



Final Report

November 2007



Pleasant Ridge Community Council
Market Study & Vision Plan



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1. Background

In 1998 Pleasant Ridge initiated and later adopted a “Strategic Plan for the Future of Pleasant Ridge”. Two years later, Community Council led the development of an Urban Design Study with the assistance of the City Department of Economic Development. Each of these plans cited the desire to improve the business district’s overall image and identity, aesthetic quality, economic health, safety, parking, and both pedestrian and vehicular circulation. (see www.improvepr.org/html/purpose.html for full copies of the above referenced plans)

In the 9 years that have passed, Pleasant Ridge has witnessed several positive developments including the development of Streetscape Improvements and the McFarland’s Corner Plaza. Several new businesses have witnessed tremendous success and have brought needed community serving goods, services, and amenities to area residents. Despite the concerted efforts, diligence, and commitment of many within the community, we have also witnessed some setbacks. Most notable among these has been the loss of the IGA grocery in the summer of 2001 and the subsequent opening and closing of The Ridge Market after a valiant 4 year run.



Existing View of Ridge & Woodford Road Intersection

In recent months, several community development initiatives have been announced for both within, and adjacent to, the business district. These include:

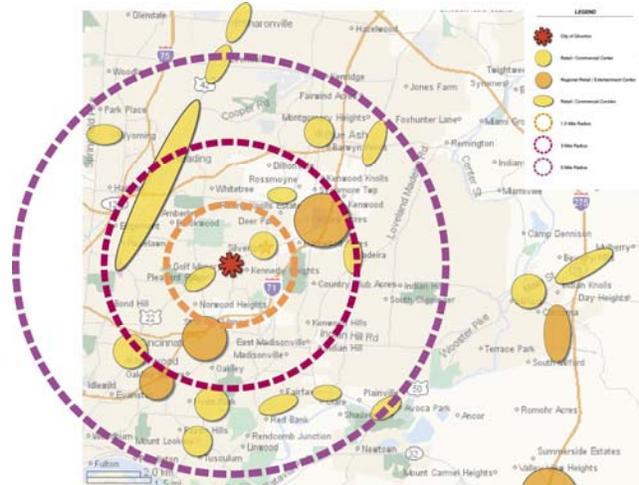
- + **The construction of a new Public School on the grounds of the current Pleasant Ridge Elementary Site.**
- + **The Expansion and Renovation of Nativity School and Church Facilities**
- + **The Columbia Township Comprehensive Plan including the redevelopment of the Ridge and Highland Avenue Commercial Area.**
- + **The proposed development of the former Crest Hills / Ridge Club site.**
- + **The development of the Kennedy Heights Arts Center**
- + **The ongoing development of Oakley Square, Center of Cincinnati, and Millworks Sites.**
- + **The completion of Strategic Redevelopment Plans in Kennedy Heights and Silverton.**

Individually, any one of these initiatives could have a pronounced impact on the future development of the Pleasant Ridge Business District and on the community as a whole. Collectively, these initiatives present a unique opportunity to leverage individual investment and improvement projects which will follow into more meaningful and strategic investment within Pleasant Ridge.



2. Context for Redevelopment

While the long list of re-investment projects bodes well for the future of Pleasant Ridge, many factors outside of the neighborhood influence economic conditions and the potential for redevelopment within the Business District. Residents of Pleasant Ridge and its neighboring communities have a wide array of alternatives in shopping, dining, and entertainment in just a 10 minute drive-time radius. In order to attract new businesses, residents, and investment, each of these communities must concentrate on the unique qualities and competitive advantages that they possess. In order to compete with regional shopping and entertainment destinations, the Pleasant Ridge Business District will have to attract patrons from the surrounding neighborhoods and the region-at-large.



The Regional Context Map above illustrates the vast concentration of competing commercial districts

The College Hill and Oakley Business Districts provide excellent models of how a small neighborhood business district can exploit its unique opportunities. Both communities experienced their initial growth and development as a result of the expansion of rail and streetcar lines. Both neighborhoods witnessed the development of homes catering to middle-income and working class families that depended upon the local grocer and a diverse array of local businesses to meet their weekly consumer demands.

As in Pleasant Ridge, the advent of the automotive society, regional shopping center, and “big box” retailer caused a gradual decline of the neighborhood business district. The neighborhood grocery in each of the three neighborhoods was ultimately supplanted by larger chain stores in higher traffic areas. Retail businesses that did not offer one-of-a-kind products or exceptional customer service were slowly replaced by regionally branded, automotive-oriented businesses and pharmacy chains that benefited from through-traffic and were not dependent on neighborhood residents or local businesses for success.

Without question, the rebirth of the Oakley business district has been influenced by the strong demographic and consumer base of the more affluent neighborhood of Hyde Park. Private developers have recognized the potential market for new housing and a significant number of new market-rate housing units have been developed in and around the community – some in the place of former single-family tracts. Coupled with the recent development of major regional shopping centers to the north (Center of Cincinnati) and South (Rookwood Commons & Pavilion) along the Madison Road corridor there has been an explosion of investment in new businesses over the last five to seven years. The businesses found there today are strategically positioned to draw from the eclectic niche of trendy home furnishings and decor retailers which anchor the district. These core retailers (including *Voltage* and *Bona*) provide the brand identity that has, in large measure, fueled additional storefront development and new construction to the east of Brotherton Road. New businesses include the development of restaurants, specialty retailers, professional, and medical offices.



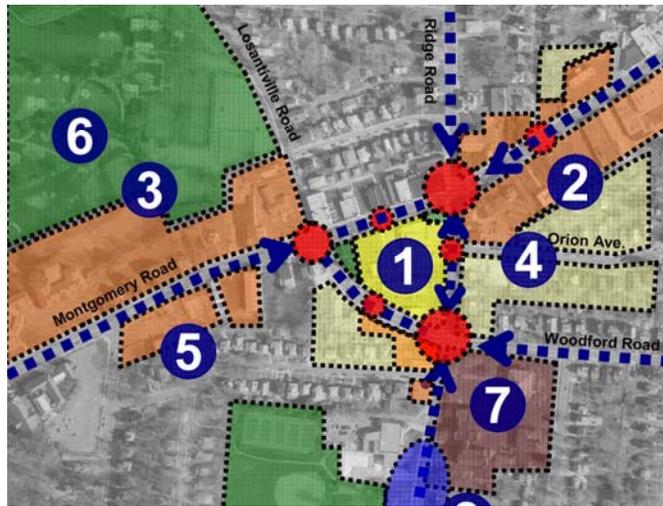
If Oakley & College Hill can do it – Why not us?

Much of the physical transformation of the Oakley Business District has occurred in just the last five years. Like Oakley, Pleasant Ridge benefits from close proximity to more affluent neighbors. The neighborhood business district is less than four miles from I-71 and the Kenwood Towne Center and less than a half-mile from the Ridge and Highland Area Interchange.

3. Current Goals

In an effort to capitalize on the positive momentum of the many current re-investment initiatives, Community Council formed a “Vision Committee” to initiate planning and development of a more targeted, strategic plan for the development of the Business District. Over the past 20 months the committee and consulting team have explored the highest and best use potential of a select number of parcels which are key to the overall quality and economic health of the business district and the community-at-large.

All work has been performed under the direction of **Pleasant Ridge Community Council** and has included an overall market assessment, *Community Kick-off Meeting*, a public *Design Workshop* and, most recently, an *Open House Presentation*. Over the course of this endeavor, many property owners, merchants and community stakeholders have provided feedback on the ideas which have been developed and refined. Furthermore, all planning concepts have been reviewed by City of Cincinnati staff responsible for community planning, transportation, and economic development.



The above map illustrates key redevelopment parcels within the district. This map was used by the “Vision Committee” to set priorities and determine possible redevelopment targets.



4. Urban Assessment

Prior to the development of any design and development concepts the design team took a look back at prior business district planning studies and completed an updated inventory and analysis of business district properties.

Concerns about the well-being of the business district go back to the mid-1960's. The perception of decline and a desire to be proactive were motivating factors behind the initial formation of Community Council in 1967.

In 1974, Community Council commissioned a “*Long Term Action Plan*” for the Business District.



View of Montgomery & Ridge Intersection looking north from UDF

This first strategic plan identified the negative influence of changing demographics, modified traffic patterns, vacancy and the deterioration of buildings within the business district. The recommendations of the plan proposed significant modifications to the street network, residential in-fill, and the development of a new “Commercial Town Center” at the intersection of Ridge and Montgomery.

In 1982, The City of Cincinnati Department of Development began work on an *Urban Design Plan* which was intended to address the revitalization of the business district and the impending closing of the Kroger Store on Montgomery Road. The 1982 was “virtually completed” in 1985 but was never sent to Planning Commission or City Council for approval.

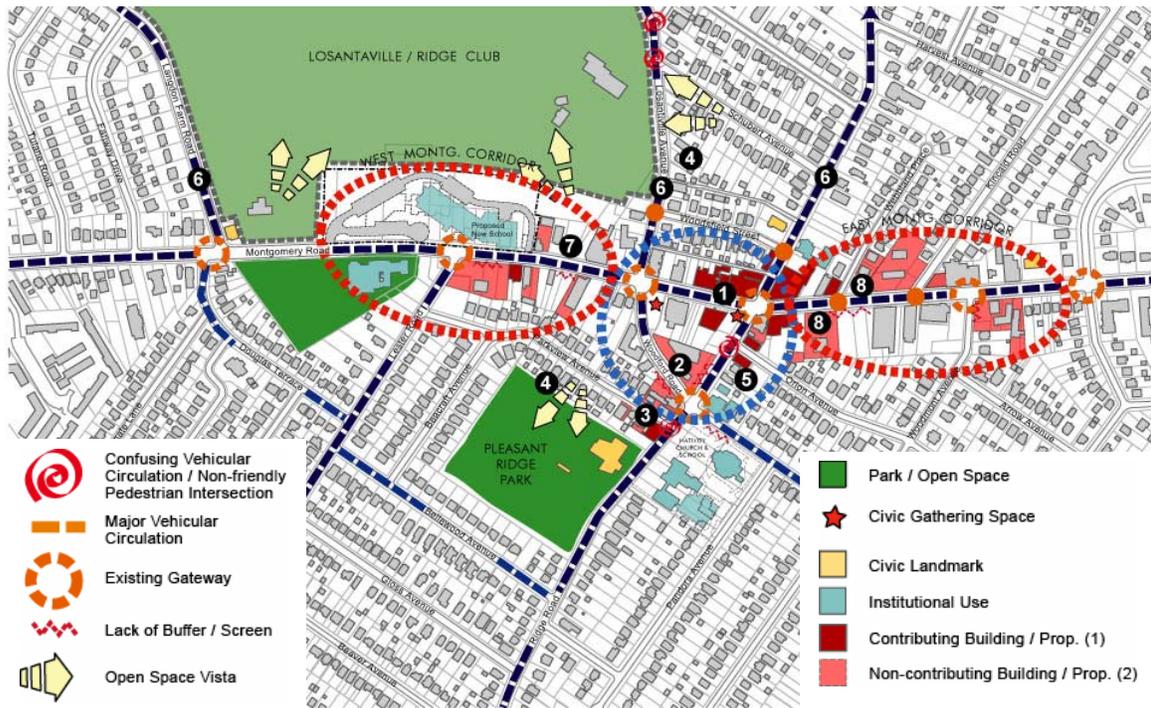
In 1990, Community Council and the Pleasant Ridge Business Association initiated the development of a “*Neighborhood Business District Urban Design Plan*”. The 1990 plan cited many of the same issues first mentioned in the 1974 study. The plan was prescriptive in nature and provided an analysis of economic conditions, available parking, vehicular-pedestrian traffic, housing, and streetscape development opportunities. While no planning concepts or implementation plans were illustrated, the plan did provide a listing of goals and objects that have carried over into the more recently adopted *1998-99 Strategic Plan* and the later *2000 Urban Design Plan*. As previously noted, the two latter plans directly led to the completion of the McFarland's Corner gateway and parking lot enhancement and the implementation of Streetscape Improvements along Montgomery Road.

Current Findings:

As of the date of publication, the 1974, 1990, 1998-99 and 2000 planning documents were all available for viewing at the Pleasant Ridge Library. With a few notable exceptions, most of the issues which the Business District faces today are already well-catalogued. Perhaps the biggest difference between this assessment and those that preceded it relates to the importance of Ridge Road to the viability and future success of the Business District.

The following *Urban Assessment* Diagram summarizes the consultant team's current findings:





Urban Assessment Diagram

1. Original streetcar era and earlier mixed-use buildings at the Ridge & Montgomery intersection define the character and appeal of the core business district. Future development should respect the importance of these building to the district's sense-of-place and historic appeal. While first floor retail tenancing could be elevated through more sensitive storefront improvement, second floor development potential is limited by small floor areas, access, and building code issues.
2. Fuel Pumps, un-buffered parking and the un-inviting architectural quality of adjoining buildings creates a negative perception of business district at the important south gateway.
3. Limited stacking distance and lack of parking along Parkview Lane limit the current potential for development of improved residential or commercial uses.
4. Single-family detached home sites offer potential for development of higher density attached housing with convenient access to the business district, park and country club.



The September 2005 "Town Meeting" gave residents and property owners an opportunity to rank the most important issues facing the neighborhood and business district.





5. The lack of a continuous street wall (of storefronts) limits the definition and recognition of a cohesive business district. Converted residential building sites adjacent to the "Triangle" and core district area could be redeveloped as new, mixed-use buildings which better define the district boundaries.
6. Potential options for future development of The Ridge Club are constrained by limited traffic capacity of Langdon Farm, Losanantaville and Ridge Road.
7. Properties along the western Montgomery Road corridor benefit from close proximity and potential views to open space. Future development should focus on higher density mixed-use residential uses versus single-story commercial uses. Lack of visibility and poor connectivity to Ridge & Montgomery core area limit current desirability of eastern Montgomery Road commercial sites.
8. Future development should promote a higher density mixed-use in-fill where possible.

5. Community Input

On September 27, 2005 over 100 people attended an initial "Town Meeting" kick-off for the Vision Plan at *Pleasant Ridge Presbyterian Church*. Participants listened to a recap of the neighborhood's prior planning efforts, heard the preliminary findings of the urban assessment and looked at emerging trends in neighborhood development, planning and design. Following the presentation, a majority of the attendees participated in a 30-minute group survey conducted to identify the most important issues and opportunities facing the district and the community at-large. Issues cited included the overall decline of the business district, crime and a lack of recognition as a destination for retail, dining or entertainment offerings. Opportunities listed included the potential for making the business district more pedestrian-oriented, the renovation of existing buildings, expansion of vintage and collectibles businesses, development of performing arts and cultural venues, and the diversification of available housing alternatives. The complete listing of the highest ranking survey responses is provided below:

STRENGTHS:

- + Diversity
- + Strong Civic/Religious Foundation
- + Central Location
- + Pedestrian Orientation
- + Dedicated Residents

WEAKNESSES:

- + Not a Clear Destination Location / Lacks Identity (*for retail, dining, or entertainment offerings*)
- + Business District Decline
- + Lack of Minority Community Involvement
- + Safety/Crime Rate Perception



The September 2005 "Town Meeting" gave residents and property owners an opportunity to rank the most important issues facing the neighborhood and business district.



OPPORTUNITIES:

- + Build upon & Improve the Pedestrian Orientation of the District
- + Renovation/Preservation of Existing Buildings
- + Increase the “Diversity of Housing” in and near the Business District
- + *Capitalize on* “Arts Patronage”
- + Increase retail offerings by building from the existing “Collectable & Vintage” retail businesses
- + Develop new housing at *Ridge Club* Country Club Site
- + *Increase Second Floor Use above new and existing* Store Fronts

THREATS:

- + Redevelopment Sites & Unscrupulous Developers
- + Drugs & Crime
- + Lack of Community Support for Businesses
- + Lack of Green Space & Identity
- + Suburban Flight

The November 12th 2005 “*Open House*” meeting at the *Pleasant Ridge Library* provided an opportunity for neighborhood stakeholders to hear the initial results of the market analysis and to see preliminary concepts for the future development of the business district.

“Ridge Day” 2006 gave another chance for residents to view the conceptual design alternatives and consider what improvements might be possible. A steady stream of Ridge Day revelers stopped by to view the plan exhibits to the right of the event organizer’s booth.