

Executive Summary

The Old Brooklyn/Brooklyn Centre Neighborhood Master Plan (Master Plan) is an effort to envision the desired physical, social and economic future of the Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre neighborhoods through the exploration of how to best build upon our multiple assets, maximize existing resources and spur neighborhood investment and revitalization.

Purpose of a Master Plan

This Master Plan represents a comprehensive effort that began in 2007, when the Cuyahoga Community Planning Commission was retained by the Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation (OBCDC) to lead the master planning process. While County Planning Commission orchestrated the formulation of the Master Plan, the content was ultimately determined by our community with assistance from residents, business owners, local officials and other stakeholders from the community, as well as feedback gained from two public meetings held midway through the planning process.

Funding for this project was provided by Community Development Block Grant funds obtained by Ward 15 Councilperson Brian Cummins and Ward 16 Councilperson Kevin Kelley.

The master planning process provides the opportunity for us to evaluate current conditions and regional and national trends and to decide how we would like our community to grow, redirect, or maintain its resources in terms of its physical, social and economic environment. The outcome of the master planning process is to develop a practical vision of the future that is set forth as a policy guide for making decisions. The essential characteristics of a master plan are that it is long-range and comprehensive, addresses opportunities and maximizes community assets. Another key component of a master plan is a list of actionable steps meant to guide us in turning our vision of the future of the neighborhoods into a reality.

Concurrent Initiatives

Four other studies were commissioned in 2007, and underway simultaneously with the production of the Master Plan. The first three listed below were commissioned by the Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation, while the fourth was commissioned by the City of Cleveland. Recommendations from these planning studies are included in comprehensive list of action steps in Chapter 7.

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The **Lower Big Creek Greenway Redevelopment & Restoration Plan** identifies locations for open space, trail linkages ecological restoration and environmental regeneration in the Lower Big Creek Valley from Ridge Road to Jennings Road.

The **Pearl Road/W 25th Street Transportation Corridor Plan** includes recommendations for improving Pearl Road including traffic calming and street enhancement efforts, and identifies nearby redevelopment opportunities.

The **Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre Comprehensive Market Strategy** identifies specific business and residential development opportunities in the neighborhoods. The findings from this report were used to refine the economic development recommendations considered for the Master Plan, the Lower Big Creek Plan, and the Pearl Road Corridor Plan.

The **U.S. EPA Areawide Brownfield Assessment of Lower Big Creek Area (Phases I and II)** assesses the possible routes for a connector trail to link the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo with the Towpath Trail's Harvard Road Trailhead.

Neighborhood Planning Methodology

Engaging community members in the planning process is essential in order to create a plan that addresses the unique issues and desires of our neighborhoods. The planning process for the Old

Brooklyn/Brooklyn Centre Master Plan utilized a three-tiered citizen participation structure:

- A project team consisting of Cleveland Wards 15 and 16 Council representatives, Cleveland City Planning Commission staff, OBCDC staff, representatives from Ohio Canal Corridor and the Cleveland Metroparks, and the consultant team from the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission.
- A 30-member community advisory committee comprised of community stakeholders (representing residents, civic associations, businesses, institutions, and the project team).
- Community-wide public meetings to enable residents to comment on the progress and directions being taken by the advisory committee.

The plan was a multi-phase process, beginning with an analysis of existing conditions and current development trends in the neighborhood. Through individual interviews and meetings, a list of issues to be addressed was created. This was followed by a community-based process which defined a shared vision for the future, and then by the development of detailed strategies for overall neighborhood application as well as strategies for specific opportunity sites.

The Advisory Committee met regularly during the process to evaluate technical conclusions of the Planning Commission and incorporate and discuss policies and recommendations, development alternatives and methods to accomplish the recommendations. Public meetings were held to share the advisory committee's work with the

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residents and other stakeholders. Attendees were given the chance to comment on the draft visioning statements and goals for the neighborhoods and help identify priorities for action. From this, a detailed implementation strategy was developed and refined by the Advisory Committee.

Neighborhood Wide Issues and Opportunity Sites

Based on interviews with the Advisory Committee members a list of issues was generated. Of the five most pressing issues to be addressed by the Master Plan, three are concerns related to housing. The top five issues listed in order include:

- number of foreclosures and vacant houses,
- poor physical state of buildings on main streets and number of vacant buildings,
- physical decline in the housing stock due to lack of repairs and inappropriate renovations,
- number of absentee landlords,
- lack of destination shops and attractions.

In reviewing the existing conditions and trends and evaluating assets and opportunities, it became clear that there were some overarching conditions and issues that were found throughout the neighborhoods, while there were also a number of strategic sites that were identified that warranted detailed evaluation. These areas were considered to be prime sites for further study because of their prominent locations within the community and potential for improvement

and/or redevelopment opportunities. In moving forward, the planning process developed overall, neighborhood goals and recommendations grouped into eight categories as well as recommendations for the various opportunity sites.

Neighborhood-Wide Categories

Housing and Neighborhood Character
Retail Services
Community Facilities and Services
Community Heritage and Identity
Economic Development
Recreation
Environmental Protection and Natural Resources
Transportation Connections

Focus Areas/ Opportunity Sites

- A. State/Pearl Triangle
- B. Fulton/Memphis Shopping Area
- C. Old Brooklyn “Downtown” Focus Area
- D. Pearl, from Wildlife Way to State
- E. Broadview, from Pearl to Valley
- F. Pearl, Brooklyn Centre Downtown
- G. Former Memphis School
- H. Henninger Land Fill
- I. Lower Big Creek Valley
- J. Harvard/Jennings Area
- K. Pearl/Oak Park Area
- L. Pearl/Brookpark Area
- M. Broadview/Brookpark Area
- N. Brookpark, from Broadview to Ridge

Vision Statements and Goals

The Advisory Committee agreed upon three overarching vision statements buttressed by twenty-six goals. These vision statements and attendant goals form the foundation of the plan recommendations.

- The Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre neighborhoods will have a strong sense of community based on pride and participation, where residents and stakeholders embrace its unique identity and cultural diversity.
- The Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre neighborhoods will continue to be desirable places to live, work, shop and visit.
- The Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre neighborhoods will conserve, preserve and protect natural resources for future generations.

Goals form an important part of the Plan: they provide overall guidance and direction, and are supplemented by more detailed strategies. This Master Plan identifies 26 goals that are meant to reach the visioning statements described above. These are long-term goals, and some will be challenging to accomplish, yet the goals form an important part of the Plan: they provide overall guidance and direction, and are supplemented by more detailed objectives and strategies that are discussed in subsequent chapters. These goals are organized into the eight different neighborhood-wide categories noted on page 3.

Housing and Neighborhood Character

Approximately 44% of the land in Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre is devoted to residential uses, making it the predominant land use in the neighborhoods and therefore of significant import to the overall health of the neighborhoods.

A number of indicators of concern are present in the neighborhoods—including a lack of home maintenance, an increasing rate of foreclosure, vacant and abandoned housing units, and some high rates of single-family rental properties in some portions of the neighborhoods.

The plan includes three goals that are instrumental in creating, maintaining, and strengthening the well-being of the neighborhoods and ensuring that they remain desirable places to live. These goals are:

- Ensure that neighborhood properties are solid investments.
- Promote the neighborhoods as great places to live.
- Ensure an adequate supply of housing stock with a range of housing choices.

Retail Services

The Connecting Cleveland 2020 Citywide Plan stresses that neighborhood shopping districts are “integral to the life and viability of the local community” and advocates that these districts be gathering places for the neighborhoods such that they are “lively, bustling forums where people gather to shop, dine, meet, converse and have a good time.”

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Most of the retail floor area in Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre was constructed between 1910 and 1950, when the population base of the city was much larger and before the advent of big box retail. Changes in retail shopping patterns no longer support the linear commercial corridors found throughout the neighborhoods. The retail/commercial inventory conducted for the Master Plan determined that there are approximately 500,000 square feet of vacant retail space, which is 13% of the nearly 3.8 million square feet of the retail/office floor area in the study area. In addition, these neighborhood retail districts are now in direct competition with the new Steelyard Commons regional retail center, located just northeast of Brooklyn Centre as well as the Ridge Park Square Shopping Center at Ridge Road and I-480 in Brooklyn.

While the current fragile economic environment makes it difficult to envision new retail development, now is a good time to take advantage of opportunities to strengthen retail areas, make improvements and plan for development opportunities that may arise when the economy recovers. The plan includes three goals to maximize the neighborhoods' retail and entertainment assets, including:

- Create unique shopping and entertainment destinations.
- Promote safe shopping environments that attract customers and provide a pleasant and convenient shopping experience.
- Ensure robust retail and commercially environments in appropriate locations.

In addition to general strategies that apply across the board to retail activities in the two neighborhoods, specific recommendations are included for the Old Brooklyn “downtown” area, Brooklyn Centre at Pearl and Denison, the Memphis/Fulton retail area, and shopping areas along Brookpark Road.

Community Services and Facilities

Community services are services that are performed for the benefit of the public, while community facilities are the places and methods through which services are provided. The quality and availability of these services and facilities are critically important to community health, impacting the quality of life for residents and attractiveness for businesses. Community facilities such as parks, schools, hospitals, libraries, and places of worship are essential to sustaining existing residents and businesses as well as attracting new ones.

Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre enjoy many quality community facilities and services, yet during the Master Planning process residents and businesses expressed concern that some community facilities and services should be improved or expanded to make both neighborhoods more viable and attractive. The plan includes three goals to ensure that community services and facilities are delivered and utilized to their fullest potential:

- Keep Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre safe neighborhoods with low crime rates.
- Ensure excellent municipal and support services.
- Encourage the collaboration of diverse neighborhood organizations.

Community Heritage and Identity

Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre are rich in cultural heritage and share an important part in Cleveland's history. According to the National Register of Historic Places, "Brooklyn Centre reflects the urbanization of America. The neighborhood's street patterns and buildings illustrate the area's transition from rural hamlet to suburban center to inner city neighborhood." A number of historic districts, buildings, and public spaces populate the neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods have distinct identities, associated with these historic and cultural elements.

Concerns about the future preservation of the neighborhoods' distinguishing characteristics and identity came to light during the planning process. The following goals were created to celebrate, promote and preserve the unique cultural, historical diversity and identity of the neighborhoods:

- Integrate community identity and assets of Old Brooklyn/Brooklyn Centre with that of Ohio & Erie Canalway America's Byway.
- Ensure widespread awareness of community assets.
- Encourage the recognition and preservation of historically, architecturally, and/or culturally significant structures, places, and districts.
- Promote place-making efforts that recognize each neighborhood's distinctiveness.
- Honor and respect the diverse cultural heritages of Brooklyn Centre and Old Brooklyn residents.

Economic Development

Economic development can be defined as efforts that seek to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community by supporting or growing incomes and the tax base and creating and/or retaining jobs.

There are many assets in Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre that should be maximized when considering economic development, such as: a central location in the region, proximity to Downtown Cleveland and the Cleveland Hopkins International Airport; easy access to interstate highways; MetroHealth Hospital and MetroHealth's Senior Health & Wellness Center; Metroparks Zoo; and the development potential of the Lower Big Creek Valley.

At the same time, Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre face several challenges in seeking increased economic development including the poor physical state of the main arteries and number of smaller-sized commercial parcels and buildings that are less compatible with new development.

Given the ever-changing nature of the national and regional economy, the economic development goals included in this plan will take considerable effort to achieve, but they are necessary to ensure that the neighborhoods remain strong and stable. Goals for the future include the desire to:

- Attract and encourage public and private investment in a systematic manner that builds upon the communities' strengths.

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- Ensure that new development fits appropriately into the neighborhood while meeting the needs of contemporary retailers and businesses.
- Foster environmentally-friendly building practices and processes.

Recreation

Brooklyn Centre and Old Brooklyn have many recreational amenities including multiple city-owned parks and playgrounds, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Cleveland Metroparks Brookside Reservation, the Lower Big Creek Valley and proximity to the Ohio & Erie Canalway Reservation, and the Towpath Trail.

A well developed recreation plan for the neighborhoods will enable and encourage residents to develop and maintain healthy and active lifestyles. The plan includes three goals to ensure that the neighborhoods are places where every resident has easy access to a recreation venue and that these venues act as a draw to all people within the region. These goals include:

- Build connections to the Towpath Trail to provide access to the neighborhoods.
- Create recreation destinations in/adjacent to the Lower Big Creek Valley, expanding upon the Zoo's current regional draw, proximity to the Towpath Trail, and the Ohio & Erie Canalway Reservation.
- Promote recreational facilities and programs for all residents, including children, young adults, and senior citizens.

Environmental Protection and Natural Resources

The presence of natural amenities and resources is being increasingly recognized as an important economic driver. In addition, natural amenities such as open space and river corridors are beneficial to the creation of a healthy social environment and are often a defining force in the community.

Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre have already put forth substantial effort and have had great success in preserving and restoring places of environmental or greenspace value, including Treadway Creek Greenway, the Cleveland MetroParks Zoo and Brookside Reservation. The plan includes three goals that will build upon past efforts and help create a healthy, beautiful and sustainable natural environment that is accessible to all community members:

- Protect and improve the health of the Lower Big Creek and the Cuyahoga River.
- Improve air quality in Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre.
- Encourage the development of an environmental stewardship ethic in all people that reside, conduct business, or visit Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre.

Transportation Connections

Multi-modal transportation that is effective and accessible is of utmost importance to the overall health of a community, especially those as economically and culturally diverse as Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Centre. Transportation infrastructure includes roads and highways, signaling networks, bike and pedestrian networks, and mass transit.

The plan includes three goals to increase safety while promoting multiple modes of transit, including the goals to:

- Design streets with all users in mind: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and drivers.
- Make streets safer for all travelers.
- Promote the use of multiple modes of transportation such as public transit to reduce dependency on private automobiles.

Implementation

A successful planning effort is one that achieves general consensus, is practicable, and is actually used as a functioning guide plan for decision-making. A viable implementation program that sets forth specific action items is a valuable tool to ensure that the recommendations are acted upon. The plan includes over 140 specific action steps that can be taken to achieve the goals for the neighborhoods.

Accomplishing the goals identified for the neighborhoods will require the efforts of not only the

Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation, but also a commitment from the city of Cleveland, the Ward Council members, the local Civic Associations and Block Clubs, area institutions as well as residents and business owners.