

On Thursday, November 13, Fostoria community leaders revealed their plans for addressing economic development and quality of life concerns for the next several years. During a conference in Fostoria, action teams and community board members announced their strategies for implementation of *Fostoria Ohio 2005: Community Framework for Progress*, a total community development vision and planning process.

Nearly two years ago, the City of Fostoria, the Fostoria Economic Development Corporation (FEDC) and the Fostoria Area Chamber of Commerce jointly initiated the *Framework* process which was facilitated by Strategic Leadership Associates, an organizational consulting firm specializing in creating consensus on community vision and strategy.

In early 1996, Strategic Leadership Associates completed a *Community Profile and Analysis* in order to identify critical issues and areas for action in shaping a conceptual plan for the future of Fostoria. The profile revealed several issues that have a negative impact on the quality of life and economic viability of the community:

- Downtown weaknesses (poor and inconsistent building maintenance, absence of a downtown strategy, no marketing for downtown community)
- Loss of manufacturing jobs (42% decline since 1970 census)
- Not competitive in attracting homeowners looking for \$75,000+ homes
- Community perceived as “welfare center”

The basic concepts and strategies of *Framework* were developed by a core group of 35 community leaders representing a cross section of the community including industry executives, Chamber of Commerce leaders, religious leaders, community service leaders, government leaders, educational leaders, workforce leaders and minority leaders.

In summer, 1996, a representative *Framework for Progress* Community Board was established to oversee implementation of the project. Board members met several times during the second half of 1996 to review and revise the *Framework* draft. Through focus groups and community forums, more than 200 community members provided input into the revisions.

Starting in first quarter, 1997, seven task forces were recruited to write action plans for achieving the seven core strategies. The seven strategies include: Community Relations, Community and Neighborhood Quality of Life, Intergovernmental Cooperation and Infrastructure Development, Economic Development, Workforce Education and Development, Improved Housing, and Women, Minority and Youth Mentoring and Training.

Now, all seven action plans have been completed, moving the *Framework* process finally to implementation. Key implementation activities will include:

- Hire a managing director to facilitate Framework activities.
- Hire a community relations coordinator.
- Develop a comprehensive community marketing program.
- Implement a development plan for downtown Fostoria.
- Implement a 5-year, \$900,000 parks and recreation improvement plan.
- Construct sewer and water lines in all presently un-served sections of the City.
- Advocate for a zoned rail-linked industrial park on both the East and West sides of Fostoria connecting the CSX and Norfolk Southern rail lines.
- Create a Workforce Education and Job Center Partnership that will establish a one-stop job development center for placement, training, job screening, technical skill development, career counseling and human relations skills training.
- Establish a homestead program to encourage people to move back into “once fine” neighborhoods.
- Create a special program to market Fostoria as an attractive place for minority businesses to locate and to help local minority citizens establish new businesses.

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