



DART REPORT  
*Condensed Summary*  
*For Portsmouth City Council*

Portsmouth, Ohio  
June 22-23, 2005

Complete Report By:  
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Condensed Report: Compiled by Jennifer Hanlon

## **Introduction**

Downtown Ohio, Inc. Downtown Assessment Resource Team spent one and a half days (June 22-23, 2005) in the City of Portsmouth to assess the downtown district's revitalization needs and opportunities. This assessment was sponsored by The Boneyfiddle Events Committee, The Boneyfiddle Historic Arts and Architecture Preservation Society, the Portsmouth Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau, The Portsmouth Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of Portsmouth Office of Community Development, the Scioto Foundation, and the Governor's Office for Appalachia.

The assessment process had several functions:

- To identify some of the commercial district's major challenges, opportunities, and needs;
- To provide community members with information about the Main Street approach to commercial district revitalization;
- To learn whether the Main Street Approach is an appropriate strategy for the City of Portsmouth; and
- To determine Portsmouth's readiness and potential to embrace the Main Street program.

The assessment team included:

- **Joyce Barrett**, Program Associate, Heritage Ohio/Downtown Ohio, Inc., Columbus
- **John Garrett**, Program Manager, Main Street Canal Winchester
- **Karen Adams**, Program Manager, Renaissance New Richmond

The observations and recommendations are based on The Four Point Approach of Main Street:

- **Organization:** building of consensus and cooperation between the groups that play a role in the downtown;
- **Design:** improving the downtown's image by improving its physical appearance – appearance of buildings, street lights, window displays, parking areas, signs, landscaping, etc... that convey a visual message about the downtown;
- **Economic Restructuring:** strengthening the existing economic base of the downtown while diversifying it. Activities include helping existing downtown businesses expand, recruiting new businesses, providing a balanced mix, converting unused space into productive property, and sharpening the competitiveness of downtown merchants.
- **Promotion:** marketing the downtown's unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, new businesses, tourists, and others; through retail promotional activity and special events utilizing the downtown as a stage area of community activities.

This methodology works to create a total image for the community: The Main Street Approach gradually builds on existing resources and fosters improved community leadership and support on behalf of the Central Business District for the long term.

This condensed summary was prepared for Portsmouth City Council to give you an overview of the challenges downtown Portsmouth and Boneyfiddle face in revitalization and the types of projects the recently formed Boneyfiddle Historic Preservation Society Board will be undertaking in the future. The complete Downtown Assessment Resource Team report is available in the Community Development Office. Full copies will be made and distributed to interested entities in the near future. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments.

Jennifer Hanlon, Director  
Community Development

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### **A. Organization**

A strong organization is the cornerstone of a successful revitalization program; without the strong foundation a good organization provides, all other projects, however well intentioned, will falter.

#### **Observations**

1. In Portsmouth the vocabulary needs to be clear that “progress” is not synonymous with “new buildings”
2. Two districts: Downtown and Bonneyfiddle, need to agree it’s in everyone’s best interest to act as one.
3. Use your resources: Shawnee State University wants to attract quality students; they need a quality town, with contemporary features, such as hip historic districts to attract those students. This includes retail and service sector businesses that compliment student and faculty needs. The high school is close enough to downtown that students can be consumers, volunteers, and employees. The Chamber and CVB are partners that will make all groups stronger. The Southern Ohio Museum is an untapped resource, they will have significant impact on downtown revitalization. Pictures and stories about Portsmouth should be commonplace.

#### **Recommendations**

The Boneyfiddle group appears willing to step up and create a downtown revitalization board that will be inclusive for the entire downtown region, reaching beyond their former scope of the Boneyfiddle area.

1. As a start up organization, a mission and vision statement exercise could help the organization see where they are headed and know what their core business is.
2. The organization committee helps all of the committees get the “Program of Work” tasked out and pulled together. OMSP communities are provided with Program of Work Training Sessions, other Ohio communities can go through this exercise on a ‘fee for service’ basis with Downtown Ohio.
3. Accountability is a cornerstone of the Main Street Approach. Monthly reports help keep communities watching the progress of their actions, effective or ineffective.

## **B. Design**

Design refers to all of the visual aspects of the business district, from buildings and pedestrian areas, to merchandising and advertising graphics used in promotion.

### **Observations**

1. Portsmouth has great building stock in Boneyfiddle and Downtown with surviving structures from early 1800 to examples of Federal, Italianate, Greek Revival, Art Deco and Eclectic styles. Bonneyfiddle has older buildings, but more “missing teeth” than Downtown. Downtown benefits from consistent lines of buildings, but many are obstructed with architectural details.
2. Portsmouth has a great collection of older buildings. Not all of them are noticeable due to successive “facelifts” and “slipcovers”, but there are great “bones” in this city and they just need a little tender loving care and polishing.
3. Portsmouth has the greatest collection of murals within driving distance. Front Street should be more in tune to the traffic that wanders slowly through this unique corridor. What a draw for your city!
4. The existing streetscape, which is between 20-30-years-old is showing signs of aging. Some sidewalks are warped, trees are broken off or missing, curbs are cracking, and the street furniture is dated.
5. A ‘heart’ of downtown seems to be missing from Portsmouth - no “core” or town square that signifies you have arrived in the city. Establish a place that symbolizes an arrival zone will go a long way in creating identity for your city.

### **Recommendations**

1. Strengthen Design Review Board’s stature in the community as a resource. Create guidelines that feature simple ‘good’ ‘bad’ examples.
2. Vacant upper story windows should be cleared visually of debris and excess storage materials. Encourage the use of curtains, lighting, window boxes to give the appearance of occupancy.
3. Develop Gateways: use identifying signage, unifying features on street signs, traffic signals, street furniture and landscaping to visually connect each district. Envision the needs of first-time visitors, and satisfy those needs.
4. Sign program for parking. Auxiliary parking needs to be identified and highlighted through landscaping and signage. Interesting/creative links to the buildings are needed.
5. Consider adding some green space/park areas to soften the building hardscapes.
6. Be pro-active about the destruction of historic buildings. Engage Heritage Ohio and National Trust for Historic Preservation for ideas & information on how to save your treasures.
7. There are many building/façade renovations to do. If you plan on doing a CDBG grant in a year or two, now is the time to be doing lots of planning and educating.

## **C. Economic Restructuring**

Economic restructuring is a long-term process to strengthen the community's downtown core of existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. Economic restructuring will be an on-going task for Portsmouth.

### **Observations**

1. Portsmouth is a city trying to revive the downtown merchant and residential base.
2. Many buildings in the district are vacant. Some buildings are in bad shape.
3. Portsmouth has some wonderful destination businesses including a jewelry store, and antiques shop that have regional appeal.
4. Downtown Portsmouth's proximity to the Ohio River and US State Routes 23, and 52 are key to the vitality of the community. Efforts must be made to pull those travelers into the downtown community.
5. Portsmouth is the county seat and the courthouse is located in the downtown district. This institution provides job stability and an additional focal point for efforts to revitalize the central business district.
6. Portsmouth is a very residential city. The close proximity of the residential district to the downtown district means that a large population of residents is within easy walking distance of the downtown. This should help to support an equally diverse retail market.
7. There are limited entertainment options in downtown Portsmouth. The soon to be completed rehabilitation of the former theater may address this concern but others should be considered as well.

### **Recommendations**

1. Portsmouth's historic buildings may be the downtown's most valuable asset. Every effort should be made to preserve and protect these structures.
2. Develop educational opportunities to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of local business people. Join with existing programs or organizations such as the Small Business Development Center.
3. Review the local zoning ordinance to determine if local codes truly reflect the realities of downtown redevelopment. For successful upper floor development to take place there needs to be some flexibility with the building codes.
4. Try to streamline the local business permitting process as much as possible, without giving up necessary control. How difficult is it for a new business to obtain an occupancy permit or a sign permit? How long does the process take, and how many different agencies are involved?

## **D. Promotion**

Raising the level of awareness of your downtown district is key to the success of the businesses and the district as a whole as well as projecting a positive image for the entire City.

### **Observations**

1. At one time a gem of the Ohio River, Portsmouth like many cities, suffers from the loss of a strong manufacturing job base. Portsmouth has a plethora of historic buildings that are in various states of repair. Many opportunities for building rehabilitation exist, adding merchants and upper floor urban living.
2. These "districts" within the downtown suffer from a lack of a unified identity. An image campaign program will help to create an identity for Downtown Portsmouth so that there isn't any question that you have 'arrived' in the downtown business district, the University district, the Bonneyfiddle district or the murals.

### **Recommendations**

1. Image Campaign. What is Portsmouth? How is it different from other river cities? If I go to Portsmouth what will I find? Creating a distinct marketable image is vital to the success of the downtown.
2. Logo development, consistent use of logo will enhance the image: merchandise, shopping bags, web site, newsletter, brochures, signs, banners, window decals
3. Continue to promote the Historic Boneyfiddle district as well as highlighting the other historic buildings in the downtown
4. Continue to promote the murals while working to enhance the mural district.

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## **Conclusion**

We were impressed with the enthusiasm and support for downtown revitalization efforts that is evident in Portsmouth. It is important that this energy be focused in an organized program that can be sustained over time. The success of the program will depend in part upon the resources the community is willing to commit to the process. Securing these commitments and taking the time to build a strong, viable organization is the first step towards continuing the revitalization of downtown Portsmouth.