

WHAT IS COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK FOR PROGRESS?

Fostoria Ohio 2005: Community Framework for Progress is a total community development vision and planning process. The process was initiated jointly by the City of Fostoria, the Fostoria Economic Development Corporation (FEDC) and the Fostoria Area Chamber of Commerce and 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 basic concepts and strategies 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. In November, all seven action plans were completed, moving the *Framework* process finally to implementation.

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR FRAMEWORK?

A profile and analysis of the Fostoria community reveals several issues that have a seriously negative impact on our quality of life and economic viability:

- 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
- Fostoria Community Schools have highest ADC recipient rate (20.3%) compared to regional averages
- Community perceived as “welfare center”

Over the past few years, as each of the *Framework* sponsors (City, Chamber and FEDC) attempted to address individual issues, it soon became obvious that any one project’s success would be severely diminished by failure to deal with the other issues.

For instance, we could dress up downtown and fill the storefronts, but if we do not have good-paying jobs, there would be no one to patronize the merchants. We cannot recruit new employers who will create good-paying jobs if we do not have an educated, skilled workforce. We cannot produce a strong workforce if our schools are weak. We cannot strengthen our schools if we do not have an adequate tax base and enthusiastic community support and involvement. We cannot increase the tax base unless we increase property values and recruit new taxpaying businesses and residents to the community. And so on...

Acknowledging that we cannot truly resolve any single issue if the others are not addressed, the City administration, FEDC and Chamber teamed up to initiate the *Framework* process which provides a “holistic” approach to community development.

WHAT IS THE FRAMEWORK VISION AND STRATEGY?

By the year 2005, Fostoria, Ohio will be a culturally and economically diverse “American community that works and cares.” Our community will enjoy excellence in the quality of life through improved educational opportunities, safe and attractive neighborhoods, and access to leisure and recreational activities. We will

secure these benefits through a stable economic future with a redeveloped utilities and transportation infrastructure, an industrial center attractive to major rail, manufacturing, agri-business, food processing and environmental growth industries, and a recognized labor, industry, educational and government partnership for industrial education and workforce development. Our image will consistently express this Vision.

The Community Framework for Progress will achieve its mission through the following core strategies and key actions:

Community Relations -- We will promote our vision of Fostoria through an accurate community profile which highlights our cultural and economic diversity as an asset. Working with government, churches, schools and businesses, we will be known as an "American community that works and cares." Key actions to achieve this strategy include the following:

- Hire a community relations coordinator.
- Develop a comprehensive community marketing program.
- Increase the number of community-wide activities which attract people to the parks, public areas, restaurants, downtown, etc.
- Publish an effective and unified community newsletter.
- Develop a coordinated city-wide business customer service program.

Community and Neighborhood Quality of Life -- We will improve our community quality of life through safe and attractive neighborhoods, access to leisure and recreational activities, and improved culture, shopping and entertainment opportunities. Key actions to achieve this strategy include the following:

- Articulate and implement a vision and development plan for downtown Fostoria.
- Create a Community Foundation.
- Organize a Fostoria Arts Council.
- Revitalize community watch groups and support community policing.
- Implement a 5-year, \$900,000 parks and recreation improvement plan.

Intergovernmental Cooperation and Infrastructure Development -- We will redevelop and expand our community infrastructure including water, sewer, gas, electric, phone, fiber optics, rail and road capabilities, and market these capabilities for development. Key actions to achieve this strategy include the following:

- Develop an ongoing network to improve relationships and establish agreements that promote development to the benefit of all.
- Construct sewer and water lines in all presently un-served sections of Fostoria and the surrounding area.
- Establish new mutual aid agreements between Fostoria and the surrounding communities.
- Complete work on a comprehensive long-range land use policy.
- Develop a comprehensive transportation plan.
- Initiate infrastructure maintenance cycles; also establish short- and long-term goals and standards for improving, upgrading and coordinating the capital improvements of city-owned infrastructure.

Economic Development -- We will identify the community assets which rail, manufacturing, food processing, agri-business and environmental growth industries require to be successful. We will restructure our capabilities to meet these needs, attracting and retaining these target industries to our community. Key actions to achieve this strategy include the following:

- 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.
- Conduct a comprehensive economic development audit of community assets and liabilities, working with existing employers in Fostoria as a basis for future economic development marketing.
- Create workforce job opportunities for women and minorities representing this capacity of Fostoria as a strength to future economic development prospects.
- Create a Business CEO Coalition working with major employers of the UAW and other major labor unions.
- Create a Business Education Collaboration developing a 5-year plan with specific targets for improvement in educational excellence and educational leadership.
- Develop an additional approach to a super two-lane bypass master plan utilizing existing county roads to create a loop around the City of Fostoria.

Workforce Education and Development -- We will develop and market a 21st century workforce through partnerships among organized labor, industry, schools, industrial educators and community colleges in our region. Key actions to achieve this strategy include the following:

- Create a Workforce Education and Job Center Partnership that will create a blueprint for a one-stop job development center for placement, training, job screening, technical skill development, career counseling and human relations skills training.
- Establish a Fostoria career fair to educate Fostoria's youth (K-12) and the future workforce about opportunities for employment in Fostoria.
- Establish a community-wide education fair to provide students and the workforce with an opportunity to become more familiar with educational opportunities in the area.
- Create a Fostoria area daycare network to assure that comprehensive daycare is available for specialized needs including multi-level care for all workforce shifts, especially sick child care.
- Set up a skill-based mentoring program providing short courses and mentoring for students in practical, on-the-job experiences in basic skills.
- Establish a one-to-one exchange program linking individual teachers with individual workforce representatives to learn about the expectations of schools and industry for workforce education and development.

Improved Housing -- We will improve the housing stock through renovation and removal of homes, inter-governmental cooperation, the extension of water and sewer opportunities, the development of new mid- and upper-level home sites, and improved housing codes. Key actions to achieve this strategy include the following:

- Upgrade the quality of property along major thoroughfares.
- Hire a full-time grants writer who will apply for or attract grants to improve the housing stock and the appearance of the City of Fostoria.
- Develop a priority list of specific targeted neighborhoods in which to make public improvements.
- Work to continue to increase available housing and land for housing for mid- and upper-level income residents (500 units by 2005).
- Initiate and establish neighborhood clean-up groups to beautify their neighborhoods, as well as public spaces, commercial and industrial properties.
- Sponsor semi-annual information meetings to encourage first-time home ownership.
- Establish a "homestead" program to encourage people to move back into "once-fine" neighborhoods.

Women, Minority and Youth Mentoring and Training -- We will create mentoring, training and support opportunities in business, education and community leadership for women, minorities and youth. Key actions to achieve this strategy include the following:

- Create a special program to market Fostoria as an attractive place for minority businesses to locate and to help local minority leaders establish new businesses.
- Expand the participation of minority communities in the Framework process; develop a database of minority volunteer members.
- Create a Youth Assistance Network to coordinate self-esteem and values-oriented youth programs in Fostoria and encourage awareness and support of their activities.
- Investigate and benchmark programs for youth and school-based sexuality curricula in other communities that have successfully reduced teen sexual activity and pregnancy.
- Establish a chapter of Parents Without Partners in Fostoria.

WHAT HAS THE COMMUNITY ALREADY INVESTED IN *FRAMEWORK*?

Recognizing the need for experienced, professional assistance in facilitating the *Framework* process, the sponsors pooled their resources to hire a nationally-recognized consulting firm, Strategic Leadership Associates. To date, the sponsors have invested more than \$40,000 in the planning process and meeting and promotion expenses, plus have committed more than 150 staff hours to coordinating and facilitating *Framework* activities.

With the Community Board, focus groups and task force members, *Framework* has been supported by more

than 200 community volunteers.

Even before reaching the implementation phase, we are already celebrating several accomplishments attributable to the *Framework* spirit. Some of our recent accomplishments include a voter-approved income tax increase for community development, a stronger business/ schools relationship, more than 100 new housing units in the works, and a \$900,000 parks and recreation improvement plan ... to name just a few.

HOW DO WE PLAN TO MAKE IT HAPPEN?

The Community Board will continue to meet regularly to monitor the progress of *Framework* objectives. Task force volunteers are working diligently on a number of projects initiated or furthered by the *Framework* plan. Under a management services agreement with the Community Board, the Chamber of Commerce president is responsible to the Community Board for coordinating task force efforts and facilitating implementation of our *Community Framework for Progress*.

HOW CAN YOU JOIN IN OUR EFFORTS?

As mentioned earlier, Fostoria community leaders and citizens have already made a substantial investment in the *Framework* plan and have committed themselves to implementation. In our pursuit of our *Framework* vision, though, we recognize that we are not a world entirely unto ourselves, but rather an integral part of the larger community around us.

With that in mind, we invite you to share our successes as we realize our vision for *Fostoria, Ohio 2005* by joining in our efforts to achieve our *Community Framework for Progress*. Please indicate your area(s) of interest on the attached volunteer registration form and return it to the address on the form.