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**Community Legacy Plan  
For  
Downtown Ocean City**

(Inlet to 17<sup>th</sup> Street)

Ocean City Development Corporation  
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## **Preface**

Cities across America and Maryland are struggling to preserve and enhance their aging downtown areas. The spiraling urban decline in most cities has often been countered with sporadic “quick fix” solutions that, for the most part, have been ineffective in restoring the unique qualities of the community urban fabric. Cities that have been successful in recapturing a true “urban experience” have taken advantage of indigenous characteristics and/or natural resources.

One of the more priceless natural resources in many cities is water. Whether a river, ocean, canal or lake, cities around the world have made use of water for not only basic everyday use but also as a stimulus for revitalization. Waterfront developments, especially those that incorporate mixed-use activities, have proven successful as catalysts for revitalization. Today, given the fierce economic competition existing between cities, it has become increasingly difficult to attract visitors, as well as local residents, to downtown and central locales. Resultantly, the promotion of water-related activities and places has leaped to the top of the incentives menu; cities utilize to beat out neighboring competition.

Programming for a successful waterfront district involves an understanding of the opportunities and constraints that either currently exists or may exist in the future. From a land use perspective, planning studies and market/feasibility analysis are made. However, waterfront related concepts, especially those that incorporate boat related activity, requires special planning and a comprehensive understanding of hydrology and boat operation issues. Furthermore, creating a blueprint for long-term results and objectives involves more than just brick and mortar. It involves innovative thoughts and ideas, especially for results that can withstand time and transcend generations.

The task at hand for communities, such as Ocean City, is finding ways to enhance and create *interesting places* within the older downtown core. *Interesting places* serve as the magnetic medium through which individuals, residents and/or visitors, are motivated and interact within commercial areas or their communities. An *interesting place* is more than a building or event. Rather, an *interesting place* is an experience. Identifying the strengths of a community and cultivating those strengths is the first step.

Creating interesting places is much easier when historic and cultural characteristics already exist in an urban setting. These unique qualities of a city quickly become the pillars that sustain the heart and soul of a community. Capturing the “spirit” of a community and being able to share that emotion through commonplace and experience is key to achieving the highest level of project realization.

This Community Legacy Plan is formulated using many of the recommendations from the “Plan of Action” as completed by the International Waterfront Group of San Antonio, Texas in 1999 for the Town of Ocean City. A number of the elements of this plan have been completed. There have been several additional projects added to the Plan to make it more comprehensive and up to date. Other areas of the original plan have been deleted or revised.

### **Executive Summary**

Over the last several decades Ocean City has seen its tourism industry continue to grow and is still today the basis for the city's economy. This tourism economy of Ocean City has been extremely beneficial to the local and State economies, with an estimated eight million visitors annually. Of particular interest is that on a percentage basis, tourism has grown faster during the months of April, May, September and October than the traditional peak months of June, July, and August, thus expanding its tourism season.

Despite the upward trend in the tourism industry and the extended season, downtown Ocean City has only recently begun seeing new developments. Since 2000 these new developments have provided improved housing, retail, restaurant, and hotel accommodations. In addition, a number of downtown buildings have been renovated.

In 1999, IWG found many local residents were skeptical that any aggressive downtown initiative would not have the necessary political and economic support needed to realize the area's full potential. International Waterfront Group (IWG) was retained in 1999 by the Town of Ocean City to develop a comprehensive master plan for Ocean City's downtown area which recognized the importance of the boardwalk and bay front and to formulate a plan that motivated pedestrian interaction between these anchors. Additional projects have been added to this master plan. The 1999 project boundaries were defined between 4th Street to the north, the inlet to the south, boardwalk to the east, and the bay to the west. In addition to circulation issues, private sector investment issues, particularly how to encourage private sector investment in the downtown core were considered. However, over the past few years these boundaries were expanded to 17<sup>th</sup> Street, which this additional area often referred to as the upper downtown area.

In 1999 many local residents made it well know to the IWG team that cynicism was in abundance considering the number of planning studies that have been completed through the years. IWG believed this local skepticism can be overcome with a series of small accomplishments, for which the Ocean City Development Corporation, a nonprofit organization set up in 2000, has been implementing. As mentioned in the IWG report, there were several phases necessary to bring about revitalization activities to downtown Ocean city. It was noted that each phase will be challenging, however, as each phase is accomplished, a healthier vibrant downtown core will be achieved. The challenge given was to tie the recommended boardwalk improvements to the rest of the downtown core area and continue these concepts to the bayfront district thus creating a transition zone concept and make specific recommendations towards implementing a plan of action. A major theme was to improve and bring about a series of capital projects that would spur private investment. This Plan of Action has been generally followed by the Ocean City Development Corporation in its pursuit of a revitalized downtown Ocean City.

Ocean City today offers visitors and local residents activities that most cities would love to have: clean and free beaches, popular boardwalk, and quality accommodations. Providing an atmosphere that compliments the already successful attractions with new and exciting activities and places to see is the next level for the city to reach.

The IWG consultants and OCDC Board of Directors believe Ocean City has many advantages

and opportunities to assist in the revitalization of downtown. The attitude of community and business leaders is one of hope and optimism. Ocean City possesses a strong sense of community and historic qualities that includes a strong presence of local property owners and a well defined geographic border. The city has invested millions of dollars towards public improvements and public safety enhancements and is planning other capital intensive projects in the downtown area. As in the original IWG Plan, it is imperative the Mayor and City Council pledge their commitment and support to revitalizing downtown Ocean City.

Today, downtown Ocean City can be characterized as a collection of small-scaled “semi-historic” structures, but with a number of newer buildings constructed in the recent years. The use of these structures has catered to the city’s primary tourist attraction, the beach and boardwalk. Ocean City’s economy, led by the tourism industry, is seasonal in nature, as is the downtown core area. Nonetheless, the time is right to elevate the city’s effort to extending the tourism season, thus creating growth opportunities throughout the downtown core.

### **Introduction**

In 2000 the Community Legacy Program was established by the State of Maryland to assist communities attempting to revitalize their downtown areas and other areas of need. In order to pursue such funds, the State of Maryland, through its Department of Housing and Community Development requires the completion and adoption of a Community Legacy Plan. The OCDC completed its first Community Development Plan in 2001 which was approved by the Town of Ocean City. This first plan targeted the core downtown area between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the Inlet.

In 2005 the OCDC expanded its area of redevelopment to include the area between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Street. An additional Community Legacy Plan was developed by the OCDC and approved by the Town of Ocean City in 2005 for this area. The current plan, contained in this document, combines the two areas into one plan and provides updated information as well as several new redevelopment strategies for this larger area.

This revised plan draws upon elements of the two previous Community Legacy Plans, the Plan of Action completed in 1999, and selections from the two downtown design standard manuals.

### **Existing Conditions**

#### **Land Use**

In the 2006 Comprehensive Plan for Ocean City, the goal outlined for land uses in the city was to *‘foster a logical land use pattern which provides a variety of development types and scale appropriate to distinct neighborhoods or districts within the town and which meets the residential, commercial and cultural needs of the community.’* A detailed plan for growth in this study area has made this a challenging goal to attain.

These major development boom periods took place during the past four decades. They occurred in the early 1970’s, between 1981-1985, and between 2001-2005. The development that evolved during the first two phases resulted and was directed by market conditions, rather than by a

preconceived plan. However, the latest development boom occurred since the completion of the IWG report and has been instrumental in changing several areas of the downtown.

The present land use pattern in the area between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the inlet contains a mix of residential types and commercial activity. The residential components include a small amount of single-family dwelling units, rooming houses, motels, hotels, duplexes and some high-rise luxury condominiums and mid-rise apartments. Although a residential component exists, it is limited with pockets of single-family and a small number of rooming houses and hotel/motels. A number of older buildings, some dilapidated, have been demolished for newer developments since 2000. The residential land uses are concentrated west of Philadelphia between the inlet and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.

Various commercial types of activities exist in the downtown study area south of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. They include Boardwalk businesses; retail and service operations; marine related commercial, and amusement and recreational uses. Most of the retail activity in the downtown/boardwalk area supports the amusement and beach activity. Very little of the existing retail could be considered specialty (i.e. antique stores, etc.). In addition, most of the food establishments in the downtown core cater primarily to the boardwalk and beach consumer, providing very little in the form of “destination” restaurants. Commercial land uses are concentrated along Baltimore Avenue and east to the Boardwalk, between the inlet and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The inlet parking lot (located at the southern tip of the downtown area) is the largest contiguous piece of property in the downtown core.

Large tracts of publicly owned space also exist, especially along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and S. Division Street. Most of these parcels contain government-related offices and uses. In addition, the City currently leases another city owned property, the fishing pier to a private party. Local individuals and families own the majority of the downtown properties.

Single families own a few of the other properties. The larger tract properties include the Trimper property (south of Worcester Street, east of Baltimore Avenue); the Harrison parcel (South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and the inlet); Cropper Concrete (1<sup>st</sup> Street and the bay), and Purnell’s Atlantic Hotel (Somerset Street and the boardwalk). As for the core interior of the downtown area, most of the properties are smaller tracts owned by multiple owners. This fragmented ownership pattern presents challenges when considering redevelopment projects in the interior, but also provided opportunities of small scale redevelopment which can be beneficial, too.

This area between 4<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Streets is generally residential in character, but does contain various commercial uses. The Boardwalk portion contains commercial uses along its first floor with a mix of residential and hotel uses above. This district’s buildings are required to be set back further from the Boardwalk than the uses south of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, which do not require a front setback.

The remainder of the district contains a mix of hotels, motels, cottages, single-family houses, and commercial uses. The commercial uses tend to be concentrated along the Boardwalk, Philadelphia Avenue and 8<sup>th</sup> Street, and Philadelphia Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street. The lots are generally 142’ by 50’ in size, which are larger than the typical downtown lot. Along Baltimore Avenue the west side uses consist of various residential types, but generally are constructed on one lot. On the east side of Baltimore Avenue, there is more evidence of property consolidation

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and therefore, larger projects are found. This area also contains better defined and expanded alleys.

The Philadelphia Avenue corridor, with the exception of the identified commercial centers, contains several motels and apartment houses. Several of the motels are set back with front side parking. The St. Louis Avenue and Edgewater Avenue corridors contain less commercial uses and are more oriented towards single-family houses.

### **Vehicular Circulation**

The downtown core of Ocean City is accessible primarily by two intersecting routes. US Route 50, which crosses the Isle of Wight Bay and turns into North Division Street, is the primary east/west road. This road intersects with St. Louis Avenue (not accessible), Philadelphia Avenue, and Baltimore Avenue and then terminates at the Boardwalk.

Baltimore Avenue and Philadelphia Avenue are used as primary north/south routes; with St. Louis Avenue being a secondary road. Philadelphia Avenue, from 3rd Street to the inlet, is one-way (south bound) and connects with Baltimore Avenue near the inlet. From South 1st Street Baltimore Avenue becomes one-way (north bound).

During the peak summer periods, the Route 50 Bridge, Philadelphia Avenue and Baltimore Avenue become heavily congested. Moreover, when the bridge crossing US Route 50 is up, traffic along Baltimore Avenue may back up for several blocks causing gridlock throughout the downtown area. There are approximately a dozen east/west streets existing between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the inlet with most of them being two lanes in width. Most of the east/west streets contain metered parking spaces.

The Upper Downtown Area between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Streets is accessible by three north/south streets: Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia Avenue and St. Louis Avenue. Bayside Avenue runs along the bayside, but is not as efficient for moving vehicles as the other three avenues. Baltimore Avenue and Philadelphia Avenue carry much more traffic than St. Louis Avenue. Baltimore Avenue is one-way north up to 15<sup>th</sup> Street while Philadelphia Avenue carries one-way traffic southbound from 9<sup>th</sup> Street. North of 9<sup>th</sup> Street Philadelphia Avenue is two-way traffic. St. Louis Avenue is a two-way corridor, but serves a much more local residential character and terminates at 17<sup>th</sup> Street. St. Louis Avenue is often referred to as the back road in the southern end of Ocean City. Edgewater Avenue carries very limited traffic and is both one way and two ways in areas. The east/west streets generally carry two-way traffic, with the exception of 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets between Baltimore Avenue and Philadelphia Avenues, which are only westbound.

It should be noted that the alleyway system in this upper downtown district is much more advanced than the downtown area. These alleys provide a good method for moving secondary traffic as well as deliveries and pickup of items. They also provide a good area to place trash containers out of sight.

The Ocean City buses serve this area along the major streets. The Ocean City tram service runs the length of this district along the Boardwalk. It has its Southern terminus on South Division

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Street. A downtown trolley also serves this area and has its southern terminus at Somerset Street.

**Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation**

Pedestrian circulation patterns range in density and consistency in the downtown core area. Pedestrian traffic is primarily generated by two sources in the lower part of downtown Ocean City. The first is traffic generated by pedestrians who drive to the downtown area/boardwalk from other destinations and park in one of the public lots/spaces in the area. Most of this source currently congregates at the inlet parking lot. This lot holds approximately 1200 cars and is closest to the boardwalk/beach areas. The patterns of pedestrian circulation from this lot concentrate along the boardwalk and/or directly to the beach. Little pedestrian traffic ventures off the Boardwalk to the bayside or interior downtown area.

Another source of pedestrian traffic comes from vehicles parking at metered spaces along the interior and terminating streets to the boardwalk and bayside. These spaces for the most part are distributed in the downtown area and the pedestrian traffic sometimes frequents nearby establishments/activities. However, most continue to the Boardwalk and beach as primary destination spots.

The most popular walking area in the district between the Inlet and 15<sup>th</sup> Street is the Boardwalk. The Boardwalk carries substantial foot traffic, particularly during the summer months. It is also popular during the off-season months for both pedestrians and bicyclists.

Besides the Boardwalk traffic, the pedestrian circulation patterns in this area generally run east and west. This is primarily due to people walking to the beach and Boardwalk amenities. However, many pedestrians walk along Baltimore Avenue, too.

Sidewalks are located along all streets with the exception of the district’s alleyways. Most of the area’s sidewalks are only five feet in width. Wider sidewalks are found along Baltimore Avenue, south of North Division Street and along most east/west streets between the Boardwalk and Baltimore Avenue, south of North Division Street. Besides Edgewater Avenue, which generally only has a sidewalk on its east side, all other streets provide sidewalks on both sides.

Pertaining to bicycle paths, they are permitted along the area’s streets, however, only along St. Louis are there designated bicycle lanes.

**Public parking facilities**

Between 4<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Streets on-street public parking is located along most streets. There are several public parking lots located in this district. They are as follows:

<u>Parking location</u>	<u>number of spaces</u>
Inlet	1206
Worcester Street	170
Somerset Street	29
Dorchester Street	25
Balt. Ave. by N. Div. St.	42
St. Louis Ave & N. Div. St.	5

St. Louis Ave & 2<sup>nd</sup> Street 22  
Baltimore Ave. & 4<sup>th</sup> Street 56

**Demographic and Economic Trends**

Regarding demographics and economic trends, the following data was obtained for this specific target area according to a special Claritas report prepared for the OCDC. As the census block level locations do not equate exactly with the parameters of the target area there has been some adjustment required. The actual stated numbers may be larger than the defined CL area due to the extension of a census block beyond the boundaries.

The 2008 population in the target area (Inlet to 17<sup>th</sup> Street) is 1,262 people which is close to the 2000 census.

The median age for this area’s population is estimated at 43.3 years compared to 36.7 years for the U.S. median age.

Race for this area: 92% is white, 3% is black, 3% is Asian, and 2% is other.

The area’s estimated Hispanic population is 3%.

There are estimated to be 681 households in 2008, a 3% increase from 2000. Over the next five years this household number is to increase by 3.4%.

The estimated average household size is 1.85.

Of the 681 households in the target area, 305 (45%) are 1 person households.

The average household income is estimated to be \$66,967 in this target area for 2008. The average household income for the U.S. is estimated to be \$67,918. The estimated 2008 median household income for the target area is \$47,083 and the 2008 per capita income is \$36,479.

Regarding employment, 55% of the population is estimated to be employed and aged 16 and over as follows:

	<u>Target area</u>	<u>U.S.</u>
Management, Business and Financial Operations	15%	14%
Professional and related occupations	16%	20%
Service	24%	15%
Sales and office	25%	27%
Construction, Extraction and Maintenance	12%	10%
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving	8%	14%

**Housing**

Owner occupied: Of 681 households, 341 (50%) are owner occupied. The U.S. average is 67% for owner occupied units.

Of the occupied housing units, the average length of residence is 9 years.

The estimated median year structure built is 1976.

There are estimated to be 346 housing units built in 1939 or before.

According to the 2000 census information, the unemployment rate for Ocean City was not available. The unemployment rate for Worcester County was 6.7% while the State rate was

4.4%. The 1990 census information pertaining to the unemployment rate for Worcester County was 8.3%, which was much higher than the 2000 data.

### **Past Initiatives**

Below is a listing of projects completed by the OCDC and Town of Ocean City since 2000 in the downtown area (south of 17<sup>th</sup> Street):

- Completed the design standards for the Downtown area. Such standards were approved and codified by the Mayor and City Council in November 2002.
- Completed the design standards for the Upper Downtown Area (3<sup>rd</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Streets). These standards were approved in 2006.
- Completed a Community Legacy Plan for the Downtown area that has been approved by the Town of Ocean City and State of Maryland for future grant opportunities.
- 58 façade projects have been completed to date. Through the OCDC façade program, over \$2.5 million has been invested into the older buildings of the Downtown area.
- Construction of Somerset Plaza, a semi-pedestrian walkway in 2002
- Construction of S. 1<sup>st</sup> Street, a pedestrian walkway in 2006
- Construction of Sunset Park, a linear public park located along S. Division Street and Bay in 2006
- The OCDC's Public Art Program has raised private contributions for 9 art projects in the Downtown area: White Marlin Sculpture, Ocean City library sculpture (being completed), Seahawk Sculpture, Dorchester Street wall mural, Caroline Street enlarged postcards, OC Beach Birds, paver art on west side of Philadelphia Avenue, and utility box painting project with the Art League of Ocean City, local area high schools and private sponsors.
- Creation of a historic plaque program. This OCDC program provided bronze plaques to 20 older buildings to recognize the age and importance of such structures.
- Restoration of the Tarry A While Guest House project at 108 Dorchester Street, a building constructed in 1897 and now used as first floor office space for the OCDC and upper floor seasonal rentals.
- Renovation of the building at 110 Somerset Street to provide seasonal housing.

### **Current Initiatives**

St. Louis Avenue street improvements – The planning and engineering work for this extensive project has commenced. This planning will include the area along St. Louis Avenue between the Route 50 Bridge and 17<sup>th</sup> Street.

3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Street park improvements – This public project will drastically alter the existing public park at this location and make it into a better utilized and more attractive public space. At this point only the design work is funded.

Route 50 bridge alternatives – The Maryland State Highway Administration is continuing its planning efforts for this southern entrance into Ocean City. The implementation of the

recommended alternate is a long-term approach; however, the effects of the selected alternative could have dramatic impacts on the downtown traffic and business environments.

The OCDC continues to implement its façade programs, public art program, and review of new site plans.

### **Obstacles to Redevelopment**

Following the findings from the 1999 IWG report and following comments, Ocean City residents tend to classify the types of problems facing, or faced, in the downtown area under one of the following categories:

#### ***Apathy***

Some people believe that residents of Ocean City are comfortable with the “status quo”. The existing infrastructure of activities has sustained the livelihood for many local residents. The late 1990’s and early part of the 2000 decade, in terms of business revenue were very good; so why change and invest more money when things are already good?

From a varied perspective, “The old way of thinking has hampered the city’s ability to realize its full potential”, was mentioned frequently during IWG interviews. In addition, a “lack of civic ownership” was mentioned as another impediment towards a revitalized downtown. There is a feeling within the community that too many property owners are silent and do not get involved in planning for a more unified community. Residents have attributed this apathy to the control that a few “large” property owners have with regards to decisions for projects in the downtown area.

#### ***Lack of Partnerships/Leadership***

Part of the equation in a successful effort to revitalize an area is through public/private partnerships. The city has demonstrated its commitment by investing in large capital projects. However, some in the community would like to see the city become more aggressive in public/private development projects that will serve as catalyst for revitalization.

#### ***Lack of Downtown Attractions***

Other than the beach, the boardwalk is Ocean City’s number one destination. The downtown core offers very little else in support of the boardwalk and beach attractions. It was noted by the IWG report the Downtown Ocean City has become a parking lot and circulation mode of transportation for the boardwalk and beach. No other anchor exists to attract visitors to the downtown core especially during the off peak season.

#### ***Afraid to take risks***

Some local residents feel that leaders are not dreaming big enough. Business owners would feel more confident expanding their businesses if they felt that other larger investments were going to be made.

#### ***Traffic Congestion***

Congested downtown interior roadways discourage pedestrian interaction with downtown core businesses. People want to “get away” from vehicular traffic and go to the beach or boardwalk.

### ***City Codes***

Many business owners feel that the city has not done enough to enforce codes that relate to the upkeep of structures. Because of this, there is unwillingness by business owners to invest capital into facility improvements. There is a lack of confidence from prospective investors because of the uncertainty in knowing what kind of neighbor will exist.

However, many others feel that the existing codes are too restrictive and should be relaxed to encourage a more “pro” business climate. Some have suggested fewer regulations, citing that private sector investment will flow in areas “where there exists little resistance.”

### ***Public Safety Concerns***

Many local residents feel that downtown Ocean City is unsafe, especially at night. Visitors eventually reciprocate the perception. Downtown is “old” and “there are too many run-down structures.”

The OCDC believes several of these 1999 concerns exist today. However, the OCDC believes many of the older “run-down” buildings have been replaced or renovated. Although a number of buildings are still in need of renovation and/or demolition, overall the OCDC believes the overall downtown building stock is in better shape than in 1999.

The area between 4<sup>th</sup> Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Street has a unique charm and character in Ocean City, but also has several challenging problems to address. The area is in transition and it is still questionable what will become of this area in the coming years. Whereas some units are in need of repair, other units are in good or new condition. Whereas, some streets and alleys are in need of repair and rebuilding, other streets and alleys are in very good condition. For this reason, it is important that some of the existing conditions of this area be addressed, through a program like the façade improvement program to complement the design standards that were approved in 2006 for this district. It is believed that the implementation and continuation of the façade program will have tremendous benefits for this area. The 2007 action by the Town of Ocean City to decrease height limits from five stories to three stories will promote a smaller scale character consistent with the existing buildings. It is believed the lower height limit may decrease the potential for new developments, but place a stronger need for building restoration to keep this area healthy.

This area between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Streets is undergoing many changes; however, it will still need to be determined whether the final outcome will be positive for the area. East of Baltimore Avenue the projects tend to be much larger than the projects west of Baltimore Avenue. There are several properties west of Baltimore Avenue that are fairly large, but haven’t yet been redeveloped. It will be challenging to ensure these properties blend with the existing land uses in the district. It is important that new projects provide an attractive frontage along Baltimore Avenue.

A number of properties in this area are in need of repair. Sometimes the properties will not generate sufficient revenue to allow funds for necessary renovation to occur. Other times the owners have been unwilling to invest in their properties recognizing such properties may eventually be redeveloped and such monies would then be wasted. In other cases such absentee

landlords do not care to maintain their properties, but only reap the benefits of the revenue generated.

Pertaining to pedestrian safety, although there are many sidewalks provided throughout the district, many are too narrow for much pedestrian traffic. Crowded sidewalks are dangerous not only to pedestrians walking through the area, but also to motorists who must be aware of these walkers and bicycles. Sometimes, the narrow sidewalks also clog at the bus stop areas as bus riders wait for the next bus. This is particularly noticeable along Baltimore Avenue.

Overhead utility wires provide an unattractive eyesore in many parts of this district. Whereas, the City undergrounded many areas along Baltimore Avenue, however the section from N. Division Street to 15<sup>th</sup> Street was not completed. These overhead utilities are also very visible along St. Louis Avenue, which presents itself as a very wide public right of way in need of renovation.

### **Community Amenities and Assets**

The most popular amenity in this downtown district is the beach and Boardwalk, both of which extend the full length of the district. These assets are the main reason eight million people visit Ocean City each year, making it one of the largest attractions in the mid-Atlantic region. The Boardwalk area contains some of the oldest businesses in Ocean City which continue to provide that traditional Ocean City experience for generations of families. Such retail businesses include Dolle's Candy and Popcorn, Fischer's Popcorn, Thrasher Fries, Dumsers Ice Cream, and the Alaska Stand.

Two prime destination points for visitors to Ocean City are the downtown amusements and arcades. Trimper Amusements and the Pier Rides provide a real excitement and adventure to be experienced in the southern area. In addition, the Ripley's Believe it or Not Museum located at the Pier on the Boardwalk is a great amenity to add to one's vacation trip.

The bayside area of downtown also provides attractive views to the water and various water related activities including fishing, boating, jet ski rentals, parasailing, and several noted restaurants. These activities and four restaurants make the bayside a destination point for many visitors and locals.

The downtown area consists of the oldest section of Ocean City. There are several buildings from the nineteenth century still existing. These are located south of North Division Street. Between North Division Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Street, particularly along Baltimore Avenue, there are many buildings constructed in the 1920's and 1930's and still in good condition.

The 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Street ball fields provide a large open space for recreation uses. In addition, Sunset Park, located at South Division Street and the Bay provide another special event forum in addition to a passive recreational area. Two public facilities that are important traffic generators for downtown; City Hall at Baltimore Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the U.S. Post Office at Philadelphia Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The major fire station serving the southern end of Ocean

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City is located at Philadelphia Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street, although a smaller facility is located on Dorchester Street. Another City facility includes a water treatment plant along St. Louis and 14<sup>th</sup> Street. The Ocean City Beach Patrol has its main office on Dorchester Street, too. The Ocean City Police Department has two of its facilities in the downtown area – Boardwalk at Worcester Street and on Dorchester Street.

A primary asset to downtown Ocean City is the mass transit system. The South Division Street bus facility serves as the southern terminus of the extensive Ocean City bus system and is an important source of transportation for millions of visitors, locals, and employees during the summer months. The recently new trolley system with its southern terminus at Somerset Street in downtown Ocean City provides a smaller and attractive means of transport for many other visitors. In addition, the Boardwalk tram which runs from South 1<sup>st</sup> Street to 27<sup>th</sup> Street provides another fun way to get around Ocean City.

Another defining amenity to this area is the system of alleyways. These interior alleys cover most of the district above N. Division Street and provide a very good method of limited travel as well as screening of vehicle deliveries and trash pickup. Whenever possible, these alleyways should be expanded and sometimes improved. They also represent an opportunity to use green building techniques as applied in other areas of the country.

Downtown Ocean City has a number of organizations interested in the area. A group, called the Partners was created to improve networking and coordinating of various issues, particularly related to business and economic development. The Partners Group consists of the following organizations: Ocean City Development Corporation, Ocean City Chamber of Commerce, Hotel Motel Restaurant Association, Downtown Association, Boardwalk Development Association, and the Economic Development Committee. These groups meet as needed to address specific issues several times. The OCDC has requested previous support from Partner members in terms of its downtown design standards and requests for grant assistance.

### **Historic Significance**

The designated community legacy area is the oldest section of Ocean City. The area south of North Division Street contains some buildings constructed before 1900 and many buildings constructed in the early 1900's. Long time residents sometimes refer to this area as "Old Towne." The area between North Division Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Street contain many buildings constructed during the 1920's and 1930's. A map with some of these oldest buildings is included in this plan.

Although Ocean City does not have a certified historic district, there are several buildings that could meet the criteria to attain such status. St. Paul's Episcopal Church is the first building in Ocean City to receive this historic designation. The OCDC has requested other building owners to consider this pursuit and has offered its assistance in the application process. To date the Town of City owns three buildings that have been fully renovated: the 1891 Ocean City Lifesaving Station Museum, City Hall (1915), and Tarry-A-While Guest House (1897).

The OCDC's plaque program combined with the Downtown Association's "Walking Tour Guide of Historic Ocean City" has resulted in a greater awareness of some of these historic gems. The

current plaque program and walking tour recognize the older buildings located south of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. A new walking tour guide is being developed to recognize many of the older buildings located between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Street. The OCDC is planning to extend its historic plaque program to this area, as well.

This older area has needed special attention for many years. The OCDC's façade program has provided financial assistance to many owners of these older buildings. This spurt of public and private investment has been instrumental in cleaning up and improving the appearance of downtown. The addition of the downtown design standards has brought special recognition in the newer buildings of some of the important architectural elements of Old Ocean City.

### **Principles of Redevelopment**

Downtown Ocean City should have:

- Pedestrian Friendly Corridors
- Attractive façades, which reflect a traditional theme and are properly designed and maintained
- Mixed-use buildings
- Buildings that are adaptable with an architectural variety
- Creation of a distinct center and focal point
- Landscape used as a space definer in public spaces for shade and air quality
- Perceivable neighborhoods or districts
- An incentive system for preserving special and historic buildings
- Provisions for employee housing at affordable prices

### **Plan of Action**

*A Plan of Action* ... Those were the words stressed at the beginning of this analysis to IWG in 1999 by the Ocean City leaders. The plan of action included in this report derives from a comprehensive long-term approach in redefining downtown Ocean City. It will be critical to the overall success of this endeavor that immediate action be taken to begin the implementation on the proposed recommendations. Organization and policy changes were stated to occur as the first step, followed by a phased physical redevelopment of the downtown core area. Building momentum and continuous community involvement/support throughout the implementation process will be the challenge to community leaders. This continued approach is still valid today.

This section of the report identifies critical key areas that must be addressed in order to achieve a more vibrant downtown core. Presently, pedestrian and vehicular traffic in downtown Ocean City is generated because of beach and boardwalk attendance. The layout of streets, parking requirements and design, land uses, etc. all are orientated to cater to a stronger boardwalk and beach. While the success of the City is its boardwalk, IWG believed the ultimate challenge for

the city's long-term success will be to create and encourage more downtown attractions so that people are captivated by a "more complete" downtown.

In striving for a place that is both interesting and complete, leaders must honor the historical and cultural flavor that exists today. The strategies outlined herein incorporate this balanced approach while weaving in new components that will ultimately create a holistic vibrant village.

The recommended "Downtown Village" concept takes the successful elements of downtown Ocean City today and infuses new relationships and experiences that evolve the basic function and form of the downtown area. The OCDC believes a comprehensive approach to this redevelopment is necessary. This new vision will create an "*interesting place*" that residents and visitors can enjoy well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Imagine the area as a quaint seacoast village. This village, with water in view from many directions will draw people with its visual appeal, passive and active sounds, and appetizing food attractions. The Downtown Village would be a place for families to enjoy. The boardwalk and amusement park, other major attraction, and excursion boats would provide enough attractions throughout the day to keep any child occupied. Antique stores and specialty shops, located in a concentrated area would give mothers and grandmothers plenty of shopping opportunities. Families might spend the day fishing or sightseeing. In the evening, families would dine and have renowned seafood restaurants to choose from. All of this to do, and all of it located within blocks of first-class accommodations.

For those not being able to stay in the Village, they would either jump on the bus or board a water-taxi and be dropped off near the new multi-modal transit station. Once at the station, they could walk to their favorite attraction or rent a bike for the day and ride around in the various pedestrian corridors. This can all be realized with focus but nevertheless patience.

### **Initial Planning & Organizational Initiatives**

As with any long-term aggressive endeavor, planning and organization become ever so important before proceeding with a project. The Downtown Village concept that IWG proposed includes three planned phases. Before the phased work begins, several critical components need to be in place that will assure long-term success and continuity. Several of these initiatives have been completed since the original IWG Plan and are described below:

**Creation of a Downtown Village Association** – The Town of Ocean City set up the framework for a new community development corporation as recommended by IWG in 1999. This initial group of 34 people elected a Board of Directors of 15 individuals which later became incorporated as a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization and was called the Ocean City Development Corporation. In 2000 the OCDC hired its Executive Director and has its office at 108 Dorchester Street in the center of downtown. The OCDC has been tasked with the charge of revitalizing downtown Ocean City.

**Design Standards** – A “sense of place” is a difficult product to achieve in a downtown environment. The IWG Plan recommended the creation of urban design characteristics that would help guide new development and renovation in downtown Ocean City.

The OCDC has created two sets of mandatory design standards for downtown Ocean City. These design standards have been instrumental in promoting attractive and better designed projects than would have occurred without such standards. The design standards require new development and renovation to provide the architectural elements found in a seaside vernacular. Such elements generally consist of light colored buildings, pitched roofs, and buildings with ample porches.

**Land Assemblage** - The 1999 IWG plan state this concept is to address the issues of land assemblage to consolidate several smaller properties and attract a developer. As previously mentioned, the downtown area contains a number of smaller parcels that may be difficult to develop by themselves. Since developers prefer not to expend ample time to assemble these isolated properties, it can be the role of the OCDC to do so. To date, the OCDC and The Town of Ocean City have purchased several parcels for a future assembled project.

**Marketing** – The IWG report stated redeveloping the downtown interior of Ocean City requires more than physical improvements. The Town of Ocean City has provided significant increases in advertising funds and a marketing campaign to attract tourists to Ocean City. The OCDC is in the process of creating a marketing video to highlight its organization and downtown Ocean City. Various press releases and newsletters are regularly produced by the OCDC to showcase various redevelopment successes to the general public and development community.

**Affordable Housing** – The IWG report referenced a continuing problem in Ocean City; the lack of affordable housing for employees. Steps should be undertaken to address this important issue. Although employee housing issue is a City wide issue, the Town of Ocean City and OCDC have recently teamed up to provide two downtown buildings to house some of the City’s seasonal workers. An 1897 building at 108 Dorchester Street and 110 Somerset Street were renovated and provide affordable housing for Ocean City Beach Patrol employees. The City owns the properties while the OCDC manages and maintains these units.

**Funding** – The IWG reported the need for the City and OCDC to create development incentives and partnerships to provide the transformation of the physical look of downtown. Such incentives are necessary to attract the type of “high profile” anchors into the downtown core area. Land assemblage, tax abatements, business improvement districts, and tax increment financing are several incentive types IWG recommended to look at. The Town of Ocean City and OCDC have researched various incentives. Due to the magnitude of this cost this issue will take further time.

## **PHASING PLAN**

Realizing the complexities in implementing any Plan of Action, IWG divided the overall Downtown Village into three phases. All the recommendations proposed in this visioning document interconnect, thus implementing them in a sequential manner is critical to the overall success of a revitalized downtown.

## **PHASE I IMPROVEMENTS**

### **East/West Corridors from Baltimore Avenue to the Boardwalk**

The challenge presented to IWG (as related to pedestrian traffic patterns) was to motivate pedestrian mobility from the beach and boardwalk to and from the bayfront. The first logical step in obtaining a unified downtown core is the ability to tie the successful boardwalk development with the interior downtown blocks. Very little pedestrian traffic is directed towards activities in the downtown interior. Subsequently, in order to achieve a more balanced circulation pattern, safe, inviting and friendly pedestrian corridors need to be designed.

To date three street segments have been converted from vehicular streets to pedestrian/semi-pedestrian streets only:

Somerset Plaza (Baltimore Avenue to the Boardwalk)

South 1st Street (Baltimore Avenue to the Boardwalk)

South Division Street (Philadelphia Avenue to the Bay)

Although it is very challenging to create these pedestrian corridors, they can play a major role in the revitalization of downtown Ocean City. The Town of Ocean City and OCDC should evaluate other potential pedestrian corridors as they arise.

In addition, certain streets will require wider sidewalks to accommodate increased pedestrian movements, particularly for safety issues.

### **Parking Facility/Multi-model Transit Station**

Since the 1970's there have been a number of studies related to downtown Ocean City. Each study has recommended the construction of a parking facility.

The IWG report believes that in order to achieve a balanced pedestrian circulation pattern and address some of the congestion issues, that a parking facility be constructed along the interior core of the downtown area. The site which would have the greatest impact on circulation but the least impact on existing businesses are the two blocks bordered by Baltimore Avenue (on the east), S. Division Street (on the south), Philadelphia Avenue (on the west) and Wicomico Street (on the north).

This combination of properties lies strategically near the south end of the downtown area and in the middle of the bay and boardwalk. In addition, the parking facility can incorporate a new multi-model station, replacing the existing transit station on S. Division Street. A new multi-model station could house the existing transit functions, a stop for bicycles, a park and ride

destination as well as a ticket outlet for a potential water transportation system operating parallel to the bayside.

The parking facility's design should be compatible with surrounding architecture and reinforce the new "Downtown Village" theme. The facility will have to be designed around and incorporate the existing water tower. As mentioned earlier in this phase, some modifications to vehicular circulation will need to be made.

Financing the parking facility will be the greatest challenge. Most facilities are financed through public means. These facilities are not usually required to make a profit. Most are publicly financed through tax exempt bond issues or revenue bonds. More recently however, are facilities financed with some infusion of private funds. Outsourcing of facility development allows the private sector turnkey delivery of a facility, on a public site, within a structured agreement, typically a leaseback.

Lenders prefer locations that offer a mix of monthly and transient revenue. The proposed site's proximity to the boardwalk and amusement areas, coupled with the elimination of a portion of metered spaces in the pedestrian corridors and proposed facility location, provide the demand counts to help justify its use. Close proximity to future developable sites also is advantageous. Another strategy to consider when looking at financing alternatives is seeking a new financing vehicle, which includes more amenities than just a parking facility. For example, the facility could incorporate some retail on the first level. High turnover storefronts such as dry cleaners, coffee shops, and ATM machines would be beneficial. These types of services are more for convenience. Most are small spaces, and premium rents can be justified because they're going to benefit from the pedestrian traffic.

A local cost-sharing program might also be developed with local businesses that would include parking packages for employees working in nearby businesses. Furthermore, by incorporating a multi-model facility, the project becomes eligible for federal funding. Federal grants can help buy down the capital cost of the parking facility, making the complex more financially feasible.

### **Pedestrian Plan**

As an extension of the Inlet Park is the wrap-around boardwalk along the inlet. The boardwalk along the inlet should extend from the edge of the proposed Inlet Park and wrap around to the bayside following the waterside as much as possible until the connection to the bayside boardwalk at 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. It is recognized the U. S. Coast Guard station can present an obstacle given homeland security issues with extending this boardwalk through this property. However, easements for this proposed boardwalk should be pursued on other properties as much as possible.

### **Specialty Retail**

Providing parking in the interior core of the downtown area will have a significant impact in redistributing the circulation pattern throughout the area. However, commercial opportunities are created when a parking facility is constructed from the high amount of pedestrian traffic that will

be generated. Specialty retail and convenience goods are natural tenants to locate near parking facilities.

As mentioned earlier in the report, convenience goods would be ideal tenants as part of a parking facility. The IWG team noticed however, that very few specialty shops existed in the downtown core area (antique shops, apparel, furnishings etc.). As part of an overall strategy to redevelop the core area a “Specialty Retail Village” concept should be designed in the interior core between Baltimore Avenue and Philadelphia Avenue from the Inlet to N. Division Street. This area, along with the parking facility will set the tone for the rest of the district as it relates to the building’s architectural design.

An important component to the special retail concentration is the inclusion of adequate outdoor shopping, dining and entertainment spaces. The large open public spaces are designed wide enough so that service vehicles could access the interior spaces. This type of design allows people to not only shop by strolling but also attracts people who want to just watch the people (a similar concept to the boardwalk). The open outdoor spaces would allow other “public” uses to occur, such as art exhibits and musical entertainers. An *interesting place* happens when a person experiences a place where they can be stimulated by sight, by smell, and by sound.

Simple to achieve, right? WRONG! The vision described above will only happen if there is a commitment to make it happen. The easiest way to realize this vision is by starting with one of the interior blocks and move outwards. The IWG team suggested that the city, through the DVA (OCDC), implement a two step process in selecting a concept and development team for the Specialty Retail Village.

The first step would be a Request for Development Qualifications followed by a Request for Proposals. Following DVA and city council selection of the developer, city staff would then negotiate terms and conditions for implementation. Using this specialty retail concentration as an initial financing tool, the concept can begin small and evolve into one of the most desirable areas in Ocean City.

### **East/West Corridor Enhancements from Baltimore Avenue to Philadelphia Avenue**

While making the necessary improvements (pedestrian crosswalks and pedestrian improvements) along Baltimore and Philadelphia Avenues, as well as during the design of the Specialty Retail blocks, careful consideration will need to be made as to the design of the east/west corridors between Baltimore Avenue and Philadelphia Avenue.

South Division Street could become a “transit only” thoroughfare, however, it acts as a strong pedestrian link between the boardwalk and bayside. This will be one of the more popular pedestrian routes with the parking facility/transit station situated along S. Division Street. This proposed project will only occur with the cooperation of the property owners along S. Division Street east of Baltimore Avenue.

The remaining east/west streets from Wicomico Street to N. Division Street will all be open to vehicular traffic, however, should include similar pedestrian amenities to those corridors east of Baltimore Avenue. These streets will play an important role with respect to east/west circulation

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and compliment the proposed Specialty Retail block(s) with respect to access and parking. Several side streets could be redesigned to allow for wider sidewalks and angled parking.

The remaining east/west streets between Baltimore and Philadelphia Avenues, from N. Division Street to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street could also contain pedestrian enhancements. These streets will preserve their width and current parking space allotments.

East/west streets north of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street should be reviewed for increased opportunities to provide wider sidewalks and improved pedestrian amenities.

### **Baltimore Avenue Enhancements**

Similar to Philadelphia Avenue, Baltimore Avenue north of North Division Street necessitates an improved look. Currently, Baltimore Avenue serves as Ocean City's "Main Street". In 1993, the southern portion of Baltimore Avenue (up to South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street) was completely renovated with upgraded underground utilities, landscaping, decorative paving and street furniture.

Similar to the Philadelphia Avenue evaluation, Baltimore Avenue should also be analyzed to the most appropriate use of traffic lanes and parking. During the IWG report it was stated that many residents and business owners expressed a desire to see parking made available again along Baltimore Avenue. While IWG concurred with this request, it would be in the best interest of the city to have the comprehensive transportation analysis completed prior to finalizing these plan specifics. The City will be reviewing options for the area of public right of way that is located in significant sections of this street north of North Division Street.

## **PHASE II IMPROVEMENTS**

### **Completion of East/West Corridor Enhancements to the Bayside**

The final phase of the east/west corridor enhancements takes the pedestrian improvements from Philadelphia Avenue all the way to the bayside. This includes all of the streets from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to S. Division Street. All of these streets will preserve their widths as well as their existing parking spaces. The pedestrian enhancements for these remaining streets will be consistent with the rest of the previously improved streets.

### **Future Developable Site Evaluation**

Up to this phase the recommendations made toward realizing a more active interior downtown core centered on small-to-medium size public/private sector investments. This approach is logical considering the seasonal challenges and unproven market for a large-scale investment project. Having achieved success in phases I and II, the next natural evolution is the ability to attract the "high-profile" anchors, such as an IMAX theater, new hotel anchor or museum.

Towards this goal, the Town of Ocean City and OCDC must identify potential developable sites that offer prospective projects a location with easy access, high visibility, and land availability. Several obvious parcels rise to the top of the list including the former Cropper Concrete location

which offers long term possibilities. The OCDC and Town of Ocean City should develop a comprehensive strategy in packaging these properties as potential public/private ventures.

**Proposed projects to pursue in future:**

**Business Assistance Program** – The OCDC should continue its successful commercial façade program which has improved the overall appearance of the downtown area. In addition, such façade applicants will be required to adhere to the downtown design standards for such renovation work. The OCDC should be open to creating and funding other business assistance programs that will help downtown businesses to attract desired uses and avoid vacant spaces.

**Land Acquisition/Landbanking** – The consolidation and assembly of land is proposed to begin the physical transformation of the downtown area. The recommended location(s) of this land assembly is an interior block that is west of Baltimore Avenue and east of Philadelphia Avenue; however the OCDC should be flexible to reviewing other properties that are available for other redevelopment endeavors.

The interior area project is planned as a mixed commercial/residential use development with a single anchor tenant (i.e., a high density residential or hotel with limited convention facilities that would bring people to and have them stay in the area for a period of time). The project should meet recommended architectural style/theme standards and promote a strong pedestrian orientation.

The property should contain limited onsite parking. This will allow for compact development while simultaneously limiting building height. Parking should be provided via a fee process within the anticipated Downtown public parking facility. An Incentive Program should be created that includes recommended development guidelines as well as financial “incentives” to encourage redevelopment.

**Downtown Parking Facility** – Ocean City's mass transit system provides an excellent service and will remain an important ingredient in bringing people to the Downtown area. In fact, due to the success of the City's bus service, the use of the parking/transit center at South Division Street has expanded significantly and needs to be replaced with a larger facility. A larger facility with accompanying service lanes is necessary at the earliest possible time. The center also handles buses from the County's bus system.

A major obstacle for redevelopment of the downtown is the lack of parking. Parking should be used as a redevelopment strategy to allow new and existing properties to redevelop and utilize this intermodal facility. A multi-level parking deck should be constructed in the downtown area and the parking structure should be tied into a new intermodal transit station. It is imperative that the parking structure be attractive and emphasizes the quality of the redevelopment efforts. First

floor retail or other active use should be considered to provide additional street life to South Baltimore Avenue and Worcester Street.

**Inlet Boardwalk Connection** – In order to physically tie the bayside properties and the Boardwalk together, an inlet boardwalk will need to be constructed. This connection will run westward from the present City’s Inlet boardwalk and then continue northward to link to the Philadelphia Avenue’s 14 feet wide boardwalk constructed on the west side of the street. The long term goal is a connected boardwalk along the waterfront, extending northwards to 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Route 50 Bridge improvements** – Presently, the Route 50 Bridge contains limited space for pedestrians, bicyclists, and fishermen. To correct this situation, several options have been discussed ranging from renovations of the existing bridge to the construction of a new bridge. The decision as to this bridge issue will be determined in the near future although the actual construction/renovation will be many years away from occurring.

**Downtown Public Arts Program** – Public art is a major component in creating a city’s visual image. Public art is often the element that can help in making a city memorable and provides it significance for succeeding generations. The OCDC recognizes the importance of public art as a means of enhancing the quality of life in the community and as a means of providing professional opportunities to local and regional visual artists. The OCDC has established a committee to promote and sponsor various types of public artwork for the Downtown area. This committee includes representatives from the Downtown Association, Boardwalk Association, Beautification Committee, and the Art League of Ocean City.

**Historic Preservation Program**– Ocean City contains several structures and sites that have interest from a historic and architectural viewpoint. The preservation and enhancement of such places can be a boom for redeveloping the Downtown area. However, without any incentives to fit these structures into the future plans for the Downtown area, many will continue to deteriorate and be demolished. Besides direct preservation of such structures, the OCDC will provide educational materials to promote the preservation efforts for specific structures. Such efforts can include a historic marker program and walking tour maps.

**Residential Enhancement Program** – There are number of residential buildings in downtown Ocean City that could be provided with incentives for renovation as with the residential Façade Program. In particular, the St. Louis Avenue area, between North Division Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Street presents an opportunity that is unique in the Downtown area. This area possesses a number of quaint homes that can be rehabilitated and help create another “interesting place” in the Downtown area.

**OCDC Fence Program** – Consistent with its downtown design standards, the OCDC will provide financial assistance to commercial and residential property owners desiring to install new fencing on the street sides or front yards of their properties. Such fencing can be used as an effective screening method for parking areas for commercial uses as well as an attractive and traditional element for residential properties.

**Employee Housing** – This item has been a major issue for the many years. Although, newer hotels and service related businesses are constructed, the number of employee housing units is decreasing. The OCDC supports efforts to improve, rehabilitate, and construct new units reserved for employee housing. Such housing generally does not require much parking and can be effectively integrated into mixed-use developments.

**Future Large Site Redevelopment** – There are several large scale sites that can be utilized for future redevelopment in the downtown area. Two potential sites are the present Coast Guard Station, south of Worcester Street on the Bayside, and the Cropper Property, which was used as a concrete plant and located on the Bayside, north of N. Division Street, but is now available for redevelopment. Both properties represent potentials to locate larger attractions to the area, such as an aquarium or IMAX Theatre, as well as, compact mixed-use development. Of course, the Coast Guard site would be problematic to redevelop given the need for such a facility near the inlet area. The Cropper property could be impacted by the Route 50 Bridge configuration. Either type of project will need to comply with the general guidelines, which the OCDC promotes. Other larger street sites can be included as land assemblage becomes practical and necessary.

**Baltimore Avenue street improvements** – This important corridor should be provided comprehensive street improvements between North Division Street and 15<sup>th</sup> Street. The additional public right of way may be useful to improve portions of this street.

**St. Louis Avenue Improvements** – Future streetscaping along St. Louis Avenue north of N. Division Street will assist in creating a more pleasing walking environment. Such improvements should consist of improved pedestrian amenities, improved intersections, and undergrounding of utilities. This project is currently in the design process.

**Street enhancements** – Consistent with the IWG Plan of Action, various downtown streets should be provided various improvements. Some of these improvements may include changes to the traffic flow, but many should improve the pedestrian amenities with special reference to wider sidewalks.

**Alleyway improvements** – As already referenced alleys play a significant role in downtown Ocean City. Provisions should be made to improve alleys when necessary as well as promoting alleys in larger projects.

**Water taxi** – consistent with the original IWG Plan of Action a water taxi system can be included into the downtown transportation plans to provide an interesting method for visitors and residents to travel to various destination points.

**Wayfinding signage program** – Fitting into the various redevelopment strategy of identifying important points of interest in downtown is the need to direct people to such points. A wayfinding signage program can be used for vehicular and pedestrians to direct and highlight various destinations to visit.

**Interactive water display** – Although not yet identified for a specific suitable site, an interactive water display should be considered to attract people.

**Improved entranceway to inlet parking lot** – Recognizing the large number of vehicles visiting the Inlet Parking Lot, it should be provided with a more appealing look. This project could be combined with improvements to the Inlet Park which is adjacent to this entrance.

**Special events** – The OCDC should continue to promote special events in downtown Ocean City. Some of these special events could be directly provided by the OCDC or through sponsorship assistance.

**Building demolition program** – There are several buildings that are severely dilapidated in downtown and could require demolition. The State of Maryland has a program for providing financial assistance to such severe structures. These buildings should be reviewed on a case by case basis working with the affected property owner and Town of Ocean City.

**Marketing** – The OCDC will pursue strategies to promote downtown Ocean City as well as the OCDC's program and successes. Such marketing may consist of press releases, videos, City publications, local radio and television resources, area publications, and OCDC newsletters.

**Design Standards** – Work with Town of Ocean City to create design standards for other areas of the Town.

### **Recommended Action Items**

The following projects are recommended planning initiatives followed by a three-phase plan of action:

#### **Planning Initiatives**

- Develop plan and initiate evaluation of streets requiring wider sidewalks in downtown
- Plan for future land acquisition activities
- Design wayfinding signage program
- Evaluate appropriate business assistance programs
- Identify buildings and programs to preserve designated historic buildings
- Develop marketing strategies
- Work with Town to create design standards for other areas of city.

#### **Phase I**

- Continue OCDC Commercial Façade Program
- Continue OCDC Residential Façade Program
- Continue OCDC Public Art Program

- Create and implement business assistance program
- Pursue land acquisition/landbanking activities
- Pursue parking structure development
- Expand Fence program
- Implement wayfinding signage program
- Promote additional special events in downtown area
- Assist owners in historic preservation efforts as requested
- Manage employee housing units

## **Phase II**

- Continue programs referenced in Phase I
- Continue to pursue wrap around Boardwalk project
- Completion of East/West corridor enhancements
- Development of specialty retail concentration in interior block area
- Work with City to develop Baltimore Avenue enhancements from N. Division Street to 15<sup>th</sup> Street

## **Phase III**

- Continue programs referenced in Phase I
- Completion of East/West Corridor enhancements to the bayside
- Pursue developers for land banked properties

## **Benchmarks**

There are a number of benchmarks to use to gauge the success of the redevelopment efforts of this extended Community Legacy Plan. They are as follows:

1) Design Standards implementation – the easiest method to determine the effectiveness of this project is to evaluate the quality of the new buildings being designed and developed in this district. The OCDC has already been working with the Town of Ocean City in this site plan process and has offered many recommendations that have been incorporated into the design of new projects.

2) Façade Program – the increased number of commercial uses that are renovating their facades. As previously mentioned, this program would be aimed at commercial businesses as well as motel, hotels, bed & breakfast establishments, and housing serving workforce employees. The effectiveness of this program is easily determined by the number of projects completed as well as the level of private investment.

3) An increase in the pedestrian traffic within this district, particularly in the inner blocks, would be good measure of success.

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4) Additional private sector redevelopment could also be measured by the number of site plans and building permits being issues.

### **Community Partners**

Within Ocean City there is a unique networking of six organizations that make up the Partners Group. This loosely set up organization was established three years ago and is a great means of communicating on various issues affecting Ocean City. The OCDC is the newest member of this organization and works very closely with each of the other five Partner organizations. The Partners Group consists of the following organizations:

- Hotel Motel Restaurant Association, Inc.
- Ocean City Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Association
- Boardwalk Development Association
- Economic Development Council

The OCDC also has one ex-officio member of each of these organizations on its Board of Directors. Such members are permitted pursuant to the OCDC by-laws. The OCDC receives valuable input on its redevelopment program from each of these members. The OCDC has provided at least one presentation on its redevelopment program to these organizations and keeps in touch with each organization on a regular basis. The Economic Development Council sponsors meetings on a regular basis whereby the organizations provide an update to each other, too. The Partners Group will play an integral part in our redevelopment program in terms of policy formulation as well as support of our strategies.

The OCDC will need to partner with the Town of Ocean City on the redevelopment program for this area. The OCDC will also require the financial assistance of the City on specific projects, too. Since the creation of the OCDC, this organization has had a strong relationship with the City. The City's Planning and Community Development Director is the appointed contact between the City and OCDC and he attends our Board meetings. He also works closely with the OCDC Executive Director on several projects. The OCDC provides various information to the City on a regular basis as well as provides a quarterly report of its activities to the Mayor and City Council.

The most important partnership for the OCDC is to work with the area business owners, property owners, and residents. Other important organizations which the OCDC has partnered with include the UMES/Rural Development Center, Salisbury University, the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore, the Art League of Ocean City, Patrick Bennett Foundation, and Worcester County Arts Council.

The OCDC will also be partnering with area business and property owners to continue its façade improvement program, if funded by the State. As previously mentioned, the OCDC recognizes the need to partner with the private sector to bring about successful redevelopment. And it also realizes that such actions will require the OCDC to take an aggressive role in promoting this form of redevelopment.

### **Local Commitment to Smart Growth**

The Town of Ocean City has been a strong follower of Smart Growth in both its policies and practices. The OCDC recognizes the importance of Smart Growth in its efforts to redevelopment the downtown area, too. All of the OCDC's recommended projects in its redevelopment plans promote Smart Growth standards in various ways. Some of the practices of the Town that promote Smart Growth are listed below:

#### Mass Transit

The Town of Ocean City has actively promoted its mass transit system, which now carries 4 million passengers per year. The Town only charges \$2 per day for unlimited bus use. The Town operates over 60 buses and plans to expand this service even more. The Town just opened its new Park & Ride facility in West Ocean City to increase the attractiveness for employees to use the bus service. This new facility will also serve as a critical point for other bus service to other points in the Delmarva Peninsula. Not only does this transportation means improve the net air quality standards; it also increases available parking in the downtown area. The Town's bus system has evolved in a major means of transportation for residents, tourists, and employees throughout Ocean City.

#### Zoning codes

In terms of zoning, the Town of Ocean City has several items that promote Smart Growth Initiatives. First the Town has a transfer of development rights program that directs development from an environmentally sensitive area (the Atlantic Ocean beach) to areas designated in the Town's Comprehensive Plan as its highest density areas. Secondly, the Town encourages mixed-use development by allowing shared parking by complementary uses. The Town codes also encourage on-site employee housing by not counting such unites against a property's density limits and reducing parking requirements. Thirdly, the Town has approved design standards for the downtown area of the City and is familiar with improving the character and appearance of new development. This reflects the traditional development patterns downtown and makes the buildings more pedestrian friendly. Fourthly, the Town's Comprehensive Plan reflects the Smart Growth Visions as stated in the Maryland Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992, and includes all appropriate elements required by the State's Planning Act.

#### Redevelopment

The Town of Ocean City has continued to support the OCDC in its efforts to revitalize the downtown area of Ocean City. Besides co-sponsoring several grant applications for redevelopment with the OCDC, the Town has also established the Inlet Parking Lot Fund that sets aside a specific amount of funds from the Inlet Parking lot for revitalization projects.

In regards to the Maryland Rehabilitation Code, the Town was involved with its development through its Chief Building Official who served on the advisory committee that developed the code. The Town has adopted this code, which is a great tool for assisting older buildings to renovate.

The Town facilitated the establishment of the OCDC and has provided funding for its redevelopment efforts since its creation in 2000. The Town also received the Maryland Smart Growth Award in 2000 for the redevelopment of Baltimore Avenue from 15<sup>th</sup> Street to 33<sup>rd</sup> Street. These improvements encouraged private sector development in the area.

## **Sources of Redevelopment Funding and Financing**

### **Sources of Redevelopment Funding and Financing**

The following section provides a general review of potential sources of funding for redevelopment programs and a description of the funding sources applicable to each of the improvements or projects identified in the plan. In general, a variety of financing options are presently available to the OCDC. Among these are the following:

#### **City and County contributions**

The OCDC will need to continue to tap these sources for general administrative expenses and projects when it can't identify other funding sources. These two public entities provide crucial administrative financial support to the OCDC. In addition, whenever a larger grant application requires a matching portion beyond the financial means of the OCDC, it may be necessary to request such matching funds to pursue a project with a significant public purpose.

#### **Private contributions/Fundraising**

The OCDC will pursue private sector contributions for a variety of redevelopment activities. The OCDC will explore several fundraising strategies, such as a pledging program, sponsoring a golf tournament, and other activities. As a 501 (c) (3), not for profit organization, contributions to the OCDC are considered charitable contributions and are thus tax deductible.

#### **Federal and State grants**

The OCDC will continue to pursue grant funds through these public sector entities. The OCDC may be eligible to pursue grants, but not limited to, the following Federal departments: Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Economic Development Administration (EDA). The OCDC may be eligible to pursue grants, but not limited to, the following State departments: Business and Economic Development (DBED) and Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Often the OCDC may need to assist or become a co-applicant with a private sector business to pursue low interest loan, grant or loan guarantee funds through a governmental entity such as the Small Business Administration or Economic Development Administration. In certain cases, the OCDC may need to request the Town of Ocean City to be an applicant on its behalf.

#### **Foundations**

As an approved 501(c) (3) organization, the OCDC is eligible to pursue foundation funds as applicable. Although there are several foundations located in Maryland, there are a host of not

for profit organizations to compete against for such funding. There are very few foundations located on the eastern shore of Maryland.

**Direct borrowing from commercial and public lenders**

The OCDC can pursue direct borrowing of funds however it will need to identify a repayment source.

**Land sales/leases**

Acquisition of property and its preparation for development are available to the OCDC. The resale or leasing of such lands to private developers can provide another source of income. However, this will require a case-by-case determination as to not jeopardize our not for profit status as well as income tax exempt status.

**Other redevelopment incentives**

The OCDC will pursue other financial strategies as necessary to promote private sector investment in the designated target area. Such actions may include co-sponsoring of applications for State and Federal funding such as low interest loans. Also the OCDC may explore the use of tax abatements and tax credits.

**Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

**GOAL AREA “A”**

**The OCDC will continue to maintain and enhance its current projects in accordance with its adopted Community Legacy Plan.**

**OBJECTIVE A-1:**

The OCDC shall prepare and maintain a Community Legacy Plan as serving as its Community Redevelopment Plan containing a list of short and long-range programs.

**POLICY A-1.1:**

The Community Legacy Plan shall be kept up-to-date. All current programs and projects shall be evaluated at least once yearly, prior to adoption of the budget.

**POLICY A-1.2:**

The Community Legacy Plan shall be reasonably flexible in accommodating private sector initiatives and future economic trends and opportunities.

**POLICY A-1.3:**

Redevelopment programs and projects shall be implemented pursuant to the Principles of this Plan.

**GOAL AREA “B”**

**The OCDC shall implement projects and programs aimed at meeting area-wide needs within the Community Legacy Area.**

**OBJECTIVE B-1:**

The OCDC shall strive to improve the overall visual appearance of the Community Legacy Area (CLA).

**POLICY B-1.1:** The OCDC shall implement a subsidized façade program for the exterior improvements to commercial property within the Community Legacy Area.

**POLICY B-1.2:** The OCDC may implement its own programs or provide funding toward Town programs for the beautification of roadways and other public spaces within the Community Legacy Area.

**POLICY B-1.3:** When deciding to fund projects or programs to improve the physical appearance of private property, the OCDC shall consider the level of private participation in the project.

**POLICY B-1.4:** The OCDC shall develop a program(s) to utilize vacant parcels within the Community Legacy Area. Specific projects shall be determined by the redevelopment strategy and shall be sensitive to the use of surrounding property.

**OBJECTIVE B-2:**

The OCDC will strive to ensure that adequate land uses and facilities remain available to meet the recreational, shopping and public service needs of area residents when implementing its redevelopment projects.

**POLICY B-2.1:** Needed facilities, which are displaced due to redevelopment efforts, should be relocated or replaced.

**OBJECTIVE B-3:**

The OCDC shall strive to increase the overall level of economic activity within the community redevelopment area.

**POLICY B-3.1:** Projects that provide increase employment opportunities shall be encouraged.

**POLICY B-3.2:** The OCDC shall initiate programs and projects which focus on business development and act as catalysts to leverage additional investment by private enterprise.

POLICY B-3.3: When possible, OCDC funding for projects shall be structured so as to encourage investment in redevelopment and rehabilitation, either in the same project or in adjacent areas.

POLICY B-3.4: The OCDC may participate in a program(s) to increase the market share of the downtown retail core. This program should contain, at least, the following elements:

- A strategy to attract new businesses to the area;
- An advertising and promotion strategy;
- A unified merchandising strategy to establish a theme; and
- A leasing and operation strategy to coordinate leasing efforts, sales events and store hours.

**OBJECTIVE B-4:**

The OCDC shall strive to improve the existing building stock within the Community Legacy Area and to increase the availability of affordable housing opportunities.

POLICY B-4.1: The OCDC shall provide support for various selected public and private building improvement programs, which are aimed at rehabilitation and the provision of additional affordable housing.

POLICY B-4.2: The OCDC shall work with the Town in the preparation of neighborhood and redevelopment plans. The Community Legacy Area may provide funding or utilize its powers for implementation of appropriate provisions of these plans.

POLICY B-4.3: The OCDC shall increase housing opportunities in the area and to demonstrate the type of infill housing, which could be built on available vacant lots within the Community Legacy Area.

**OBJECTIVE B-5:**

The OCDC shall strive to meet the requirements of the State of Maryland's Smart Growth Initiatives:

POLICY B-5.1: Promote projects that increase pedestrian activity.

POLICY B-5.2: Support projects that provide a mixture of uses.

POLICY B-5.3: Support mass transit.

POLICY B-5.4: Support an incentive system for preserving special and historic buildings.

**GOAL AREA “C”**

**The OCDC shall conduct its business in accordance with Maryland State Statutes, and adopted standards and procedures contained within this Community Legacy Plan.**

**OBJECTIVE C-1:**

The OCDC shall strive to boost public relations and increase public awareness of its activities within the CLA.

**POLICY C-1.1:** The OCDC shall continue to solicit the participation of residents and citizen groups in the formulation of its redevelopment strategies.

**POLICY C-1.2:** The OCDC shall issue press releases when it determines that public notice of its actions is warranted.

**OBJECTIVE C-2:**

Administration of the OCDC and the procedures by which it operates shall in accordance with adopted Bylaws.

**POLICY C-2.1:** The Bylaws of the OCDC shall be available for public inspection.

**OBJECTIVE C-3:**

The OCDC shall coordinate its activities with the Town of Ocean City.

**POLICY C-3.1:** The OCDC shall prepare periodic updates to the Town of Ocean City.

**POLICY C-3.2:** The OCDC shall coordinate with the Town to ensure that all development applications to occur within the OCDC’s target area shall be reviewed by the OCDC for comment.

**POLICY C-3.3:** The Director of Community Development & Planning shall be responsible for maintaining coordination with the Town of Ocean City and the OCDC.

**OBJECTIVE C-4:**

The OCDC shall coordinate its planning and redevelopment activities with those units of government and agencies, which may be impacted by it.

POLICY C-4.1: The OCDC shall strive to coordinate its activities with other agencies through the attendance of the Executive Director or board member at meetings where activities, which impact the OCDC, will be discussed.

POLICY C-4.2: The OCDC shall request that the Town Council appoint one member of the OCDC Board of Directors to all Town Task Forces that deal with items affecting the OCDC.

POLICY C-4.3: The OCDC shall invite members of other agencies to attend its meetings when items, which would impact, said agencies would be discussed.







