river edge to the west and the alley between Main St. and River St. to the east. This study builds upon the general guiding principles set forth by the Downtown Master Plan and develops the capacity of the area in further detail to determine the best possible riverfront development scenarios.

# PLAN PRIORITIES

In the current context, Downtown Franklin stands poised to capture upon a variety of opportunities that can help re-brand and innovate itself into a new, improved, and exciting Downtown area. As the planning process evolved, key priorities were identified that can help create a critical mass of activity that supports retail and restaurants, fosters healthy social settings, provides a feeling of safety and security, and encourages people to live and work downtown with extensive amenities. These priorities resonate as underlying themes driving the focused recommendations offered in the following chapters.

1

## MAKE DOWNTOWN A DESTINATION

Create an environment with a variety of engaging places that encourages people to visit and spend time and money Downtown.

2

## EXPAND DINING & ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS

Incentivize new restaurants, breweries, and other similar uses Downtown to provide more dining options for the community.

3

## A FAMILY- FRIENDLY DOWNTOWN

Explore opportunities to establish Downtown as a family destination by incorporating amenities that cater to various age groups and interests.

4

## ADDRESS CRIMES AND DRUG ABUSE

Explore strategies to counter crime, drugs, and homelessness Downtown.



**5**

**HIGHLIGHT  
DOWNTOWN'S  
UNIQUENESS**

Discover and celebrate the character, culture, and unique elements that differentiate Franklin from other communities.

**6**

**PRESERVE  
LOCAL HISTORIC  
CHARACTER**

Protect the city's historic landmarks and create opportunities to highlight and celebrate local history.

**7**

**CREATE A  
SAFE & CLEAN  
ENVIRONMENT**

Improve safety and cleanliness within Downtown to present an inviting and comfortable experience for visitors and residents.

**8**

**SUPPORT &  
STRENGTHEN THE  
ECONOMY**

Provide support for local businesses and supplement the economy by attracting new investments and businesses into the area.

**9**

**PLAN  
REALISTICALLY**

Work towards a bold vision for the future with considerations for the practical and feasible realization of the identified goals.

**10**

**PROVIDE SAFE &  
CONVENIENT  
CIRCULATION**

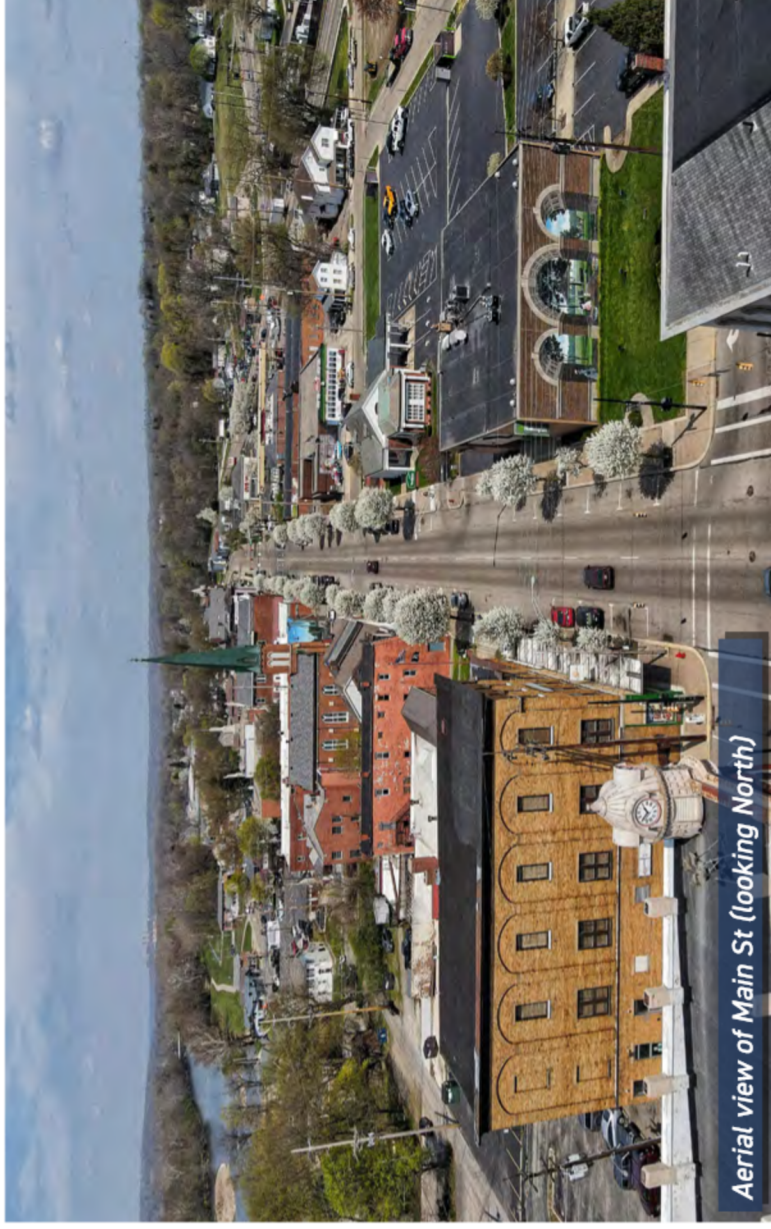
Study and improve parking availability and circulation to provide convenient access Downtown for cars and pedestrians.



# 2 Understanding Downtown

# WHAT WE ARE TODAY.

This section reflects upon the past and how that has impacted the city's current framework in Downtown Franklin. An analysis of the present conditions serves as the foundation for the adopted approach for revitalization and guides the recommendations proposed within the plan. It includes an overview of the community engagement opportunities utilized in the planning process and key highlights of what the public desires to see in Downtown. It also provides the study of existing patterns, conditions, and other factors that can influence future development in this area. Specific aspects focused on for the existing conditions analysis include developed to undeveloped lands ratio, walkability in Downtown, vehicular circulation patterns, available surface parking, current vacancy, and other factors. This section's findings help us identify the opportunities and inform the strategies in the coming chapters.





# Our History

Our past shapes our present and future. Franklin has a rich history that molded the city into what it is today; with an emphasis on history and highlighting existing landmarks that define present day Downtown.



**1796**

Franklin was founded as a small collection of cabins along the Great Miami River.



**1805**

Franklin became home to one of the first four post offices in Warren County. The original Franklin Post Office still stands today.



**1814**

Franklin was established as a Village.



**1829**

The first industries were established with the completion of the Miami-Erie Canal.



**1872**

Franklin's industries, and manufacturing began booming with Downtown's new rail line.



**Early 1890s**

The population of the village grew exponentially during this time, as workers migrated to work in the many Paper Making factories.

**1897**

One of Ohio's first electric trains began running on Franklin's Main Street, eventually running to Cincinnati and Detroit.



**1901**

Miami Valley Chautauqua, a popular summer and tourist institution of over 60 cottages, opened on the West-side of the Great Miami River. Chautauqua made it through the Great Depression and two world wars before closing in 1968.

### 1934-1940

Feeling the pressure from the growing popularity of the passenger car, the tracks that ran down the middle of Main Street were removed. The new "modern" Main Street was part of U.S. Route 25, known as the Dixie Highway, which ran from Michigan to Florida. The Miami-Eie Canal was drained and filled for free parking.



### 1978

The former Miami-Erie Canal was officially transformed into a highway, State Route 73, connecting Oxford and Portsmouth, Ohio.



# Downtown Franklin Master Plan

The past has led us and greatly contributed to the planning process the city and residents participated in to form this document. The plan's approach and actions will help guide Franklin's future landmarks and growth.



### 1984

Franklin became a charter municipality.

### 1960

Interstate-75 opened and replaced U.S. Route 25. The opening of Interstate-75 took the through traffic out of downtown Franklin, and the businesses and industries that relied on the highway slowing began to migrate east and away from downtown to be closer to the I-75 exits.



### 1932

Lion Bridge was built.