

Historic Downtown Delaware, Ohio

The heart of Delaware, Ohio, is its historic downtown. The establishment of a burgeoning community on the former site of a Mingo Indian village along the scenic Olentangy River (formerly the Whetstone River) was envisioned under the master planning of Colonel Moses Byxbe of Massachusetts. He submitted a plan of the city on May 9, 1808, marking the official founding of Delaware.

As the seat of county government, the courthouse was erected in 1816 and became the northern anchor of Sandusky Street. In 1842, Ohio Wesleyan University, the southern anchor of Sandusky Street, was founded. The Sandusky Street Corridor continues to benefit from Byxbe's forethought; he laid out Sandusky Street '6 poles wide' – 33 feet wider than nearby streets. This extra width helped establish the downtown central business district.

The Sandusky Street Corridor is a mixture of approximately 150 buildings. Land uses range from government to retail, eating and drinking establishments, offices, and upper-floor residential units. Two- and three-story buildings reflect late Victorian architectural style with sporadic 1940s-1960s buildings.

Specific planning efforts contributed to and helped sustain the corridor's character and vibrancy through downturns, including in the 1970s and 1980s, when high vacancy rates, boarded up buildings, and lack of business threatened some of corridor's ornate historic architecture.

With the goal of reversing the decline and preserving the heart of the city - and as part of a national movement - City administrators became advocates for the preservation of the downtown's architectural heritage. The Sandusky Street Corridor became a designated National Register Historic District in 1982. City Council established the Historic Preservation Commission in 1998, basing its guidelines on the U.S. Department of Interior Preservation Briefs. City administrators took advantage of funding offered through the Ohio Department of Transportation and Ohio Department of Development to increase pedestrian walkability and connectivity. Between 1998 and 2002, \$5 million of local and state funds was invested in downtown streetscape and infrastructure improvements. City Council offered tax incentives to owners to re-invest in their downtown buildings.

In 2003, the City of Delaware became a Certified Local Government and Main Street Delaware, Inc. became accredited under the National Main Street Program--both under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Sandusky Street Corridor More than 200 Years in the Making

1) The Sandusky Street Corridor dates back more than 200 years, to May 9, 1808, when Colonel Moses Byxbe filed or "platted" the "plan of the town of Delaware," marking the true beginning of the present City of Delaware.

2) Set in the basic gridiron-style layout, Sandusky Street, at "6 poles wide," was planned 33 feet wider than nearby streets, easily accommodating the Courthouse (1816) and Ohio Wesleyan University (1842) as downtown anchors.

3) Through our first 100 years, focused planning by city leaders gave rise to about 150 multi-story Victorian-style buildings. Past and current mixed uses include bakeries, eateries, retail, brewers, government & upper floor living.

4) City leaders halted the retail exodus of the 1970s and 1980s by becoming historic preservationists. National, state and local designations guided successful Sandusky Street redevelopment through the 2000s that continues today

5) Supported by APA award-winning plans, current efforts include sidewalk patios, wayfinding signs, and a \$1 million façade program. Our 95% retail occupancy brings "feet to the street" and testifies to the vibrant downtown Byxbe intended.

(more)

In 2005, the City's Comprehensive Plan and Gateways & Corridors Design Standards were awarded the Ohio Planning Conference "Plans of the Year" and also helped guide the corridor's redevelopment. Storefronts filled and residents, visitors, and college students were taking advantage of the offerings of restaurants, antique and book stores, microbreweries, coffee shops, ice cream parlors, and moved into refurbished apartments on upper floors.

Sensing a slowdown and faltering economy in 2008, the City offered a series of local stimuli. It authorized patio permits allowing alfresco dining and seating areas on the city sidewalks. With no industry utilizing the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund (RLF), the City petitioned the Ohio Department of Development to use the funds on other eligible projects to benefit the downtown: a façade program, offering 50-percent grants to 25 building/business owners for painting, masonry repair, and roof replacement totaling more than \$800,000 in total investments in five years; and a Wayfinding Plan addressing and installing directional signs to direct pedestrians and motorists from outside to the area and within the area itself. The City also passed a new Parking Plan to help direct consumers to downtown area merchants.

Main Street Delaware rallied a sense of community with "First Friday" parties, Farmers Markets, and a 6-week Christmas season celebration. The City became a host for the annual Ironman competition. Other organizers got involved, hosting arts festivals, car shows and county fair horse parades, all bringing "feet to the street" and back to the heart of the city.

Having productive and communicating cross-functional team's, such as City administration, Main Street Delaware, and building and business owners has led to a 95-percent occupancy rate and the vibrant downtown Moses Byxbe envisioned more than 200 years ago.

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