PART I: Strategic Recommendations

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGIC PLAN
For the City of Independence, Ohio

City of Independence

November 1, 2013
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INTRODUCTION

Part I of the Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) provides specific strategies, action items, and performance targets to help guide local leaders, by providing them with the tools necessary to strengthen the local economy. As instructed by the City of Independence, the EDSP focuses on “strategies and activities that have the greatest potential for creating jobs and increasing the local tax base.” Recommendations focus on economic development activities through which the City can influence the creation and retention of jobs. These recommendations are based on the findings presented in the Part II Background Report: Research and Analysis.

Key Objectives

The City of Independence has stated as its key objectives for economic development the need to attract and retain high-wage and sustainable employment and to increase the local tax base. Through the various stakeholder engagement efforts, business representatives and residents of Independence have concurred with these overall objectives and also stated the need for Independence to maintain the City’s high quality of services and continue to practice fiscal responsibility.

More specific objectives for the EDSP that have been derived based on economic analysis and stakeholder engagement, include the following:

- Diversify the City’s employment and tax base
- Strengthen and retain existing industry
- Focus on growth industries
- Focus on high-wage jobs
- Reduce “footloose” nature of the existing business base
- Exploit the City’s competitive advantages
- Strengthen Downtown Independence
- Retain and enhance Independence’s high quality of life
- Ensure the EDSP is consistent with the community’s vision

Organization of Report

The following report provides detailed strategies and implementation matrices organized into seven sections. Section 1 provides strategies for business development, by focusing on the City’s target industries. Section 2 describes several approaches for enhancing the amenity value of the community in support of business retention and development. Section 3 provides strategies aimed specifically at strengthening Downtown Independence. In Section 4, a
menu of possible incentives is provided that are oriented to the City’s particular targets, needs, and requirements for meeting key objectives. Section 5 includes several recommendations for enhancing the City’s infrastructure in support of the various economic development objectives, while Section 6 focuses on strategies for attracting talent and strengthening entrepreneurship.

Finally, Section 7 contains an implementation matrix, detailing specific actions and timetables, assigns responsibility, and indicates costs and sources of funding for various economic development activities to be undertaken in the next three years. Section 7 also contains a list of recommended metrics or approaches for measuring the City’s progress in meeting key economic development objectives.
Section 1. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: BUILD ON EXISTING STRENGTHS

Whether recruiting new business to Independence or working to retain the businesses that are already there, it is critical to build on the existing strengths of the community and on the City’s competitive advantages. Such advantages have been identified as the City’s location and transportation accessibility, supportive local government and opportunities for collaboration, high-quality City services, low property tax rate, and safety and security. Industry targets have been identified through economic analysis and stakeholder guidance to help steer and focus marketing efforts in areas where Independence is most likely to succeed.

Independence has and will continue to attract businesses in a variety of sectors, and it is important to diversify the local economy to the greatest extent possible. Nevertheless, the City’s competitive advantages can help strengthen its marketing for certain industries and build on the “agglomeration effect,” which stimulates employment growth through the creation of industry clusters. A summary of each recommended industry target is provided below, followed by marketing recommendations for target industry business recruitment and retention.

Key Target Industries

The target industry analysis identified key sectors and industries for recruitment and retention in Independence based on the City’s relative competitiveness for these industries, their propensity to generate high-wage employment, regional and national growth prospects, opportunities provided for diversification in the local economy, and consistency with lifestyle attributes for Independence. Each industry sector and sub-sector is listed with its corresponding NAICS (North American Industrial Classification System) code.

Administrative Services (NAICS 561)

Independence is the hub for administrative services in Northeast Ohio. The City has attracted far beyond its “fair share” of businesses and employment within this sector due to its many competitive advantages in support of administrative service industries. Most important of those advantages is its central location and regional accessibility, which allows administrative businesses to attract a broad range of employment from throughout the region. For businesses serving clients in Northeast Ohio or regions to the east and west, Independence has a critical logistical advantage in accessing that client base. The broader local business community also benefits from having administrative functions based in Independence, so in effect, recruiting and sustaining administrative functions helps recruit and sustain other types of businesses.
Independence residents, through their participation in the strategic planning process, also recognized the City’s strengths in this sector and offered that this success “should be enhanced and expanded.”

Key high-growth industries within (or related to) the administrative services sector that form important targets for recruitment include the following:

- **Office Administrative Support Services (5611).** This industry includes a broad range of services in support of the day-to-day clerical operation of a variety of businesses.

- **Human Resources & Training Services (5613).** Independence is particularly well-suited for attracting and retaining in-house HR and training service components of companies, as well as consultants and service providers.

- **Business Support (5614).** There are a number of business operations industries for which Independence is competitive, and the following growth industries offer particularly strong opportunities for clustering in Independence:
  - **Meeting Planners.** Because of Independence’s central location, both locally and regionally, it is well-placed to serve as a hub for meeting services. Meeting planners prefer to locate close to their market base, which includes the corporations and administrative service providers that cluster in Independence.
  - **Market Research Services.** Independence is well-suited to attracting growing market research companies and divisions engaged in consumer market research and customer support. Proximity to the broad regional labor force as well as corporate clients is key to Independence’s success.
  - **Management Analysis.** Management and related analytical services can also cluster in Independence to serve a broad regional client base.

- **Corporate Offices.** Apart from administrative services, the City of Independence may also be competitive for attracting functions relating to the Management of Companies and Enterprises (NAICS 55), including corporate, subsidiary, and regional management offices (551114). These are not, however, high-growth industries.

**Information Services (NAICS 51)**

As with administrative services, Independence has increasingly become the regional hub for information services. This high-growth sector provides clean
technical services to a broad range of industries and, unlike administrative services, tends to offer high-wage jobs for higher-educated workers. The business community, as well as residents of Independence, supports the continued concentration of this sector in the City, since Independence has proven to be competitive within the region for attracting jobs in this growing sector.

Within or related to information services, there are several industries in particular that offer future high-growth opportunities for Independence to strengthen its position as the region’s leader. These future growth opportunities include the following sub-sector industries:

- **Data Processing, Hosting, and Related Services (518).** Independence has already proven to be a competitive location for growing back-office functions including data processing, hosting, and related services.

- **Information Security (519).** There are various other information services, such as information security tracking, that are also an important and growing industries relating to the information services sector.

- **Health Care-Related Information Technology.** There are opportunities for Independence to build on its strengths in the IT sector to link into Cleveland’s Health Technology Corridor (HTC). Independence is likely to be more competitive as a location for IT companies than for emerging biotechnology businesses for several reasons, not the least of which is that the medical research institutions are concentrated within Cleveland and emerging commercialization and spin-off activity is likely to be focused there. Yet, Independence has a strong existing IT sector and offers an environment attractive to many IT companies and employees. The City can help strengthen this sector by identifying interests and engaging with the HTC to build linkages between Independence’s IT sector, Cleveland’s medical research institutions, and emerging companies.

- **Logistics (519 and 4931).** Logistics is not a specific NAICS industry, per se, but a cross-sector function that focuses on creating efficiencies in the movement of goods. In particular, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines logistics services as including “labeling, breaking bulk, inventory control and management, light assembly, order entry and fulfillment, packaging, pick and pack, price marking and ticketing, and transportation arrangement.” Components of the industry are particularly well-suited to Independence, including order fulfillment, inventory control and management, and transportation arrangement. Information services relating to these functions would be a target opportunity for Independence.
Health Care Services (NAICS 62)

Health care has been among the fastest-growing sectors in the national economy for some time, although the changing health care policy environment has had an impact on the financial viability of some private and non-profit health-care providers. Independence is a good location as a hub for the provision of health care services in the regional market, particularly within the service area located between Cleveland and Akron-Canton. That being said, the region is fairly saturated with ambulatory care and other direct care facilities. Growth opportunities relate more to Independence’s strengths as a node for businesses serving the health care industry and improving cost efficiencies within the industry. Support for the growth of the health care sector was supported strongly by Independence residents. Examples of target industries servicing the health care sector include the following:

- **Administrative Support Services (561).** A niche within the administrative support and IT sectors relates to services in support of the health care industry. HR, billing and data processing, auditing, and other administrative support functions are naturally drawn to Independence and its central location.

- **Home Health Care Administration (6216).** This industry includes the provision of home health care services, as well as services for the aging and other caregiver services. Independence is well-located for administration of such services over a broad geographic region including Cleveland and Akron-Canton. Other new and “emerging” health care services would also be recruited to Independence.

Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (NAICS 54)

Independence has proven to be very competitive for various types of professional, scientific and technical service businesses. The extensive list of these services includes the following for which Independence is particularly competitive:

- **Selected Professional & Technical Services**
  - Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping, and Payroll (5412)
  - Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services (5413)
  - Computer Systems Design and Related Services (5415)
  - Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services (5416)

- **Scientific Research & Development Services (5417).** As noted previously, Independence is not home to a major research university or other institution. However, it is strategically located near Cleveland’s emerging Health Technology Corridor (HTC), which is anchored by such
illustrious, world-renowned institutions as The Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, and Case Western Reserve. While the HTC does not physically extend to Independence, there may be some opportunities for biotechnology research and support services that spin-off from the concentration of activity in the HTC, or supply the activities located there. Attracting emerging bio-tech companies to Independence from within the HTC may prove to be a challenge, if they are dependent on funding, proprietary contracts, intellectual property agreements and other ties to the anchor institutions. However, as these companies reach second- and third-stage funding levels, they may expand and seek more traditional office environments in suburban locations like Independence. More importantly, companies supplying or providing support services (especially information technology and services) to these emerging bio-tech companies may prefer Independence because of the excellent location but lower cost of business than Cleveland.

Tourism & Accommodation Services (72)

Tourism and accommodation services are growing industries worldwide and within the region. Independence is already an important regional node for hotels and accommodation services. Most of this accommodation demand is driven by regional business tourism, including overnight stays generated by downtown Cleveland convention business. Opportunities have been identified for the City to build on this existing base but also to expand its share of the leisure tourism industry. The community has suggested that the City capitalize on its natural assets, such as through the development of a visitors’ center, environmental education facility, or “Land Lab.” The primary growth industries within the tourism cluster include the following:

- **Lodging (721).** The City can build on its existing base of accommodation services by attracting a more diversified mix of lodging facilities and integrating them into mixed-use developments. While the hotel market may be saturated, there are opportunities for smaller specialty inns or B&B facilities within or near Downtown Independence.

- **Food Services & Drinking Places (722).** There are also opportunities for more restaurants and eating & drinking places, as well as foodservice operations that service a broader regional market. A diversity of restaurants helps establish a destination and amenity value that is important to attracting and retaining business.

- **Meetings, Events and Conferencing (5612, 5615, 5619).** Because of its central location, proximity to the business base, and excellent transportation accessibility, Independence is competitive as a location for meetings, events, and conferencing. The MICE (meetings, incentives,
conferencing, and exhibition) industry is growing and through its services offers opportunities in return to attract business.

Food & Beverage Manufacturing (NAICS 311, 312)

While the regional manufacturing sector has declined sharply over many years, certain components of the food and beverage manufacturing industries have shown resiliency and even growth. Independence is well-located to capture some clean and light food manufacturing activity, which has some modest support from residents. The addition of food production and catering companies can help diversify the employment base and bring tenants to the city’s industrial areas. While the food manufacturing industry is diverse, there are some general components of the industry for which Independence is particularly competitive.

- **Production**
  - Sugar and Confectionary Manufacturing (3113)
  - Fruit & Vegetable Preserving; Specialty Food Manufacturing (3114)
  - Bakeries (3118)

- **Food Catering and Regional Distribution.** Because of Independence’s central location and accessibility, it is well-suited as center for foodservice catering, supply and distribution within the northeast Ohio region.

Education Services (61)

Educational services also represent a growth market for Independence, which has proven to be a competitive location for private colleges and vocational institutions. There is modest support in the community for additional colleges, although there is some concern that the proliferation of private colleges as office tenants will detract from the competitiveness of Independence as a corporate office location. Efforts could focus on recruiting an educational institution, training center, or branch university to Downtown Independence as part of a broader, mixed-use redevelopment, thus enhancing the daytime population and market for downtown businesses.

Secondary Targets

Among the remaining target industries, there were several others that retain some modest support from residents and should be pursued to help diversify the employment base. The City would focus on management and administrative functions that are consistent with the high quality of life and environment appropriate for Independence. Such growth industries include the following for which Independence is competitive.

- **Oil & Gas Extraction (211) and Support Services (213).** By virtue of its strategic location near the oil and gas extraction industries of western
Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and northeast Ohio, Independence is well-placed to attract the administrative, management, and logistics services associated with the extraction industries nearby.

- **Installation and Repair Services (811).** Again, Independence has the opportunity to attract the growing repair industries by virtue of its excellent location. Again, care should be taken to ensure that the functions associated with such functions either include administrative and management support, or in the case of direct service, clean industries such as electronic and precision equipment repair that may take place in laboratories or regular office buildings. Such repair services can make for a good re-use of office structures that are otherwise non-competitive for other office uses.

- **Protective Services.** Independence is also competitive for attracting private security and other protective services, which serve a regional market base. There is modest support among residents for such enterprises in Independence.

**Basic Business Recruitment & Marketing Strategies**

Recruitment strategies are identified for each of the major industry sectors to inform and influence site selection decision makers in targeted industries. The strategies identify decision makers and consultants in each of the respective targeted industries. It should be noted that a significant component of marketing to these target industries is the physical environment that the City helps enable for business growth and retention. Development of amenities and changes in the office product and physical environment, along with specific business incentives, are addressed in other sections of this report. The following provides basic approaches to business recruitment and attraction beyond environment, infrastructure, and financial incentives.

**Administrative Services (561)**

Independence has had little difficulty attracting administrative service business functions over many years. Some of these entities operate as subsidiary functions of a larger corporation while others are independent businesses supplying services on a contract or fee basis. There is also significant overlap between functions in the administrative services sector (56) and those in the information technology sector (51).

Key marketing factors that help establish Independence’s competitiveness for these industries including location and access to the regional labor force, availability of office space, and a safe and secure environment. Proximity of service suppliers to a large client base, both in downtown Cleveland as well as in Independence itself, is also important. Finally, access to free parking and lower
operating costs than downtown Cleveland also help sustain Independence’s marketing advantages. Strategies for target marketing to administrative service firms or divisions should continue to focus on the primary existing marketing strengths: central location, labor force accessibility, and lower operating costs.

Two of these three marketing strengths will remain constant, with operating costs being the only variable over which Independence has any control. Any efforts that will help stabilize or lower overall operating costs for businesses locating in Independence will benefit the City’s marketing efforts for administrative services. Efforts to lower operating costs an include any of the following:

- **Energy Efficiency Programs.** Work with utility companies and building owners to improve energy efficiency, thus lowering energy bills. Encourage development of new, energy-efficient and modern office buildings. A series of incentives is discussed later in this report.

- **Purchasing Programs.** Offer goods or services through economy-of-scale purchasing. The City can help reduce costs to businesses through purchasing programs, again discussed later in this report.

- **Mixed-Use Development.** Encourage redevelopment of single-use office parks as mixed-use nodes, which can help improve employee productivity by reducing the amount of time used commuting and driving for business or personal errands. Strategies for encouraging mixed-use development are provided later in this report.

What is most important in terms of marketing is to highlight the various cost savings achieved when businesses locate in Independence. Above and beyond pro-active City programs as described above, the City should focus on its relatively low income and property tax rates, free parking, and even highlight the “bargain” found in current office rents as compared with the height of the market. Coordinate with office brokers to develop a list of bargains and relative cost benefits for marketing Independence office space for administrative and back-office functions.

There is no real concern that Independence will lose its overall competitiveness for administrative services business anytime soon. However, the City should remain vigilant, continuously maintain its services, and upgrade its offering for these businesses to remain competitive in the regional market. The addition of training facilities or programs, meeting space, and other amenities as part of the overall amenity package should be promoted for their overall benefits in lowering the direct operating costs of business.
Information Services / IT (51)

As noted earlier, Independence has the opportunity to build on its existing base in information services to become a regional leader as a hub for the IT Sector. The City can increase its competitiveness for IT by establishing a local tech council or collaborative framework in coordination with private industry for identifying needs and opportunities within the sector. The concept for this coordinating entity is discussed later in this report. Independence can also increase its competitiveness by enhancing its IT infrastructure (e.g., fiber optic cable and wireless bandwidth), as also discussed later.

A strong opportunity for marketing Independence as an IT hub is to identify and measure the volume of information that is carried, transferred, analyzed, and distributed through Independence. Surveys and discussions with players in the IT sector and within IT divisions of local companies can help quantify this information base. Data on the types and quantity of information generated, along with the services operating, can give Independence quantitative input to marketing efforts.

Building a strong collaboration with Cleveland’s Health Tech Corridor and area institutions will also be a strong opportunity for Independence, which can become the supplier of IT services and innovation within the biotech sector. While Independence may not be as competitive for attracting bio-technology firms engaged in wet lab basic research, the City can bring its strengths as an IT hub to engage in the biotech sector and increase its role in IT innovation. Thus, the City of Independence should be working with its IT businesses to determine the best ways for it to plug into the Health Tech Corridor and enhance innovation capacity. Collaborations with institutions such as university engineering departments will also help the city develop programs oriented to entrepreneurship and innovation.

The marketing focus for Independence should be on IT agglomeration, infrastructure, and talent. Ultimately, Independence has a strong growth opportunity in its IT sector and marketing can highlight the City’s relative strengths in this sector, namely: an existing information services agglomeration, data delivery and storage capacity, accessibility to the regional IT labor force, available office and data space, and high-quality municipal services.

Health Care (62)

The health care industry faces a difficult future, in terms of ambulatory health care (hospitals) and related services. But as health care companies and institutions become ever more cost conscious, Independence has the opportunity to attract the administrative functions, back office and home care delivery services that benefit from a central, accessible location. As such, Independence
would market its strengths in terms of **central location, labor force accessibility, and lower operating costs**. These attributes, shared with administrative services, are important for their focus on cost and efficiency, which is becoming important to health care businesses. Marketing would also highlight Independence’s existing cluster of health care activities, especially administrative functions and services, as among the City’s competitive features. Finally, the City’s proximity to and collaborations with businesses and institutions associated with Cleveland’s Health Tech Corridor would also be pursued and promoted.

### Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (54)

As with administrative services and health care, Independence is an attractive location for professional and technical services due to its **central location, labor force accessibility and lower operating costs**. As with the IT sector, there are opportunities for Independence to link into the Health Tech Corridor to promote collaborations with the City’s professional, scientific and technical services. Redevelopment of the City’s office parks into mixed-use business communities, and modernization or replacement of aging office stock, will help enhance the image of Independence and increase its attractiveness to higher-end professional, scientific and technical service companies. Incentives for enabling these changes are discussed later in this report.

### Tourism and Accommodation Services (72)

The strengthening of the area’s business base will naturally increase business tourism and accommodation services. However, the strategy for leisure tourism has a different focus, as there is a need for a fully-developed leisure tourism marketing plan that can provide a foundation for promoting the City to a more diverse audience. Elements of this plan would include an assessment of the existing tourism base and flow, tourism potentials, identification of development project opportunities; and marketing strategies covering advertising and promotions, wayfinding, tour routing, heritage tourism, and joint ventures with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Tourism marketing would build on the key elements of Independence’s location and appeal along the Cuyahoga River. Major components of the tourism plan would incorporate the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), the Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area, the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, and other attractions. CVNP is the 7th most-visited national park in the United States, with over 1.5 million visitors (and increasing). This attendance represents a large potential audience and market for visitor attractions, tourism services, accommodation, retail, entertainment, and other economic activity within Independence. There are also opportunities to capture some of this potential market base within Downtown Independence, as part of a broader strategy to revitalize the downtown area (addressed later in this report).
Because of the sheer size and audience of the CVNP, it is imperative that the City’s tourism plans and marketing focus on building connections between the park and Downtown Independence as a way of enhancing market support for downtown businesses and raising the City’s exposure and profile to visitors. Arts & cultural venues, recreation goods retailers, outdoor cafes and a brew pub restaurant are the types of commercial activities that might benefit from exposure to the park’s attendees. Again, market analysis could determine potential for such specific uses. Connections can take the form of trails and other recreational facilities that add value to the park experience but also enhance the amenity value of the community to residents and workers alike.

Food Manufacturing & Catering (311, 312)

Northeast Ohio’s manufacturing sector has been in sharp retreat for decades, although there are several sub-sectors where opportunities remain for growth and development. The opportunities assessment identified the food industry as one sub-sector where Independence may consider targeting further manufacturing activity. Marketing for business recruitment in this sector would, as with others, focus on the City’s excellent central location, transportation accessibility, and highly-regarded City services. A central location and transport access apply in this case not only to the Cleveland market but also to the Midwest, where Independence is well located within the Pittsburgh-Chicago Corridor and therefore part of a large market for food product distribution.

Even so, the best opportunities are likely to relate to small “boutique” food product manufacturing, regional catering and distribution, and home / administrative offices for regional food companies. Independence should focus on recruiting small, “independent” boutique food companies that have both production and regional distribution needs focused on northeast Ohio. The City would also assist or attract entrepreneurs in the food industry sector through a variety of incentives as described later. Small companies producing specialty products including candy and other unique products will be interested in co-branding their product with the City’s name, since Independence has strong marketing advantages through name recognition. Use of the city’s name should be promoted through co-branding so long as products are proven to be healthy and companies are reputable.

East Pleasant Valley & Cloverleaf Area. Food manufacturing, catering and distribution activity should be directed to the East Pleasant Valley and Cloverleaf business areas. East Pleasant Valley especially offers easy on/off access to the interstate highway system, thus avoiding traffic-congested commercial areas along Rockside Road. East Pleasant Valley provides an attractive corridor that attracts a broad range of office, R&D, distribution and light industrial uses. The Cloverleaf business area, by virtue of its existing construction-related uses, provides a good location for light industry and other uses less compatible with high-amenity office/mixed-use districts.
Section 2. ENHANCE AMENITY VALUE

Independence is perceived as having well-maintained infrastructure and a high level of services. Both businesses and residents want to ensure that the City continues to offer the same high level of service into the future. Further, businesses recognize that Independence has attracted several new restaurants and service amenities to the commercial areas near the highway interchange. Nevertheless, there is interest among businesses and residents for additional amenities that not only add value to the experience of workers but also increase the City’s attractiveness and competitiveness for recruiting business.

There has been shown to be a strong correlation between amenity value, including the quality of place, and economic viability. The amenity value defined through surveys and stakeholder input as being important to economic competitiveness includes restaurants, a viable downtown, attractive housing, “walk-able” streets, recreation amenities, and conditions which promote safety and security. Aside from physical conditions and facilities, amenity value also includes “soft” programming such as festivals and events that help to promote a sense of place and a community feel. Recommendations for enhancing amenity value are summarized below, along with approaches for implementation through coordination with partner organizations. More detailed recommendations for Downtown are provided in Section 3 of this report, while strategies for incentivizing office redevelopment and upgrading of infrastructure are provided in Section 4 and 5, respectively.

“Walk-able” Environment

The City of Independence has received positive feedback with respect to its maintenance of roads and infrastructure. However, it has been determined that there is a need to enhance the physical environment to establish more amenity value, in order for the City to remain competitive for attracting and retaining office tenants and other businesses in the future. Ultimately, there is a need to establish a more “walk-able” environment and a sense of place in the City’s business districts.

Master Planning

Many office workers within the City’s business districts may prefer to walk to restaurants and service establishments such as hair salons and cleaners. Some of these businesses are located within walking distance of office buildings, but the overall environment does not support extensive walking within Independence. In particular, there are issues with pedestrian crossings along Rockside Road, where it is often challenging to cross from the north to south side
and vice versa. Master planning for redevelopment within designated business districts can incorporate better pedestrian infrastructure and access planning. Such master planning can inform zoning and other regulatory mechanisms that improve pedestrian access between retail, housing, and office uses. Thus, it is strongly recommended that the City of Independence pursue business district “sub-area” master planning within the broader context of citywide comprehensive planning. Such planning will help the City address broader issues of physical redevelopment to strengthen the City’s competitive advantages for business recruitment and retention.

### Parks, Recreation & Open Space

The City of Independence provides access for its residents to exceptional public facilities, including a well-designed recreation center. However, these facilities are not accessible on a regular basis to non-residents who work at the City’s many businesses. Representatives of Independence businesses agree that an attractive recreation facility open to their employees would provide an excellent amenity that can be used as a tool for business retention and attraction. At the same time, there is a lack of consensus among Independence residents as to whether the City should invest in recreation centers and other facilities for use by businesses or their employees. Ultimately, there are three options that residents and businesses may agree provide opportunities for enhancing the recreation amenity value of the community to assist with business development.

#### Increase Access to Private Fitness Center

In addition to the 78,000 square-foot comprehensive Community/ Civic Center it operates for residents, Independence also has five private fitness clubs offering a variety of different programs, equipment and facilities. These clubs include Destination Fit (6487 Brecksville Road), Life Change Fitness (5332 Arbor Court), CrossFit Independence (5572 Brecksville Road), Curves (7116 Brecksville Road), and Strong Style (6900 Granger Road). While there is an array of small fitness clubs in Independence, none is located directly in the Rockside Road corridor. The fitness center located closest to that business district is Destination Fit, which does not offer facility memberships per se, but rather offers contract relationships with private trainers who use the facility. Most of these private clubs offer only limited facilities and equipment, unlike the City’s comprehensive Community/ Civic Center venue.

It is recommended that, as part of a sub-area master planning process for the Rockside Road corridor and other business districts, consideration be given to relocation of one of the area’s existing private fitness clubs to a walk-able mixed-use development within Rockside Road. The City’s role would be to consult with the various local clubs and present the broad concept of relocation to them as an option. Ultimately, the City might also work to recruit a private health club to the area as part of any overall redevelopment effort.
The City might also consider working with the area’s private clubs, whether incorporated into mixed-use developments or not, to offer discounts, coupons or other subsidized incentives for Independence area businesses and their employees. As a business recruitment tool, the City might work with area clubs to offer subsidized health club membership discounts as part of a broader amenity recruitment package. Thus, the recreation service would be apportioned as an economic development function in tandem with private entities, and not as part of the City’s recreation budget.

**Allow Limited Access to City Facilities**

In light of the fact that the City is unlikely to develop recreation facilities specifically for area employees, the City should consider allowing some limited access to existing recreation facilities at its Community/ Civic Center. Use would be limited to people working at Independence businesses, and access would be limited to certain hours and days where resident utilization is otherwise low. For example, pre- and post-work day hours (e.g., 8-9am and 5-7pm) or during work hours (e.g., 7am-5pm), Monday through Friday may be appropriate for opening access to Independence workers. Access to workers would not extend to weekends and the number of memberships per business would be limited.

**Enhance Outdoor Recreation Amenities**

Both residents and workers would benefit from an investment in outdoor amenities, including walking/biking trails and outdoor recreation facilities. Trails should be integrated with business and mixed-use districts, such as through sub-area and comprehensive planning processes. Such amenities could also be linked with regional trail corridors to build on the City’s tourism opportunities.

- **Environmental Education Center.** A center could be established that focuses specifically on environmental education relating to the nearby Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. This center could also include passive recreation facilities integrated into the overall education component of the center. Broader funding sources could be tapped to support development of such centers and trails as part of larger regional networks. A tourism plan is recommended to identify the best options for such facilities in concert with the park’s existing visitor center.

**Outdoor Entertainment Venue**

It is also recommended that the City pursue partnerships in consideration of developing entertainment and event spaces, which help strengthen the amenity value of its business districts and of the City as a whole. A band shell or amphitheatre in a park might be considered as part of the overall amenity
package for enlivening the business districts during and after work hours, so long as the City (in coordination with the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce and other business organizations) develops a strong plan for active programming of such spaces.

The specific type and scale of facility should be identified as part of a “sub-area” master planning process for the business districts, again within the context of broader citywide comprehensive planning. If a live entertainment venue concept is developed, then the City’s role would be to help leverage outside financing for the construction of the facility (such as through a grant or capital campaign), and to support the Chamber of Commerce in regular programming for the facility by providing support grants on a seasonal basis. An amphitheatre or other music venue would be an amenity for residents as well as for people working in Independence.

Meeting & Event Space

There are also opportunities to establish meeting and networking spaces for the business community closer to the Rockside Road corridor. Again, as part of the sub-area planning for business districts, meeting, event and conference space might be identified that can add amenity value within the business district areas. The scale and utilization for such a facility would need to be determined in coordination with area businesses and Independence residents, and the venue could be integrated with the outdoor event space or with downtown projects discussed elsewhere in this report. Some Independence businesses already have access to internal conference spaces, and there are civic venues elsewhere in Independence. However, having a civic facility or joint business-civic facility in the Rockside Road corridor can attract existing and potential businesses that need space for meetings, special events, and functions. If developed through a partnership with local businesses, the space could be programmed for residents and business use alike.

Coordination with a Restructured Chamber

There are opportunities for the City to leverage the strengths of a chamber of commerce to market and promote Independence and assist its businesses. At present, the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce represents businesses in a broader, multi-jurisdictional area. If the Chamber were restructured to focus primarily on Independence, then the Chamber could take primary responsibility for marketing, such as through the programming of business networking and event spaces. The City of Independence can coordinate with and support a reconfigured Chamber in these efforts, such as through revenue sharing and use of City space, equipment, and staffing.

Coordination should focus on programming that is relevant to and supportive of the Independence business community. Thus, an Independence-
based and focused Chamber would better serve the interests of the large business community concentrated in Independence than the current multi-jurisdictional approach. The City's Economic Development department should be responsible for coordinating with the Chamber and developing marketing strategies and programming concepts.
Section 3. STRENGTHEN DOWNTOWN

Both the business community and residents of Independence have identified the Downtown as an important opportunity for growth and for new forms of development. Downtown can become more of an attraction in itself for retaining and recruiting businesses to Independence through the clustering of retail, restaurants and amenities. It has been shown that business owners will judge a city as a business location based partly on "livability" factors led by the health and quality of its downtown. Business owners will often relocate their enterprises based on where they and their families want to live. A strong, healthy town center is an indicator of a robust local economy and a high quality of life.

Key Challenges

Downtown Independence is challenged because of its relatively isolated located lacks traffic exposure and access to the bulk of the regional market. Office workers generate roughly 76% of the existing demand for retail goods and services within the City of Independence, based on an analysis of the existing business base. And yet, most of the City’s thousands of office workers rarely if ever visit Downtown Independence.

Aside from its location away from the core of the City’s office district, Downtown Independence lacks destination stores, dining and entertainment that would otherwise attract office workers and residents of nearby communities into Independence. As a result, downtown is highly dependent on residents of the relatively low-density neighborhoods surrounding it. There is higher than desired vacancy in the downtown area and turnover in the business base. The only consistent businesses (e.g., hardware) are those that cater primarily to a convenience market base, again concentrated within the surrounding residential neighborhoods of Independence.

One of the primary anchors in Downtown Independence, in terms of space occupied, is a funeral home. Small offices and service businesses occupy a large share of the ground-floor spaces that should normally be rented to retailers. There is very little new retail commercial space to accommodate modern retail needs. At the same time, Downtown Independence lacks the historic “Main Street” character of some other communities, with most commercial uses in aging strip shopping centers. Despite these challenges, there are successful businesses in Downtown Independence that continue to serve the community.

Building the Market Base

Successful downtown business districts thrive not only because of the resident neighborhoods surrounding them but also because of they are perceived
as destinations serving the broader community. Downtown should be the symbolic “heart” of Independence, a place that draws on the community’s history and character. Becoming a destination does not require Downtown to be clogged with regional traffic and over-development. Destinations can be established by recruiting a few specialty businesses, entertainment venues and cultural activities that are unique to Independence and celebrate its unique qualities.

However, in addition to creating more of a destination appeal, there is also a need to expand the market base in support of downtown businesses. Downtown markets are built from the aggregation of niches including resident households, tourists and other visitors, area daytime workers, students and pass-through commuters who converge in the downtown area.

**Market Opportunities**

At present, Downtown Independence is highly dependent on the local resident household base, as noted above, and there is a lack of appeal to younger demographic niches in the market. A “back-of-the-envelope” market opportunities assessment determined that an additional 125 to 150 “rooftops” or households would be required in the Downtown area to support an additional 50,000 to 60,000 square feet of retail, much closer to the threshold for creating a destination to attract daytime workers and others to downtown shops and restaurants.

**New Downtown Housing**

As such, the City should, as part of sub-area planning processes for Downtown, determine how best to establish a target for adding up to 150 housing units within walking distance of the Downtown core. By adding housing within the core, there will be more opportunities for people to walk to purchase basic goods and services, enhancing the overall “walk-ability” of downtown and alleviating some of the traffic pressures generated by new housing.

It is also recommended that discussions about the addition of new housing focus on attracting households with young professionals, recent college graduates, empty nesters, and others that help support the tax base and improve the market base for Downtown. Medium and high-income households have more disposable income and are therefore more likely to spend money that supports Downtown businesses. But it is also important to diversify the housing opportunities in Independence for younger couples, recent graduates (including the children of Independence families), and professionals just starting out in their careers.

The addition of new housing units will increase market densities (the number of households with incomes) within the Downtown area, which helps support existing and potential new businesses, thereby strengthening Downtown...
for the future. Residents who attended the strategic planning meetings recognized the importance of building the market base though more housing as a way to help strengthen Downtown. Housing is perhaps one potential re-use of the former middle school site located in the Downtown area.

**Active Adult Housing.** Many of the residents who participated in the strategic planning meetings expressed their concerns over the lack of housing within Independence to accommodate those current residents such as “baby boomers” who will gradually age out of their homes but want to remain in the City. Downtown provides excellent opportunities for mixed-use development that can incorporate attractive housing for active adults as well as young professionals. Many people remain active later in life and will want to be able to walk to shops, groceries, cultural venues, services, pharmacies, and restaurants. A Downtown location is therefore ideal for active adults.

**Culture & Entertainment**

In order to help establish Downtown Independence as a destination that attracts consumers from outside of the immediate area, there is the opportunity to build off of anchor arts, cultural, and/or entertainment venues. Cultural and entertainment facilities could take the form of either commercial enterprises or civic facilities and programs sponsored by the City or by a local non-profit organization.

**Commercial Entertainment Venues.** The market potentials for commercial entertainment venues (such as cinemas or music venues) would need to be tested to determine whether there is economic support for such facilities. Given the location, it is unlikely that commercial cinema venues are supportable. However, a specialty music performance venue or similar entertainment facility integrated with eating & drinking venues may have market support. If it is determined that there is market demand for such a venue, then the City would work on identifying an appropriate building or site, and recruiting a commercial business operator.

**Civic or Non-Profit Cultural Venues.** An alternative would be for the City of Independence to sponsor a cultural venue within the Downtown area. A cultural venue could accommodate a theater, music, and other performing arts as well as the visual arts and special exhibitions. Generally, such facilities are not financially self-supporting, and the City already sponsors cultural space and activities at its nearby Community/ Civic center, so a more prudent and fiscally-responsible approach would be for the City to work with a non-profit organization having primary responsibility for cultural development in the Downtown area. A community foundation could be established focusing on the development of arts, culture, and recreation programming outside of but coordinated with the City’s public facilities. Local corporations and businesses within Independence would be an important part of the potential donor base for such an organization. This
non-profit would raise money for developing a cultural anchor within the Downtown area.

**Eating & Drinking**

Development of housing, culture and entertainment facilities in the Downtown area will help strengthen the market base for restaurants and other establishments. The retail assessment identified the opportunity for up to 25,000 square feet of additional eating & drinking uses, if the Downtown housing base is expanded by 150 units, office uses are recruited downtown, and the Downtown area is promoted to Independence-area employees and Cuyahoga Valley tourists as a destination. Having both day-time and night-time populations will be imperative for the success of full-service restaurant operations. Having more than one of these venues will also be necessary, in order to establish an “agglomeration” effect. Thus, capturing this market will require quite a substantial, pro-active recruitment and development effort.

A “brew-pub” restaurant and bar has been identified as a possible prime anchor use that would attract an after-work crowd. A health-themed café could be co-branded with the national park to attract the recreational users. Finally, a family-style old-fashioned diner consistent with Independence’s community reputation may also be appropriate to attract the broader suburban commuter market. Such concepts would have to be tested through market analysis to determine the scale of opportunity and their overall viability.

**Small & Specialty Retail Businesses**

Once a destination is established, building on housing densities, culture & entertainment, and eating & drinking venues, then there will be the opportunity to recruit a more substantive specialty retail base of shopper’s goods stores. Independence residents have stated their support for small-scale retail business development and recruitment in the Downtown area, while they draw the line at “big box” retail chains. Specialty stores such as a bicycle shop, hobby shop, ethnic food store, or antique store can become destinations in themselves, if they are unique in the broader regional marketplace. Recreation-oriented businesses could be co-branded with the recreation amenities associated with the Cuyahoga Valley.

Again, it is important to assess the market potential for such businesses as a guideline for entrepreneurship development and business recruitment. Most important is the need to generate the benefits of agglomeration. One or two small individual specialty stores without the benefit of larger anchors to drive traffic are likely to fail without subsidy. An example is provided by the lessons learned from newly-built Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TNDs), where developers have had to subsidize the initial specialty shops in their “town centers” in order to market their housing product as part of the broader small town “package.”
Independence residents have stated their desire to increase opportunities for small businesses and local entrepreneurs. Downtown is perceived to be a location where smaller businesses can be encouraged to locate and grow. The City can offer incentives for small business development, which are discussed elsewhere in this report and can include subsidized space in City-owned buildings as noted below.

Redevelopment Sites

Independence’s residents recognize the importance of building on the existing character of the city while allowing for a greater diversity of uses in the Downtown area. An “easing” of restrictions on building types and uses is supported, so long as it is limited to certain business areas and in particular, Downtown Independence. There is a concern that the character of the community be carefully considered when allowing for a greater concentration of activity downtown.

Independence Middle School Site

There appears to be widespread support for redevelopment of the City-owned middle school site. Among the uses suggested by the community are education, health care, and administrative services. The school was also identified as an opportunity site for development of small businesses in the Downtown area. That being said, there are numerous economic opportunities for use of the school site for mixed-use redevelopment that could include arts & cultural venues, housing, retail and business space. An anchor use (e.g., housing, office or mixed-use) would be ideal that helps drive demand for Downtown retail and restaurants. In reality, a highest-and-best use analysis could be completed to assist the City in determining the best use for the site. Such an analysis can be completed as part of a broader Downtown market analysis and/or a sub-area planning effort for the Downtown area.

“100% Corner”

As part of the market analysis or sub-area plan, the “center” of Downtown should be identified in terms of its marketing potential as well as its inherent appeal to the community’s heritage. Where that center is located, the “100% intersection” should be developed to its highest possible density and exposure, as a way of drawing consumers in to the center of the City. At present, Downtown lacks a center, a key intersection where pedestrian activity is concentrated. Instead, there is a series of strip centers and outparcels that are not well-connected. Depending on the market potentials for specific uses and scale of development, the concentration of activity would emanate from this central core.
Independence Square Shopping Center

Independence Square is well-located near the intersection of key streets in Downtown Independence. However, the design of this shopping center is poorly-adapted to market considerations and as a result, it is not surprising that significant portions of the center remain vacant or under-utilized. There are opportunities for redevelopment of this site, incorporating existing uses and even portions of the center, while improving the overall economic and financial performance of this retail site. Because of its location, the center may provide an excellent opportunity for redevelopment in coordination or consolidation with the City’s middle school site, which is adjacent to the shopping center. If the two sites are combined, they allow for a larger development “envelope” and a more substantial opportunity for development generating economic spin-off (such as retail sales) for Downtown. Again, a market analysis and sub-area plan will help define the market parameters and appropriate uses for key sites like these in the Downtown area.

Downtown Improvement Authority (DIA)

The City should consider establishing a Downtown Improvement (or Development) Authority (DIA) to assist small businesses growth and to leverage private-sector investment in the Downtown area. The DIA would offer businesses access to small grants, low-interest loans, and/or matching grants to help them invest in the building stock and fund expansion within Downtown. Businesses could use the funds to make capital improvements and for other purposes. The DIA could also have authority to use City assets to help leverage development and private sector investment. The DIA could be used for clustering various Downtown programs, development projects, and incentives that the City may want to pursue. In other words, the DIA helps geographically define a small business district where business owners can receive a variety of incentives and benefits to enable growth and development. The DIA should overlap with one of the City’s TIF districts in the event that financing for specific capital projects is required to support business development.

Small Business Incentives

As noted earlier, there are opportunities to strengthen Downtown by attracting and retaining entrepreneurs and unique, small businesses. The restaurants and specialty businesses help to create a unique identity which in turn is used to promote Downtown to a destination market and for corporate business recruitment. At present, the City of Independence does not have an advertized incentive program specifically to assist small businesses, although the City does offer a policy “tailored to individual business needs.” Thus, the City considers incentives on a “case-by-case basis.” While this policy is appropriate for a City that has long succeeded in attracting large corporations thanks to its
superior location and accessibility attributes, there is a need to target certain incentives and resources to key business segments and geographic areas, if the City wishes to ensure growth and redevelopment where appropriate.

One of the most important resources that the City of Independence has at its disposal for assisting small businesses is real estate. Using existing land and building resources to help small business has been identified by Independence residents as an opportunity for the City. This and other opportunities to assist small businesses are recommended below, generally within the context of establishing a special benefits district or DIA.

**Technology Business Incubator**

Independence residents identified use of the Independence Middle School site as an opportunity site for recruiting and supporting small businesses. Unfortunately, the cost of reuse and reconfiguration of the building for this purpose may be disadvantageous due to the high subsidies that may be required for operation. Instead, there is the opportunity for Independence to work with owners of under-utilized office buildings in the Rockside Road corridor to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a technology business incubator, or program to assist emerging technology companies with subsidized office use, free internet, shared administrative services and meeting space.

Of course a true business “incubator” comprises much more than just offering a building and its services at reduced rents. An effective incubator is developed in concert with technical support and financing components to help get businesses to a level where they can operate on a non-subsidized commercial basis. In order to establish a true business incubator, the City would need to partner or collaborate through its technology development programs with technology companies and/or educational institutions such as Cuyahoga Community College or Cleveland State Business School.

**Revolving Loan Fund Pools**

The Grow Cuyahoga County Fund assists small businesses with obtaining low-interest loans of between $100,000 and $1.0 million. However, the City of Independence should offer its own loan program by working collaboratively with area banks to secure and package small business loans for existing and potential businesses in Independence. The City would coordinate with area banks to develop a special revolving loan program or loan pool for small businesses. The City would also help market and promote such programs, including technical assistance (such as application assistance) as part of a broader small business incentive package. By combining loan funds from a variety of banks, the loan pool can help reduce risk to any one individual bank, which can allow banks to offer loans at reduced interest rates.
A low-interest loan program can make financing more available for start-up costs, equipment purchases, capital improvements, and expansion of small business including new employment. Similar programs exist among a number of Independence’s competitors in the region and in other parts of Ohio. Solon’s “Get Growing in Solon Small Business Loan,” for example, allows for loans ranging from $50,000 up to $1.0 million for qualifying small businesses. The City of Medina provides gap financing through a revolving loan fund (RLF), which can be used for land acquisition, site improvements, construction, rehabilitation, leasehold improvements and capital equipment. Some communities provide direct grants instead of loans, for specific types of capital improvements. For example Parma provides a 50% matching grant on expenses related to upgrading, renovation and improvements to commercial storefronts among small businesses in designated districts, with a maximum grant of $21,000.

**Loan Guarantees**

The City of Independence can also work with the banks to draft a loan guarantee program that, through lending pools, reduces the risk to individual banks and thereby allows them to offer a reduced interest rate on common small business loans, such as for equity-based building improvements (e.g., façade loans) or expansion. Loan guarantees transfer some of the risk to the City, which backs the loans. In such cases, it is in the City’s interest to ensure a mechanism is in place to cap and track the loan program so that all losses are contained within a pre-determined budget.

**Rent-to-Own**

It will be important for Independence to encourage small and large businesses to own their premises, rather than renting space in the city. In doing so, the City can help reduce some of the “footloose” nature of business operations in Independence (where tenure is 91% rental). The City should work with landlords to encourage rent-to-own or equity positions in building stock Downtown and in other business districts including the Rockside Road corridor. Similarly, the City should encourage inclusion of small business equity in project teams for redevelopment of public sites (e.g., the middle school site).

**Technical Assistance**

In addition to the technical assistance the City can provide for SBA and other loan applications, or through an incubator collaboration, Independence can assist small businesses with other forms of technical assistance to help improve their opportunities Downtown. Such technical assistance might include information from market analyses on the potential for their category of business in the Downtown Independence area. Such information can be used by the business to tailor business plans and loan applications. The City can also work
with area institutions and local corporate businesses to assist small businesses with the business plans themselves.

“Buy Local” and Contractor Marketing

The City can assist small businesses through the development of “buy local” programs and through networking efforts to bring small businesses and entrepreneurs together with prospective corporate clients located within the city. The City would work closely with the Chamber in “matchmaking” small businesses with potential contract opportunities in the broader market. The City has considered and elected not to institute preference policies for small local businesses, but the City can still encourage the use of small and locally-based businesses in discussions with its larger contractors.

Savings and Benefits Programs

Several communities in the region have established discount programs that offer discounts on goods and services to new and expanding small businesses. For example, a new business with less than 20 employees might receive a voucher for office supplies sourced from within Independence, as part of a welcome package. The discounts could be offered through bulk purchasing by the City, which helps reduce the overall marginal cost of individual products.
Section 4. UPDATE OFFICE PRODUCT: INCENTIVES FOR OFFICE REHABILITATION AND REDEVELOPMENT

The economic analysis has determined that Independence will gradually lose some of its competitiveness for attracting and retaining office employers unless office space is upgraded and the office environment changes to encourage more of a sense of place. Independence residents understood and agreed that, if the City is to remain competitive in the shrinking Cleveland market, then it must modernize its office stock. This section provides recommendations for encouraging the development of mixed-use business nodes (such as through zoning and land use regulations), encouraging the rehabilitation and redevelopment of office building stock through development of a special incentives or CRA district, and through marketing and recruitment of businesses to under-performing or newly redeveloping office space.

Encourage Mixed-use Office Nodes: Zoning and Land Use Regulation

The strategic planning process has noted the importance of reconfiguring some of the City’s office corridors to allow for a more mixed-use environment that increases the City’s competitiveness for businesses. One of the key findings of this study has been the need for better integration of office, retail, and restaurant uses in Rockside Road along with a need for housing and mixed-use redevelopment within the Downtown Independence area. The City’s existing zoning code (Chapter 1141) designates mixed-use zones through the U5-HR/MU overlay district that allows for the integration of office, hotel and certain retail uses. However, the zoning has not required such integration, so it acts primarily as a regulatory mechanism rather than as a tool for redevelopment.

A sub-area planning effort, as part of a broader comprehensive plan, can help determine an approach to guide the restructuring of the City’s zoning code and land use regulations to meet the emerging economic development needs of the city. For example, some cities have revised their zoning code to include “Specific Plan” (SP) districts (rather than an overlay) which is not subject to traditional zoning district development standards. Under SP zoning, land use and design standards are established for a specific development and written into the zone change ordinance as a way to compel certain changes in the development pattern. Consideration might also be given to elimination of office-only zones, with a focus on establishing strong, mixed-use commercial districts. There are no specific zoning changes recommended in this report, but appropriate changes should be considered as part of sub-area planning efforts.
The highest level of land use diversity should be reserved for the Downtown Independence area. In order to avoid competition between Downtown and other business districts, it will be imperative that zoning and land use regulation provide some unique dispensation for Downtown, such as by allowing:

- Mixed-density housing
- Commercial entertainment venues
- Mixed-use buildings
- Office, retail, eating & drinking, and other commercial uses
- Arts & cultural facilities
- Government and civic uses

This broad combination of uses might not be permitted in the Rockside Road area, which might exclude all forms of housing, for example.

**Encourage Office Building Rehabilitation and Redevelopment: Rockside Road Community Reinvestment Area (CRA)**

It is recommended that the Rockside Road corridor area be designated as an Ohio Community Reinvestment Area (CRA), where property owners receive tax incentives for investing in real property improvements including rehabilitation as well as new construction. While many CRAs are designated for the purpose of housing revitalization, the CRA program also allows CRA designation for economic development purposes. The program allows for up to 100% property tax exemptions, with a minimum of $5,000 on commercial and industrial properties for up to 12 years. This incentive could prove to be more powerful than ordinary tax abatements, depending on the level of exemption. Cities like Maple Heights have implemented the program, where the City Council has responsibility for approving CRA applications based on the amount of new investment and number of jobs created or retained. The Rockside Road CRA would be coordinated to ensure it does not interfere with the viability of the City’s TIF District, used to finance infrastructure improvements.

**Direct Investment Mechanism**

To assist private property owners and developers with rehabilitation and redevelopment of office buildings in the Rockside Road CRA, a non-profit Community Investment Corporation (CIC) might be established as an arms-length agency to collaborate with property owners. The CIC might focus on land and building acquisition and development of public improvements (financed through TIF) to leverage private redevelopment in the area. The CIC might also consider direct equity participation or a more fiscally conservative approach of “matchmaking” with private equity partners. Redevelopment projects would be identified through the sub-area planning process noted elsewhere in this report. A somewhat similar mechanism is operated by the City of Brooklyn, through its Community Improvement Corporation.
Capital Access Program

Similar to the small business revolving loan programs, there is the opportunity to establish a capital access or linked deposit program for property owners and developers wishing to make capital improvements to their aging office stock in the Rockside Road area. The City of Wickliffe, Ohio operates a Linked Deposit Program that provides low-interest loans (up to five years) for capital improvements through partnerships with local banks. In addition to loans, the City of Solon offers one-time grants to property owners for redevelopment, improvements, or demolition projects on a reimbursement basis.

Green Building & Energy Efficiency Incentives

The federal government offers a cost recovery and bonus depreciation incentive for investment in energy-efficient equipment. The Illuminating Company (First Energy) offers a broad range of energy rebates for energy efficiency in operations through its EnergySaveOhio program. However, these incentives do not address capital construction or building design.

Since 2010, Ohio cities can offer Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) incentives, which establish loans or bonds for property owners to enhance the energy efficiency of their buildings. The amount of the loan or bond is recaptured through special property assessments up to 30 years. To enable the financing, the City would have to pass legislation creating a “special energy improvement district” (or SEID, which could be coordinated with the CRA and other incentive zones as discussed previously). Among the technologies included in the incentive are solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, gasification, and energy efficiency technologies.\(^1\) While the program has been primarily for residential use, cities are starting to enable the incentive for commercial properties, with Cincinnati and Toledo having established SEIDs to-date.

The City of Independence could enable these incentives through a SEID within the CRA district, although this has proven to be challenging in some places including Cleveland’s prior multi-jurisdictional effort, which proved to be too complicated. Independence could also collaborate with local utilities on green building and energy efficiency standards and incentives. Since energy efficiency is increasingly seen as an important contributor to operating cost savings, incentives that help reduce the premium on up-front costs for such improvements can increase the competitiveness of Independence’s office building stock.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) has found that the most effective incentives for green building are tax incentives (e.g., abatements), density/floor-area ratio bonuses, and expedited permitting. Certainly the easiest and least costly option for Independence is to overlay expedited permitting for green building with the other incentives that could be offered within the CRA.

\(^1\) Ohio Department of Development, 2013.
Cincinnati instituted a LEED-Community Reinvestment Area (LEED-CRA), which offers tax abatement for rehabilitation and new construction. The policy has set a national standard, with an abatement of up to 75% of the increased value over 12 years for building rehabilitation.

**Quality Standards and Rewards**

Another way to encourage redevelopment of aging office building stock is to set or recognize standards of quality for modern office product, and to honor and reward those buildings that have met or exceeded local standards. Such standards can also be used as a marketing tool, to illustrate Independence’s *commitment to the highest-possible quality of office space and work environment in the region*.

Independence could set voluntary standards based on LEED (leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and in consultation with the local office brokerage and construction industries. Developers and businesses that met or exceeded key standards would be recognized (at a minimum) and rewarded such as through refunds of municipal building permit and other fees.

**Encourage Condominium and Owner Occupancy**

The City of Independence has a high percentage of businesses that rent their space, at more than 91%. There is a need to increase ownership tenure in office space in Independence to help reduce the “footloose” character of businesses that are located there. The various incentives mentioned herein can be tied or increased for building owners and developers that incorporate condominium ownership in their projects or that recruit more single-tenant occupants and build-to-suits. The regulatory process can also favor inclusion of more owner-occupied office space, which is often more profitable for developers.

However, the City must recognize that developers and property owners are also captive to market conditions that may or may not favor development of single-tenant or condominium product at a particular time. Thus, the property owner cannot be punished for not attracting single-tenant occupants. Rather, incentives should help reward the recruitment of single-tenant occupants, the development of office condominiums, and the landing of major corporate headquarter uses.

**Marketing & Recruitment**

Finally, the City of Independence should continue to work closely with office building owners and brokers to assist with marketing and business recruitment targeted to office buildings with vacant space in the Rockside Road corridor. The types of companies identified in this study are appropriate for targeting to the corridor’s buildings, but every effort should be made to focus on
the types of tenants most appropriate to occupy individual buildings. Key marketing and recruitment strategies would include the following:

1. Interim Strategy

   a. Identify key competitive office buildings and sites with blocks of available space ready for tenanting. Work with brokers to prioritize the spaces in terms of their competitiveness for targeted office uses.
   
   b. Work with brokers to match the prioritized competitive office buildings and sites with the needs for appropriate target industries.
   
   c. Work with brokers to exchange information relating to targeted industries and prospects within those industries “floating” in the northeast Ohio market.
   
   d. Continue to work with State and Team NEO regional economic development agencies not only to access leads; but also exchange information on target industries that are particularly relevant to marketing of Independence.
   
   e. Promote Independence using branding and advertising messages developed for the city.
   
   f. Promote the use of market analysis and sub-area planning to lay the groundwork for redevelopment and marketing strategies specifically for the Rockside Road corridor and Downtown Independence.
   
   g. Work with banks to develop loan pools and focus on incentive packages to assist small business.
   
   h. Work with educational institutions on the concept for use of one or more under-utilized office buildings to house a small business incubator.
   
   i. Develop draft incentive package associated with the establishment of a Rockside Road CRA.

2. Long-term Strategy

   a. Once market analyses and sub-area plans are in place for the Rockside Road corridor and Downtown Independence, focus on implementation of revisions to the zoning code and regulations, incentive packages specific to redevelopment, and investment mechanism to leverage redevelopment.
   
   b. Implement incentive package associated with the Rockside Road CRA, also to help leverage redevelopment.
   
   c. Continue to work with existing businesses to ensure support for retention and expansion, and match expansion opportunities with existing underutilized building resources.
   
   d. Work through the investment mechanism to encourage redevelopment of the Independence Middle School site for mixed-
use; also encourage development and integration of housing into the Downtown area.

Target Market Players

Several major decision makers and consultants within the specific target industries have been identified and are included in a list in the Appendix of this report. The objective is for the Economic Development agents (City and Chamber) for Independence to contact the key players within these industries, particularly within the Northeast Ohio Region, to discuss competitive advantages and prime opportunities to capture movements within the region and beyond.
Section 5. ENHANCE INFRASTRUCTURE & SITE “READINESS”

Infrastructure and competitive site investment is one of the key tools available to the City of Independence to leverage economic development. This report has recommended a strategy of sub-area planning to bring changes to both public infrastructure and private development patterns in support of an evolving business environment. But in addition, there are several urban services and infrastructure-related improvements that are specifically recommended based on input from business and resident stakeholders, and as appropriate to leverage economic development. Several of these improvements and site “readiness” concepts are suggested below.

Traffic Mitigation Measures

The City has worked with State agencies to make significant improvements to ease traffic in the Rockside Road corridor. Businesses recognize these improvements. Regardless, Independence has garnered and retained a reputation, deservedly or not, for having traffic bottlenecks around the Rockside Road area at I-77. Whether or not this reputation is based on actual level of service or performance standards, perceptions are as harmful to Independence’s reputation as reality.

More importantly, businesses agree that the City’s most competitive characteristic is its accessibility to a broad regional labor force. So, any negative perception of traffic congestion and reduced accessibility will harm Independence’s marketing efforts for recruiting and retaining business. The City should continue to coordinate efforts with the State to improve existing access to the highway network and/or create alternative access from the Rockside Road corridor.

Mixed-use Development

Over the long-term, redevelopment of the Rockside Road corridor into more of a mixed-use center can help reduce traffic congestion. First, a “walkable,” mixed-use environment can improve overall traffic flow by shifting some modality from automobile to pedestrian for short trips (such as office-to-restaurant). Secondly, a mixed-use environment can be master planned to include a grid network of streets that better distributes traffic and reduces the “funneling” effect of pouring traffic onto one main thoroughfare. These improvements can be programmed through a sub-area planning effort and comprehensive planning.
Signal Timing

Commuters seem to agree that there may be an issue with the timing of traffic signals at core intersections in the Rockside Road corridor. The City has been looking into this issue, but any effort to improve signal timing can be a low-cost and effective way of reducing the perception (if not reality) of traffic congestion. Thus, it is recommended that the City implement any recommended changes in signal timing that would improve traffic flow and, more importantly, notify businesses of the changes so that there is a psychologically positive impact from the improvements.

Peak Hour Traffic Amelioration

The City of Independence should sponsor a variety of programs such as car-pooling / ride sharing and staggered work hours to encourage businesses to participate in reducing traffic congestion at peak hours. The City can offer awards and incentives for ride sharing programs, such as coupons for free dinners at Independence restaurants for those companies that achieve the highest percentage participation in ridesharing programs and staggered hours. While programs like telecommuting could also help reduce traffic, the City should be careful not to impact on the at-place employment base which generates income tax revenues.

Transit / Trolleys

The City might also consider working with the Chamber of Commerce to sponsor trolley busses that circulate within the Rockside Road and Downtown areas during lunch hours or commuting periods, to take workers between key nodes. A circulation study would be required to determine whether a transit circulator might have any impact on congestion, before investing in such efforts.

Community Spaces

As noted earlier in this report, there are opportunities to enhance the quality of the business environment by integrating public uses and open space. A park, amphitheatre, trails and recreation spaces are recommended as amenities that would make the Rockside Road area more attractive to a variety of businesses and their office workers. Such amenities can be programmed as part of a sub-area planning process and would ensure availability of such amenities to residents as well. Linkages between recreation trails, parks and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park would increase overall participation, amenity value, and opportunities for tourism.
Power / Bandwidth

The business survey and focus groups identified a surprisingly strong need for more reliable power service and greater bandwidth capacity in Independence. The City is marketing itself to attract Information Technology and services companies that rely on both reliable power and bandwidth. To ensure and enhance the City’s competitiveness in the future, it is highly recommended that the City build a strong, working relationship with The Illuminating Company to resolve any existing and potential issues that may impact on businesses in the area. The City should also work with telecom providers to ensure integration of the highest-speed Internet services, fiber optic cable networks (including “last mile” connections), and bandwidth capacity within the northeast Ohio region. Several cities, including Cleveland, are extending wireless networks into all or portions of their communities (e.g., the City of Dublin or Ward 13 in Cleveland). Independence should be marketing its infrastructure as a key strength for IT business recruitment and retention. The infrastructure package must include:

- Reliable power
- Fiber optic network strength (e.g., “last mile”), as appropriate
- Bandwidth capacity and high-speed services
- Energy efficient office space
- Reduced congestion road networks
- Mixed-use, high-amenity environments
- Free WiFi services within core business districts (e.g., Rockside Road Corridor and Downtown Independence).

Independence has opportunities to build on its strong IT sector as a critical link to the Cleveland Bio-tech corridor, serving as the information services component within the bio-tech industry. Cleveland markets itself as being at the forefront of the Midwest’s InfoTech, BioTech and Alternative Energy sectors. Independence can best “plug” into this marketing by focusing on the City’s location, accessibility, and IT infrastructure as noted above. The City should consider offering special “perks” such as free WiFi services within its business districts and available to businesses and residents alike (such as through Internet-friendly coffee shops).

Establish Industrial Districts Through Design Improvements

There is a need to create more physical definition for the city’s industrial areas including the East Pleasant Valley and Cloverleaf areas. Using signage, gateway features and other design elements can help set the industrial areas apart and establish a “brand” for each of these areas for marketing and business recruitment. A CRA similar to the one recommended for Rockside Road could
also be established within one or both of the industrial areas to help establish incentives for business investment.

**East Pleasant Valley Corridor**

The East Pleasant Valley area is already a relatively stable and successful business district with a solid mix of office, distribution, R&D and some light manufacturing. Several large companies have major operations in this corridor. The area has a relatively high-quality physical environment, with buildings set back in forested or landscaped settings. While there are some available sites or buildings, sites for future redevelopment or re-use should be identified in consultation with businesses. There are opportunities to attract logistics / distribution, warehousing, light manufacturing (i.e., specialty food and catering companies) as well as research and back office to this corridor because of its good transportation access without major traffic congestion. This corridor is primed for branding as the “Pleasant Valley Business Corridor” through physical design elements such as gateways, signage, and other infrastructure improvements.

**Cloverleaf Area**

The Cloverleaf area provides the City’s only real opportunity for heavier industries, such as the construction supply activity that already anchors this area. That being said, the visual streetscape along key corridors such as Brecksville Road and Old Brecksville Road on the east side of I-77 can be enhanced as a gateway into the City of Independence. Again, especially along Brecksville Road, there are opportunities for signage and gateway treatments to help give this area definition as an attractive business hub, with a focus on industrial uses.

This area has superior exposure to both I-77 and I-480. As such, there are marketing opportunities for businesses located in portions of this area to reach a broad market base. Unfortunately, the area lacks immediate ingress and egress from either I-77 or I-480, which intersect near this area. Nevertheless, there is access to I-77 from Brecksville Road further north, so there remain good opportunities for clean distribution, warehousing, and light industrial uses (e.g., food production, catering, wholesale supply, etc) that require access to the interstate system. Again, target opportunity sites and buildings should be identified within the area for marketing, and an effort made to provide the area with more physical definition for branding and marketing as the City’s Center of Industry.

**Ensure Site Readiness:**
**Target “NW Quadrant”**

Independence has few remaining large parcels for attracting business investment and development. The most significant of these is located in the
northwest quadrant of the interchange at Rockside Road and I-77. The City may consider a “land-banking” strategy to hold this relatively competitive site for future “drop in” economic development uses and/or attractive mixed-use development including housing. A “drop-in” use could include a “smart” manufacturing facility or an education institutional anchor, for example. Mixed use might include high-quality residential, hotel/conferencing, office, education and other uses. This 80+/-acre site offers multiple opportunities for development but it is in the City’s interest to monitor the “highest and best use” (HBU) for the property. An HBU market analysis could be conducted as part of a broader sub-area planning effort to determine the most productive economic uses for the property that would help the City meet its fiscal and economic objectives while also contributing to residents’ and workers’ quality of life.

There is also a need for infrastructure improvements to this site, since there are no internal roads or other access. Sub-area planning could address such design issues as attractive frontage for the site and improved integration of existing uses, along with issues relating to coordination with Seven Hills on the landscaping and maintenance of Lombardo Center Road.
Section 6. ATTRACT TALENT & PROMOTE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Everyone recognizes as Independence’s strength its location and access to the regional labor force. The environment that is created for business, however, can help Independence attract the “best and brightest” workers to work at Independence-based companies. If the work environment is attractive to workers, then the City will have a strong marketing tool for recruiting and retaining business. In other words, economic development for Independence is not just about attracting businesses but also about creating an environment that attracts the workers that business needs.

Previous sections of this report focused on incentives for small businesses and entrepreneurs, including the use of City-owned real estate as well as tax incentives, regulatory policies and other approaches. High-quality infrastructure is important to many businesses and specialty products – such as high-capacity bandwidth – will help the City attract information technology and service companies. Finally, changes to the overall physical environment, including the integration of more recreation amenities in a more walk-able mixed-use environment, will also enhance the City’s competitiveness for a variety of businesses. There are also other strategies the City can employ to help businesses recruit and retain the talent necessary to “foster entrepreneurial activity and support the employment needs of targeted industries.” These strategies are outlined below.

Technology Talent Partnership

The City of Independence should establish a technology talent partnership with interested local businesses. This partnership would work to identify internal needs, in terms of attracting and retaining technology talent, as well as potential synergies for working with institutions and businesses within the Cleveland Health Technology Corridor. Leadership among key technology and tech-services businesses would be recruited by the Mayor and Council to participate in the partnership committee on a regular basis. Surveys and workshops would be conducted to collect input and to define the strategies for recruitment that best suit the needs of existing and potential Independence businesses. Finally, the partnership’s members would contribute to marketing, outreach and broad education efforts to promote the City as an information technology hub within the region and the State of Ohio.
Continuing Education Resources

The City would also work with the Technology Talent Partnership and regional institutions to develop programs for continuing education as a resource for technology workers in the area. Placement of such resources within Independence (such as by attracting the program of a highly-respected regional institution) would also help in promoting the City as a hub for innovation and information services. This relationship with regional institutions would integrate the concept of an incubator, discussed earlier in this report.

Entrepreneurial Financing

Entrepreneur assistance programs, including those that help fund information technology businesses, are expanding in northeast Ohio. For example, TECHudson targets entrepreneurs working in technology fields within the City of Hudson. The Hudson program is tied to its new incubator, which is focused on technology businesses. Gaining participation or guidance from groups like the Northeast Ohio Software Association can help Independence gain cache to assist in developing its reputation for IT entrepreneurship. Independence has been strong in information services and administration, but there is a need to expand on the innovation side of information technologies within Independence. Financing is one key draw to attract and retain companies engaged in the design and innovation associated with IT. Independence is well suited to attracting IT engineers, but financing will help leverage innovation and business development.

Various non-profits are working to increase funding and technical assistance for technology startups in the region. Other cities like Akron, Barberton, Canton and Wooster have leveraged assistance from a non-profit called JumpStart to form local funding organizations that make small grants, loans, or micro-loans to entrepreneurs in those communities. Venture for America is investing in Cleveland start-ups, and there are opportunities for Independence to work with such funds to funnel companies that the City identifies for assistance. Among the programs assisting start-up technology businesses in the region are the following: Bizdom U, 10000 Small Businesses (Goldman Sachs), LeanDog Labs, JumpStart, Bad Girl Ventures, New Venture for America, BioEnterprise Corporation, and NorTech, among others. The City should reach out to these enterprise funding non-profits and determine how Independence can work with them to recruit businesses to the City, its potential incubator, and under-utilized office space in the Rockside Road corridor.
Promote Property Ownership

The City should work with office building owners to promote integration of equity ownership, through establishment of office condominiums on site or within new office developments as promoted through sub-area planning. Ownership opportunities can help attract entrepreneurs and reduce the “footloose” character of businesses located in Independence. The City of Independence can also adopt a policy of “land-banking” to purchase under-utilized or under-performing land that can be redeveloped for owner-occupied buildings or multi-tenant office condominiums.
Section 7. IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX & PERFORMANCE METRICS

An implementation matrix has been developed to assist the City with implementation of the various strategies for economic development recommended in this report. The matrix identifies key actions to be taken within the next three years, the timing of those actions, responsible party (i.e., City agency or partner and their respective roles and responsibilities), indicative costs, and sources of funding for each action. Many of the initial short-term actions are of a facilitating nature and require no expenditures from the City Government.

Facilitation paves the way for future economic development efforts, each of which should be measured against the cost-benefit of implementation. Over time, each program should be measured against overall Citywide objectives and targets for economic development. Following the Implementation Matrix, a list of performance metrics is provided as a guide for measuring and evaluating the success of the City’s economic development programs.
## Implementation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>RESPONSIBLE</th>
<th>COST</th>
<th>FUNDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Approval of Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) by Council</td>
<td>12/13</td>
<td>Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Conduct outreach and communication to business community regarding content and recommendations of ED Strategic Plan</td>
<td>12/13</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Initiate discussions with Council on need for comprehensive master plan that incorporates sub-area plans, design improvements, and market analyses for Downtown, Rockside Road Corridor, Cloverleaf, and East Pleasant Valley Road areas.</td>
<td>1/14</td>
<td>ED/Council</td>
<td>Comp Plan-TBD, Sub-Area Plans-TBD CBD Market Analysis- TBD Rockside Market Analysis- TBD</td>
<td>Independence City budget; Ohio Development Services Agency, National Main Street Program, Cleveland Foundation, and large local businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Coordinate with Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce on business networking programming and events to bring more of a community environment to the Rockside Road business area. Explore the possibility of developing an Independence centered chamber to focus efforts relating to local events, programming and marketing.</td>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>ED/Chamber</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Identify key competitive office buildings and sites with blocks of</td>
<td>3/14</td>
<td>ED/Brokers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>available space ready for tenancy. Work with brokers to prioritize the spaces in terms of their competitiveness for targeted office uses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Work with brokers to match the prioritized competitive office buildings and sites with the needs for appropriate target industries.</td>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>ED/Brokers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Consider developing and implementing a Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) or Development Corporation to enable direct investment in real estate and economic development opportunities.</td>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>ED/Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Consider opportunities for land-banking of NW Quadrant site for future use; Incorporate highest-and-best use market analysis into sub-area planning. Begin planning for infrastructure improvements to make the site more development ready.</td>
<td>5/14</td>
<td>ED/Council</td>
<td>Costs associated with land and infrastructure</td>
<td>City budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Work with brokers to exchange information relating to targeted industries and prospects within those industries “floating” in the northeast Ohio market.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>ED/Brokers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Continue to work with State and Team NEO regional economic development agencies to access</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>ED/Team NEO/State</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE</td>
<td>COST</td>
<td>FUNDING</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leads; but exchange information on target industries that are particularly relevant to marketing of Independence.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Contact key industry consultants and other players in the region (as indicated in the attached list) to discuss the City’s competitiveness and to identify opportunities for capturing market share within target industries.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>ED/Chamber of Commerce (Independence)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Promote Independence using branding and advertising messages developed for the City.</td>
<td>6/14</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>City/ED Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Promote to residents and businesses the use of market analysis and sub-area planning to lay the groundwork for redevelopment and marketing strategies specifically for the Rockside Road corridor and Downtown Independence.</td>
<td>6/14</td>
<td>ED/Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Develop Downtown Improvement Authority (DIA) and Small Business Incentive package for Council approval that incorporates key elements including tax abatements, fee rebates, technical assistance, and other elements outlined herein.</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Work with banks to develop loan pools and focus on incentive</td>
<td>12/14</td>
<td>ED, local banks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>ACTION</td>
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<td>RESPONSIBLE</td>
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<td>FUNDING</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Develop draft incentive package associated with the establishment of a Rockside Road CRA.</td>
<td>5/15</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Explore the possibility of a City purchasing program that would use bulk purchasing to create economies of scale and offer reduced-cost goods for new, emerging and small businesses.</td>
<td>5/15</td>
<td>ED/Purchasing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Meet with the Illuminating Company and representatives of the US Green Building Council to discuss existing incentives but also approaches for encouraging energy efficient construction and LEED certification</td>
<td>7/15</td>
<td>ED/Building</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Work with local IT companies to establish an Independence Technology Council that would focus on enhancing the city’s competitiveness for IT and IS companies in the region through infrastructure improvements, education programs, marketing outreach, and synergies / collaborations with the Cleveland Health Tech Corridor and area engineering departments.</td>
<td>9/15</td>
<td>ED/Mayor/IT Companies</td>
<td>$2,500 seed funding</td>
<td>City/ED Budget; Partner company contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Work with building owners and educational institutions on the</td>
<td>11/15</td>
<td>ED/Mayor, office building owners,</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE</td>
<td>COST</td>
<td>FUNDING</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Work with local businesses, especially in administrative services, IT, health, and professional services to assess and identify opportunities for cost efficiencies in local operations.</td>
<td>12/15</td>
<td>ED/Local companies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Initiate a Tourism Plan fundraising effort in coordination with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and other stakeholders. As part of the planning effort, explore the possibility of establishing a local tourism office, visitors office or convention &amp; visitors bureau.</td>
<td>2/16</td>
<td>ED/Chamber/CVNP and Ohio &amp; Erie Canalway National Heritage Area</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>City/ED Budget; CVNP and O&amp;E NHA funders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Identify specialty food companies, caterers, and entrepreneurs who may have an interest in locating in Independence.</td>
<td>4/16</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Initiate discussions with private fitness centers in Independence regarding possibilities for expansion and relocation to a redeveloped mixed-use Rockside Road business district. Concurrently, contact regional or national health club chains to gauge interest in Independence as a location.</td>
<td>5/16</td>
<td>ED/private fitness centers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE</td>
<td>COST</td>
<td>FUNDING</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Engage with Council and the City’s Recreation Department to explore allowing limited access for Independence workers to the City’s Recreation Facilities, at least on an interim basis until integration of a health club facility in a redeveloped Rockside Road business district.</td>
<td>8/16</td>
<td>ED/Recreation</td>
<td>0 (Access would generate fee income to City)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Long-term Strategies:</strong> Once market analyses and sub-area plans are in place for the Rockside Road corridor and Downtown Independence, focus on implementation of revisions to the zoning code, incentive packages specific to redevelopment, and investment mechanism to leverage redevelopment.</td>
<td>2016+</td>
<td>ED/Council/Planning</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Implement incentive package associated with the Rockside Road CRA, also to help leverage redevelopment.</td>
<td>2016+</td>
<td>ED/Council</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Continue to work with existing businesses to ensure support for retention and expansion, and match expansion opportunities with existing underutilized building resources.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Specific to site</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE</td>
<td>COST</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work through the investment mechanism to encourage redevelopment of the Middle School site for mixed-use; also encourage development and integration of housing into the Downtown area.</td>
<td>2016+</td>
<td>ED/CIC</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>CIC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Metrics & Targets

The following performance metrics are recommended to measure progress and success of City of Independence Economic Development Strategic Plan initiatives. Targets, in terms of dates, accomplishments, and/or amounts are also recommended in relation to several of the suggested performance metrics.

- Reduced Vacancy in Rockside Road Corridor office buildings - Target 15% by end of 2015, 12% by end of 2018.
- Number of new companies within target industries attracted to Independence per year.
- Number of expansions within target industries in Independence per year.
- New employment in target industries per year, in terms of expansions and relocations to Independence.
- Change in average wages by employee cohort and industry sector among target industries in Independence per year.
- Incubator established, operating by end of 2017
- Downtown housing and mixed-use re-development project underway by 2020.
- Sub-area plans completed by 2017 as basis for incentive districts in Downtown Independence and Rockside Road Corridor
- Downtown vacancy reduced to 10% by 2018.
- Amount spent on reinvestment in Rockside Road
- Tech Council established by 2016.
- Tourism Plan completed by 2016.
- Small business incentive package implemented by 2016.
- CRA incentive package implemented by 2018.
PART II: Background Report – Research & Analysis

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
For the City of Independence, Ohio

City of Independence

November 1, 2013
Randall Gross / Development Economics (RGDE)
American Communities Partnership (ACP)
INTRODUCTION

Part II of the Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) provides a summary of research, analysis, and other background information used to prepare strategic recommendations for the economic development of Independence, Ohio. This Background Report includes an assessment of the region’s and City’s economic base, identification of Independence’s competitive advantages, potentials and target industries for recruitment, retention, and marketing.

This report is divided into five sections. Section 1 includes findings from an Economic Overview for the region and the Independence area. In Section 2, real estate market conditions are discussed in relation to the city’s overall economic development. Section 3 provides a summary of the City’s overall fiscal conditions and Section 4 summarizes output from the stakeholder engagement process. Finally, Section 5 provides findings from an Opportunities Assessment including target industries recommended for the City.
Section 1. ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

This section provides a summary of regional and local economic trends as context for developing strategies for the future economic development of Independence. Input to this Economic Overview included a review of existing documentation, analysis of the local and regional economic base, and a review of existing resources and structures for economic development. The economic base analysis included an assessment of existing industries, output and employment. More detailed information on real estate, fiscal base, and other factors is discussed later in this report.

Economic Development Structure

Local and regional economic development partners and programs were reviewed. Independence has a local economic development director and an assistant who are housed in the Mayor’s Office but serve the community as a whole. A Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce serves the needs of businesses in Independence along with several other communities including Brooklyn Heights, Cuyahoga Heights, Seven Hills, Valley View, and Walton Hills. The resources of this chamber are spread relatively thin and the organization lacks the mandate to focus solely on business development within Independence alone. As such, there is a need for restructuring the chamber or establishing a division focused on the marketing and existing business needs of Independence. Independence also lacks a tourism development or convention and visitors bureau (CVB) focused on the tourism and meeting markets in the city. Regionally, the State of Ohio’s Team NEO helps direct investment to sites and communities within the state, and has a focus on the 18-county Cleveland Plus region which includes Independence.

Regional Economic Base

Independence is part of the Cleveland Metropolitan Area, a major economic hub in the Midwest made famous as a center for manufacturing in America’s Steel Belt. Cleveland’s economy began a long period of expansion starting in the 19th century with the opening of the Ohio and Erie Canal. Over time, Cleveland and surrounding northeast Ohio became home to a large manufacturing industry and a number of corporate headquarters ranging
from Eaton and American Greetings to the Sherwin-Williams Company. Cleveland has more recently become an important health care center, anchored by major employers including the world-famous Cleveland Clinic along with University Hospitals, MetroHealth, and Case Western Reserve University. The region has also being marketed for high-tech industry, strengthened through a well-developed high-speed digital network.

Today Greater Cleveland has a somewhat diversified economy, although the region still has a relatively large manufacturing sector, accounting for nearly one in five jobs in the region.

Chart 1

Health care accounts for 20% of the region’s jobs, the highest share of any industry and a major economic driver in the regional economy. Retail trade accounts for 12% and accommodation services 8% of the region’s jobs. Otherwise, there are few industries that dominate.

Regional Employment Trends

Regional, county and local employment trends were examined by major industry sector and key sub-sectors. The Cleveland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) had a total employment base of about 890,000 in 2011, down by almost 150,000 or 14.4% from 1998. Nearly all of the Cleveland MSA’s economic sectors saw a decrease in employment over the 13-year period, with the exception of health, education, and management services. The greatest decrease was in manufacturing, which lost more than 85,100 jobs or 42% during
this period. The manufacturing sector has been buffeted nationally by a combination of recession, foreign competition (especially China), and mechanization. The latter includes the integration of robotics and other emerging technologies resulting in reduced demand for human labor. These impacts have been exacerbated in the Cleveland area because of the region’s high concentration of high-paying union wage jobs. The decline of manufacturing as a major employment driver has had a devastating impact on Cleveland, where manufacturing was the lifeblood of the regional economy.

Table 1

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>(200)</td>
<td>-53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>(1,183)</td>
<td>-67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>(3,750)</td>
<td>-50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>44,787</td>
<td>37,600</td>
<td>28,215</td>
<td>(16,572)</td>
<td>-37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>202,515</td>
<td>143,044</td>
<td>117,379</td>
<td>(85,136)</td>
<td>-42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>64,965</td>
<td>54,668</td>
<td>47,681</td>
<td>(17,284)</td>
<td>-26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>124,347</td>
<td>107,125</td>
<td>98,325</td>
<td>(26,022)</td>
<td>-20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>25,001</td>
<td>27,401</td>
<td>22,965</td>
<td>(2,036)</td>
<td>-8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>22,942</td>
<td>19,854</td>
<td>16,819</td>
<td>(6,123)</td>
<td>-26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>60,841</td>
<td>59,421</td>
<td>52,689</td>
<td>(8,152)</td>
<td>-13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate</td>
<td>16,685</td>
<td>16,769</td>
<td>15,893</td>
<td>(792)</td>
<td>-4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof/Tech services</td>
<td>54,209</td>
<td>56,655</td>
<td>52,199</td>
<td>(2,010)</td>
<td>-3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>37,500</td>
<td>42,126</td>
<td>38,332</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>69,390</td>
<td>62,707</td>
<td>58,868</td>
<td>(10,522)</td>
<td>-15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>21,814</td>
<td>30,111</td>
<td>35,129</td>
<td>13,315</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>143,360</td>
<td>163,340</td>
<td>173,734</td>
<td>30,374</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/Enter/Rec</td>
<td>13,657</td>
<td>12,899</td>
<td>12,490</td>
<td>(1,167)</td>
<td>-8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>78,633</td>
<td>80,685</td>
<td>75,047</td>
<td>(3,586)</td>
<td>-4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>49,541</td>
<td>44,951</td>
<td>39,908</td>
<td>(9,633)</td>
<td>-19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,039,810</td>
<td>964,016</td>
<td>890,164</td>
<td>(149,646)</td>
<td>-14.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Retail and wholesale trade, administrative services, and construction have seen a dramatic decrease in employment. The highest rate of decrease was in mining, forestry and utilities, followed by manufacturing, construction, information services, finance, and administrative services. By contrast, health care employment increased by 21.2% and education by 61.0% since 1998. Together, education and health care added about 43,700 jobs to the Greater Cleveland area. Many of these jobs are in private, non-profit organizations. Education and health care have become important economic drivers in many cities nationwide with the collapse of manufacturing and the slowing of economic growth in other sectors. The relative importance of education and health care is captured again in the following chart.

The period from 1998 through 2011 has seen the steep decline of manufacturing and the rise of health care (along with education) as the region’s major employer. A decrease in retail employment is tied to the region’s stagnating demographics, a “downstream” impact from falling manufacturing employment. The stagnant household base has also impacted the construction industry, which is cyclical in nature but is generally dependent on an increase in employment and the number of households to spur housing demand.
Regional GDP Growth

Despite declining employment, the Greater Cleveland gross domestic product (GDP, or output) remains relatively stable and increased slightly between 2008 and 2011. In 2011, GDP was $134.4 billion, an increase of 2.8% or 0.93% per year from 2008. The slight growth in output, during a period of declining employment, is not surprising as manufacturing companies have invested in capital and increased productivity thereby reducing the need for labor. In fiscal terms, increased capitalization can hurt local municipalities that are dependent on income tax revenues generated by manufacturing employees. Thus, growth in output does not necessarily equate with job growth or positive fiscal returns for municipalities in Ohio, especially where governments no longer benefit from revenue from tangible personal property taxes generated by capital investments (phased out through Ohio tax reform).

Independence Area Economic Base

The Independence Area economic base was analyzed to assess the composition of the local economy and key trends relating to the City’s economic growth and development. Two analyses were conducted, the first relating to the broader area encompassed by Zip Code 44131, for which detailed data and information is available on a trends basis. A second analysis focuses on the economic base within the City of Independence, for which less specific trend data is available.

Zip Code 44131

The area encompassed by Zip Code 44131, which includes Independence and parts of Brooklyn Heights and Seven Hills, is characterized as having a major transportation interchange with Interstates 77 and 480. This location and regional access has helped establish the area (particularly Independence) as a major business hub for Northeast Ohio. The economic base within this area is dominated by administrative support
services (20% of all jobs) and professional, scientific, and technical services (12%). Finance & insurance (11%), wholesale trade (9%), manufacturing (8%), and health care (7%) are also important industries in this area, in terms of total employment.

The area does not have significant employment in retail trade (2%), despite the excellent exposure and transportation access afforded by the interstates in this area. Surprisingly, transportation services (2%) also play a minor role in the local economy. The area also lacks major educational institution employment (2%), although there appears to be a number of small commercial colleges locating in the Rockside Road corridor. Perhaps most limited are jobs in arts, entertainment, and recreation, since the area lacks large commercial cinemas, or significant numbers of private non-profit arts organizations and venues.

**Chart 3**

**Independence Area Economic Base, 2007**

**Employment Trends by Industry.** Overall, employment has fallen in the Independence area since 1998, although not at the rate that it has in the region as a whole. At-place employment stood at about 30,100 in 2011, down by about 1,100 or 3.4% from 1998. Again, the regional economy has lost 150,000 jobs or 14.4% of its employment base over this same period. This suggests first, that the Independence area is less dependent on rapidly-declining sectors like manufacturing that became a drag on the regional economy during this period. And second, this suggests that Independence remains relatively competitive for
jobs within the region. The City’s position vis-à-vis other areas has improved marginally, from having 3.0% of the region’s employment base in 1998 to having 3.1% in 2011, despite a fall in Independence-area employment.

Independence-area manufacturing employment fell by almost 1,500 jobs or nearly two-thirds between 1998 and 2011. There was an even larger decrease in the number of wholesale jobs, nearly 1,700 or 37.9% less than in 1998. The area also lost jobs in construction, retail, transportation, finance & insurance, professional & technical services, management services (e.g., corporate headquarters) and services not elsewhere classified. Some of the losses in finance, insurance, professional services, and other industries were most likely recession-related.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1,758</td>
<td>1,218</td>
<td>(540)</td>
<td>-30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>2,277</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>(1,471)</td>
<td>-64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>4,417</td>
<td>2,741</td>
<td>(1,676)</td>
<td>-37.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>(375)</td>
<td>-31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>(90)</td>
<td>-26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>1,352</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance &amp; Insurance</td>
<td>3,336</td>
<td>3,181</td>
<td>(155)</td>
<td>-4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof/Tech Services</td>
<td>4,927</td>
<td>4,207</td>
<td>(720)</td>
<td>-14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Support</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>1,245</td>
<td>(33)</td>
<td>-2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin Services</td>
<td>4,546</td>
<td>6,252</td>
<td>1,707</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>197.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>1,376</td>
<td>3,177</td>
<td>1,802</td>
<td>131.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Entertain</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>2,219</td>
<td>2,378</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>(294)</td>
<td>-30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>31,205</td>
<td>30,132</td>
<td>(1,073)</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, the Independence area gained employment in several industries, including health care (1,800 jobs or 131%), administrative services (1,700 jobs or about 38%), education (440 jobs or 197%), accommodation services (160 jobs or 7%), and information services (100 jobs or 7%). Administration services, an industry which was already important to the Independence area, strengthened its position through the addition of 1,700 jobs. Strong growth in health care and education mirrored that of the region as a whole. While there has been some nominal growth, the area still has only a handful of people employed in arts, entertainment, and recreation services.

As noted previously, the Independence area marginally increased its share of the region’s employment base. The Independence area’s role in the region shifted among different sectors. In administrative services, Independence increased its share from 6.6% to 10.6%, a dramatic increase in the City’s overall share of the region’s employment in this sector. Similarly, Independence had a rapidly-growing share of the region’s information services (IS/IT) employment, which increased from 5.9% in 1998 to 8.6% by 2011. The Independence area’s share of employment in education and health care also increase significantly.

Chart 4

On the other hand, Independence’s share of employment in several sectors fell over the 13-year period. A decrease occurred in wholesale trade.
(5.7% in 2011 versus 6.8% in 1998), as well as in manufacturing retail, transportation and other services not elsewhere classified.

City of Independence

Additional analysis of economic trends within the jurisdiction of the City of Independence was also completed, using available data and information from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). This information suggests that the City had a total employment base of 17,993 in 2011, up by 1,463 (8.9%) from 2007. Thus, at least during the four-year period from 2007 leading up to the recession by 2011, it would appear that the City saw substantive economic growth. It should be noted that the establishment base used by the BEA may not equate directly with data collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census at the county and zip code level (as described above for the Independence area). In addition, the BEA data cover a somewhat different period, 2002 to 2007.

Daytime Population. Independence is a small city, with a resident population of only 7,133 (estimated 2011), up slightly from 7,109 in 2007. Based on the BEA employment data, the City of Independence had a jobs-to-residents ratio of 252% and an estimated daytime population of 20,871. These numbers confirm the substantial success that Independence has had in attracting a large employment base over time.

Industry Trends. These data suggest that, between 2002 and 2007, the City of Independence saw an increase in administrative services employment of 2,100 (60%) to a total of 5,500. Thus, the rapid growth in this sector is again confirmed. In health care, the City added 920 jobs or 112% to a total 1,740 in 2007. Real estate and professional & technical services employment also increased between 2002 and 2007, prior to the recession. However, the BEA data suggest that information services, accommodation, and retail & wholesale trade employment fell during this five-year period.

Number of Businesses. The City of Independence was recorded as having a total of 752 businesses, with 673 registered as having a local address by the Census Bureau. These businesses are disaggregated by sector as follows:

- Professional/Tech Services 181
- Administrative Support 109
- Information Services 73
- Accommodation & Foodservice 70
- Health Care 62
- Wholesale Trade 50
- Real Estate 38
- Other Services 34
- Retail Trade 29
Manufacturing 16
Educational Services 9
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation 2

The largest number of businesses (nearly 200) was in professional, scientific and technical services, followed by nearly 110 businesses in administrative support. Information services has the third largest number, with nearly 75, and accommodation and foodservice at 70. The smallest number of business establishments is in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector.

Major Employers (2011). There are a number of large employers in Independence. However, one in particular, the Cleveland Clinic, dominates with nearly 2,140 employees or 11.9% of total employment in the City of Independence. Independence organizations with 100 or more employees are listed below (based on the most recent accurate employee counts provided, 2011). Please note the employee counts listed below are based on W-2s issued, which includes seasonal and part-time employees. The City of Independence had 221 full-time employees in 2011.

- Cleveland Clinic Foundation 2,136 (11.9%)
- City of Independence 473 (2.6%)
- L.D. Kichler Co 416 (2.3%)
- Farmers Group, Inc. 300 (1.7%)
- Travelers Indemnity Co 258 (1.4%)
- ADP Incorporated 233 (1.3%)
- Cellco Partnership 194 (1.1%)
- Ferro Corporation 185 (1.0%)
- Honeywell International 146 (0.8%)
- Nidec (Avtron Aerospace Inc.) 100 (0.6%)
  ◦ Total 4,441 (24.7%)
  ◦ Total employment in City (2011) 17,993

These ten large employers account for about 4,440 jobs or nearly one-quarter of all employment in the City of Independence. Most of these are private employers, with the exception of the City of Independence. The largest private employer outside of the Cleveland Clinic is Kichler, a lighting manufacturer headquartered in Independence.

Summary

Independence is located within the Greater Cleveland area in northeastern Ohio, one of the largest and most dynamic economies in the country. While Cleveland’s economy was built by heavy industry, manufacturing as an employer is waning due to competition and technologies that are reducing the demand for labor. Luckily, Independence is not so dependent on manufacturing and the City’s role as an administrative hub has only strengthened in recent years.
Independence has a large employment base that represents 252% of its resident base, and a daytime population of nearly 21,000. These numbers are testament to the City’s success in building a major employment hub over time.

Nevertheless, the City has lost employment and market share in some sectors and there is a concern that stagnant growth at the regional level can only translate into slow growth among Independence companies that service the region’s business base.
Section 2. REAL ESTATE CONDITIONS

This section summarizes an analysis of existing real estate assets, inventory and market conditions. A key focus of this analysis is on the Rockside Road Corridor and its associated office space, as well as on industrial and commercial nodes within the City of Independence. A land use and building inventory was completed for the City’s office, industrial and retail/commercial buildings. Interviews were conducted with real estate and development professionals in the local and regional market. Data was collected from brokers and other real estate professionals on real estate market conditions and trends. Indicative “high-level” market assessments were conducted for downtown Independence and the baseline market requirements identified by type of use.

Independence has several business areas, including the *Rockside Road* corridor (east and west from I-77), where most of the City’s office parks and commercial development is concentrated. **Downtown Independence** is located along Brecksville Road near Chestnut Road, although the City’s offices and major safety functions and Community/ Civic center are located further south off of Selig Boulevard. **East Pleasant Valley Road** (further south) has a mix of industry and office use, while the **Cloverleaf** area (north of I-480) has a heavier mix of industrial and construction supply operations.
Independence Office Market

By virtue of its location and excellent accessibility to the regional interstate system, Independence has over time developed the region’s major suburban office node. This regional sub-market comprises a total office inventory of more than 4.0 million square feet, constituting about 5.0% of the regional Northeast Ohio market including Cleveland and Akron. Most of this space is concentrated in the Rockside Road Corridor. Full-service rents average about $20 per square foot, which are among the highest in the metropolitan region. There is a large amount of available space, estimated at about 20%, including direct vacancy of at least 13%. Absorption averaged a respectable 79,000 square feet in the Independence sub-market in 2012.¹

Vacancy Trends

As noted above, total office vacancy in Independence is close to 20%, which is an unacceptably high vacancy rate. Between 2005 and 2013, the local vacancy rate gradually increased over time from about 21% in 3rd quarter 2005 to a peak of nearly 27% in 3rd quarter 2011. However, since that time, occupancy has improved fairly consistently to the current 19/20% figure. In general, vacancy has stayed within a range of 20 to 25% for seven years.

Chart 5

¹ Based on data generated through CoStar.
Rents

Office rentals average about $19.80 per square foot, full service in Independence. This compares with an average of $17.65 within Cuyahoga County. Rents in Independence have consistently generated a premium over other rates in the county and the region as a whole. Rents in Independence (as well as the county) have fallen over time from $23.10 in 2000 to $19.80 in early 2013. While rents seemed to pick up starting in 2007, they have remained fairly stagnant in recent years. After accounting for inflation, rents have generally fallen in Independence and throughout the region as a whole.

Chart 6

Office Product Requirements

Office buildings in Independence were built over 31 years ago, on average, and were designed to fit the traditional suburban office park model appropriate for that time. However, the standards for building design and environment for office space have evolved since these buildings were constructed there is a need for updated product to remain competitive for
attracting the types of office tenants that form the core of Independence’s economic base today.

**Building Formats.** When the existing office stock was constructed over 30 years ago, buildings were designed with smaller floor plates and traditional layouts, with individual rooms for each office user. Today, many office tenants, especially administrative service uses like those that have traditionally been attracted to Independence, require larger floor plates, open space formats, and high energy efficiency. According to the Urban Land Institute (ULI), more Class A office tenants “will pay premiums for efficient design layouts and lower long-term operating costs in ‘green’ buildings.”

In other words, cost containment has become more important and building design helps reduce energy leakage and improve operating efficiencies.

**Site Requirements.** When much of Independence’s office environment was established, the traditional single-use office park format was still popular as an attractive location for Class A office tenants. Today, there is more demand for integrated amenities, “walkability” (with restaurants, services and housing easily accessible by foot), and mixed-use environments. Again, according to the Urban Land Institute (ULI), “separating land uses from each other…will lose traction to more compact development with mixed-use, urban concepts. Many suburban parcels stand ready for makeover, (such as) that low-density business park.”

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Existing Conditions | Emerging Models

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**Independence Industrial Market**

The Independence industrial market is relatively stable, with only limited new construction in recent years. The Independence sub-market has a total inventory of about 2.8 million square feet, with relatively healthy vacancy of about...
6.2%. Rents are averaging $4.95 per square foot. Key industrial uses include L.D. Kichler (416 jobs) and NIDEC (Avtron Aerostructures Inc., 100).

Net absorption in 2012 was negative -14,772 square feet, consistent with regional trends and an overall reduction in demand for industrial space due to the lingering effects of recession and the decline of manufacturing in northeast Ohio. As with office space, Independence has an aging stock of industrial buildings. The average age of Independence’s industrial buildings is now 47 years. Industrial space requirements shifted during the late 1990s and early 2000s towards more high-volume distribution and stacking to meet the demand for distribution of foreign imports. However, demand for “cube” space (measured in terms of overall volume instead of square feet) has cooled with recession and now demand has settled back with 30,000 square foot light manufacturing and flexible spaces that can accommodate office/warehouse use. Much of Independence’s “industrial” space is now used for a mix of office/warehouse, administration, and R&D activities. There are only a handful of pure manufacturing facilities located in Independence. Much of the City’s industrial use is concentrated in the East Pleasant Valley and Cloverleaf areas.

Independence Retail Market

The City of Independence has effectively avoided becoming a regional shopping node or center for “big box” retail, despite its attractive location with exposure from the intersection of two major regional commuter highways, I-77 and I-480. Independence does have retail/commercial use concentrated along Rockside Road. There are convenience uses and restaurants located near the interchange and office parks. Small-scale retail is concentrated in the traditional downtown area of Independence on Brecksville Road at Elmwood Avenue. While local government offices and the community civic center are located just outside of downtown on Selig Drive, the downtown retains some of the density and charm of a traditional downtown core.

Overall Market Conditions

Independence has a total inventory of 451,400 square feet of retail/commercial space. Rents are averaging $17.68 and net absorption in 2012 was a positive 8,930 square feet. The overall retail market is very healthy, with vacancy of only about 4.8%, lower than the standard for shopping center operations requiring a maximum of 5.0% vacancy to accommodate the natural changeover of tenants.
Downtown

Of this amount, an estimated 110,000 square feet is located within the downtown core along Brecksville Road. Vacancy within the downtown area is somewhat higher, however, and much of the downtown vacancy is concentrated at the back end of strip shopping centers that lack exposure to traffic along Brecksville Road. Even so, at least 40% of downtown’s ground-floor retail spaces accommodate office/service use, rather than retail stores. Such use reduces the overall retail traffic and creates “dead” zones within the shopping district. There is very little pedestrian activity within downtown, despite its relative density and good pedestrian access compared to other parts of the city.

Dependency on Office Workers

There are about 2,725 households in Independence. With a median household income of $71,450, these households yield total retail expenditures of about $77.9 million per year, assuming 40% of income is spent for retail goods and services. As such, Independence households generate indicative demand for about 103,000 square feet of retail space excluding demand that constitutes “leakage” to other parts of the Cleveland Metropolitan Area. However, there is in excess of 400,000 square feet of retail space in Independence, suggesting that residents only generate about 24% of the total market demand for retail within Independence.

People employed by businesses in Independence, along with pass-through commuter traffic generate at least 76% of the market for Independence’s retail businesses. This suggests that Independence’s retail business base is very dependent on the local office market and office workers to help support the availability of retail goods and services in the City. If the City becomes less competitive for office tenants, then retail businesses will also suffer. Further, because of the small household market base and competition from major retail nodes, downtown Independence can only survive, grow and prosper by capturing demand from other sources like office workers or destination shoppers traveling from other communities in the region.
Key Sites

The City of Independence is largely built-out, with few major sites available for Greenfield development. That being said, there is the “northwest quadrant” site located northwest of the intersection of I-77 and Rockside Road. This large, mainly undeveloped parcel lacks direct exposure and visibility from Rockside Road due to the construction of restaurants along the Rockside frontage. One office building has been constructed on site. Lombardo Center Road forms the western boundary of the site and is also the City Limit with Seven Hills, to the west. Opportunities for development of this site can be extensive, but there is a need to narrow down the possibilities and focus on the site’s highest and best uses.
Section 3. FISCAL HEALTH

There is a strong relationship between economic development and fiscal health. Independence has long-benefitted from its large and prosperous business base. The various office tenants within Independence employ thousands of high-wage workers, who in turn pay income taxes to the City of Independence. Further, the various Class A office buildings and high-quality industrial uses generate substantial property taxes, permits, fees and other revenues to the City. Thus, the business base is a major generator of the City’s revenue stream, which helps pay for services provided to the residents of the City of Independence.

Revenue Sources

The City of Independence generates two-thirds of its revenue from income taxes. Most of this tax revenue is provided through payroll taxes on the 20,000+ people who work, but do not necessarily live, in Independence.

Chart 7

In 2011, the last year for which actual fiscal numbers were available when this analysis was started, estate taxes generated about 14% of the City’s
revenue, the second-largest source of income. However, the estate tax has been eliminated as a revenue source for Ohio municipalities, so the City has become even more dependent on income taxes to support the delivery of City services. Meanwhile, property tax only generates 3% of the city's revenue stream, a relatively small amount. Hotel/motel taxes generate about the same share. Finally, Independence gains revenue from inter-governmental transfers, fines & forfeitures, licenses, permits, fees and other minor sources that together account for 14% of the revenue stream.

Property Taxes

The City of Independence has no voted millage and only imposes the statutory minimum, which is one of the reasons that property taxes generate a relatively small portion of the City's overall budget. The City's tax (2.60) is only 4.5% of the total property tax bill, which includes the schools and county taxes. Independence also imposes no fire, police, street or other operating levies unlike other communities that depend on these levies to help sustain operations.

Chart 8

Assessed Values. Residential values in Independence peaked in 2003 but have remained relatively stable at around $250,000,000 since 2007. Commercial and industrial assessed values have, however peaked in 2005 and have generally fallen since, with consistent decreases each year since 2008. Declining commercial property values for office space does not bode well in terms of the competitiveness of the City's office space in the future.
Income Tax

As noted previously, Independence gained more than two thirds of its 2011 revenue (more now, with the elimination of the estate tax) from local income taxes.

Competitive Tax Rate Comparison

Independence tax rates were compared with those in several comparable and competitive cities, based on data produced by the City of Independence. The income tax rate is comparable to the average among area communities, at 2.0%. However, the City’s property tax rate is comparatively low, at less than 60.00 (total including county and schools).

Cities with relatively high tax rates include Broadview Heights, Brecksville, and Seven Hills.

Role of Businesses in Support of City Services

As noted previously, the City of Independence has chartered a successful course of attracting a major employment node, which in turn has generated substantial income and other tax revenue in support of City services. Given the relatively small resident population of Independence, the City is therefore
dependent on the income taxes generated by its businesses and workers to supply services to the city as a whole. Below is a calculation of how reliant the City is on the business base.

- Income tax: 96.2% \( \times \) $23,133,248
- Property tax: 46.7% \( \times \) $540,186
- Hotel/Motel tax: 100.0% \( \times \) $1,072,995
- Amusement tax: 100.0% \( \times \) $8,268
- Permits & Fees: 90.7% \( \times \) $282,785
- Charges for Service: 10.0% \( \times \) $27,575

**Business Share:** 96.1% \( \times \) $25,065,057

* Excludes residents who also work in Independence.
** Excludes licenses
*** Estimated share. Another 40% estimated as resident-driven; 50% as non-resident (Fld Hs)

Revenues generated by businesses and their employees including income and property taxes, hotel/motel taxes, amusement taxes, permits & fees, and charges for service accounted for more than 96% of the City’s total revenue stream in 2011. Again, since there is no longer income from estate taxes, the share generated by business is even higher today. The total excludes intergovernmental transfers, investment, income, fines & forfeitures (mostly non-resident), rentals, special assessments, PILOT, and miscellaneous.

**Example of Business Impact on Resident Services**

The impact of business on resident services was calculated as a case study to illustrate the importance of businesses and their employees to the City’s overall fiscal health.

- Total income tax: $24,050,310
- Employees: 17,993
- Tax/employee: $1,337

If office occupancy falls another 10%:
- More available: 408,278 sq. ft.
- Less employees: 1,815
- Loss in income taxes: $2,426,078

Cost of providing resident services:
- Cost of Fire service: $2,860,603 (85%)
- Leisure Facilities: $2,794,259 (87%)(Community/ Civic Center, pool, parks, field house)

This case study shows that if the office vacancy rate increases (and occupancy falls) by another 10% in Independence, then there would be nearly 410,000 additional square feet of office space available, and 1,800 less employees occupying space. This would result in a loss in income tax revenue of
about $2,430,000. At the same time, the cost of providing fire service citywide is $2,860,000. So, the loss of income tax revenue due to an increase in office space vacancy would result in a loss equivalent to 85% of the City’s fire service budget. Similarly, such a decrease in office occupancy would also result in a loss equivalent to roughly 87% of the City’s budget for the Community/ Civic Center and other leisure facilities. Thus, the City would have to make hard choices about cuts in services if the business base declines and office vacancy increases even by just 10%.
Section 4. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Extensive stakeholder engagement fed into the process of developing the Economic Development Strategic Plan for Independence. This process engaged with residents, businesses, workers, City Government, and other stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with major employers in the City and the region, and with a sample of small businesses. Focus groups were conducted with Independence businesses in various sectors to discuss key issues and opportunities impacting in each of those respective sectors. In addition, a survey was conducted of businesses throughout Independence to collect input to a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and to strategies developed for the City.

Residents of Independence also participated through two community meetings during which initial findings were presented and opportunities developed through small-group roundtable discussions. The public was also informed regularly of the process through the City’s newsletter and web site. A steering committee comprised of local business, residents, and public officials helped monitor the process through a series of meetings over seven months. Finally, the City’s public leadership participated through meetings drawing the Mayor and members of Council. Key findings from the community and business input are summarized below, while more detailed reports from each meeting are included as Appendix documents.

Business Focus Group Stakeholder Input

As noted above, business and employee input was gathered through interviews, roundtable focus group meetings, public meetings, and a survey. The following summarizes key findings from focus group meetings and interviews held with businesses in nine economic sectors: administrative services; finance, insurance and real estate; professional, scientific and technical services; manufacturing; wholesale & retail trade; construction; health care; accommodation & foodservice; and information services & logistics. The findings from these meetings relate to existing business conditions, employment, real estate, transportation and infrastructure, business operating costs, downtown and amenities, schools and other factors affecting the community’s economic development. Findings from the business survey are presented separately.

General Business Mix and Market Base

A large share of Independence businesses provide a service to other businesses, such as through administrative services, professional and technical services, management services, and other activities. Many services are provided explicitly as administration services marketed and sold to business, such as
through consultants. However, many companies operate internal (implicit) administrative functions in-house in Independence.

The market base for many Independence companies is not focused on northeast Ohio. Many have national and international markets, but located in Independence because of the location (if already situated in Cleveland). Often, there is no reason for the companies to be located in the Cleveland area other than a history of being there or to retain senior/technology staff. Further, many are divisions of national companies with offices making location decisions situated elsewhere. As a result, many of Independence's business enterprises are “footloose,” with the potential to relocate elsewhere in the country due to corporate decisions, consolidation, efficiencies, or to better serve markets concentrated elsewhere in the country. The footloose nature of many of these firms is cause for concern, because it is in Independence’s interest to retain as many of these high-paying jobs as possible.

Reason for Locating in Independence

Many of the companies in Independence located there because of the City’s excellent transportation access, which maximizes access to the regional labor force. This accessibility is a major driver for Independence’s economy. Independence was also perceived as the “prime” location for business during the 1970s through 1990s and today, so businesses chose to locate there because of the City’s reputation and image among businesses. Meetings with businesses seem to indicate that many Independence businesses are growing, but downtown businesses are struggling, in terms of accessing a market. Businesses identified a need for the City to be pro-active in business retention and recruitment. Business representatives also indicated that what happened in Independence has implications at the regional level, since Independence is such an important business location.

Independence as a Business Location

Business representatives provided input to a broader assessment of Independence’s strengths and weaknesses as a business location.

Strengths. Among the city’s perceived strengths were its accessibility and central location, in terms of accessing the labor force, as well as the client base (in downtown Cleveland and elsewhere), Hopkins and Akron Airports, and meetings. Other strengths include the availability of free parking (versus paid parking in downtown Cleveland), hotels and restaurants in the Rockside Road area, the relatively low tax rate, and the high level of service and leadership provided by the City of Independence.

Weaknesses. Most important among the perceived weaknesses for Independence as a business location is traffic congestion at the I-77/480
interchange. While it was recognized that improvements have been made, many business representatives still shared a concern about traffic and its impact on the quality of the business environment. The traffic issues also relate to a perceived weakness in terms of the lack of “walk-ability” within Independence, especially in the Rockside Road Corridor, where it is difficult to cross the road and to access amenities such as restaurants by walking from office buildings. There are few on-site amenities within the office areas, requiring many workers to drive to restaurants for lunch or to conduct errands, thus adding to the traffic congestion issues within the area. Some business representatives noted a lack of engagement in terms of relationships between businesses, networking, or resident-business relations. They did, however, appreciate the City’s efforts in reaching out to business as part of this economic development strategic planning effort.

Other issues noted by business representatives include the lack of available housing for both executives as well as workers in local businesses, as well as perceptions of a declining downtown Independence. Some business representatives noted that when they look at a new business location, the first question their CEO asks of a community is “can you show me downtown?” because the health of the downtown is indicative of the overall business environment and the engagement of the community in the City’s own economic health.

The Independence “Brand”

Information was elicited from businesses to identify what they consider to be the Independence “brand,” or the key strengths of the community as a business location. The following words were generated from the interviews and business focus groups.

◦ Nice, Clean, Safe, Comfortable
◦ Convenient, Central, Accessible Location
  • “Heart of Cuyahoga County”
  • “Heartland of Midwest”
◦ Well-Kept, Tidy, Manicured, “Sparkly”
◦ Quality, Prestigious, Business Address
◦ Friendly, Family-Oriented

Business Survey Results

A business survey was conducted of employers in key sectors in the Independence area to assess the city’s competitive advantages for various types of businesses. The survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey (Internet), with businesses notified through the City’s economic development office. Key findings from the survey are summarized below.
General Business Characteristics

There were more than 120 businesses that were represented by responses to the survey. Of these businesses, 60% were based in Independence, but 40% have their home offices elsewhere. The companies that responded to the survey had been in business an average of 12 years, but ranged from three months to 91 years in operation.

Chart 10

As illustrated above, the respondent businesses represent all of the City’s various economic sectors. However, there was substantial representation (20%) from the professional services sector. Information services (14%) and finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE-12%) were also well-represented. About 8% were in construction and 9% in the health care sector. The City’s large administrative services sector was somewhat underrepresented in the survey sample.

Employment. The businesses that responded to the survey have an average of 20 full-time employees, but there is a broad range in employment, from sole proprietorships to a business with 225 full-time workers. The median size is eight employees among the businesses that responded. About 20% of businesses are planning to increase employment in the near term, with an average of six additional hires (and 1,300 square feet of added space). Only about 10% of employees telecommute, on average, according to respondents. But, 27% of respondents expected the share of telecommuters to grow over time, thereby reducing some of the need for additional office space.
Based on the respondents’ data, the City’s businesses have a much higher share of mid-career professionals and fewer young workers than are represented in the region’s labor force (including all of the Cleveland-Akron consolidated metropolitan statistical area, or CMSA).

Chart 11

As shown above, more than 45% of Independence workers are aged 45 to 54, while only about 22% of the region’s labor force fits within this age cohort. Conversely, very few Independence workers are less than 25 years old or greater than 64 years old compared with the regional average.

Real Estate. On average, the businesses occupy about 18,300 square feet, but again there is a significant range of 150 to 234,000 square feet in business size. The median size is 4,000 square feet. Importantly, 91% of respondents are renting their business premises, meaning that only 9% own their buildings and have a long-term physical commitment to stay in Independence. This suggests again a “footloose” character to many of the businesses that are located in Independence and the need to increase property ownership among businesses has been identified as an issue.

The respondent businesses overwhelmingly (66%) occupy office space. Relatively few (8%) are housed in retail/commercial buildings, 4% in R&D space, 4% in warehouses, and 4% in medical space. Only 2% occupy pure manufacturing buildings.
Market Base. About 37% of surveyed businesses consider northeast Ohio to be their primary market. Only about 16% of the businesses consider Independence itself to be the primary market, and another 16% view the entire country as their market. Another 13% have an international base as their primary market.

Independence Competitive Advantages

A number of questions on the survey were oriented towards businesses’ identification of the City’s competitive advantages as a business location. The first of these questions relating to why the respondent’s company initially located in Independence. By far the most important reason for the businesses having located in Independence is the City’s convenience and accessibility to the labor
Accessibility was the reason shared by 56.9% of all responses, confirming the input received more informally through focus groups and interviews with Independence area businesses.

Chart 14

Much further down the list of reasons for locating in Independence were the City’s amenities and services, immediate client base, the fact that the owner lives there (or its their hometown), and the availability of a site or building. Respondents were also asked to rank the various factors important to them in selecting a location. Most important, again, were highway accessibility and a central location. These factors were followed closely by access to a nearby client base, the availability of space, potential for growth (due, for example to a growing market base), and low-cost operating conditions. While low costs were ranked high as a factor considered in location decisions, “affordability” was among the least-mentioned reasons that businesses located in independence. This suggests that the City is not perceived to be a particularly low-cost location.

Among the least important factors affecting location decisions is the immediate availability of staffing, access to young entrepreneurs, access to the airport, or being within a large cluster or agglomeration of companies within their respective sector.
The overall competitive advantages of an Independence location were identified by respondents as including (again) its central **location and highway accessibility** which constituted nearly one-half of all responses. Other advantages included its available space (10%), and growth potential (9%).
Less important advantages for Independence include access to labor (nearby), lower operating costs, affordability, high aesthetic value, and high quality of life. Overall, respondents noted that Independence offers location and access, followed by amenities, hotels, safety and good City services, as summarized below.

Chart 17

The disadvantages of an Independence location were also identified through the survey. The most significant of these disadvantages, as identified by local businesses, are the **functional obsolescence** of Independence building space, the higher real estate costs, and the lack of “walk-ability” in the city.

Chart 18
Other disadvantages include the regulatory environment and associated costs of doing business, the lack of available labor, and higher housing costs.

**Site Selection Factors**

The importance of various site-specific factors in location decisions was also measured through the survey. Among the most important site considerations for Independence businesses are safety, available parking, exposure/site accessibility, and (somewhat surprisingly), power/bandwidth. The importance of bandwidth relates to the growing base of information services and IT companies with operations in Independence, but also the large number of administrative services companies that store and analyze large amounts of data for the purposes of human resources, accounting, customer service, purchasing, or other administrative functions.

![Chart 19: Ranking of Site Specific Location Factors](image)

**Chart 19**

Also relatively important are “walk-ability” and the site’s immediate access to amenities such as restaurants or personal services within walking distance. The overall landscape, energy efficiency, and a traditional suburban environment were attractive to the existing businesses in Independence. Least important among site selection factors were access to public transit and a pastoral (rural) setting.

**Business Setting.** Respondents were asked about the business setting and their preferences, in terms of aesthetics, amenities, overall environment and other factors. As noted previously, representatives of existing business had a slight preference for the suburban office park model over a more rural context or
an urban setting, neither of which is represented by existing business space in Independence.

Respondents were asked why setting is important, and the most frequent answer was that setting relates to the availability of amenities for workers, which increases their outlook and enhances productivity. In fact, productivity was related to setting, for example, when workers must drive and travel greater distances for their lunch, errands, day care, and other retail and service needs during the work day then productivity levels can suffer. Thus, some companies see an advantage to having retail and services located within or near office uses, such as in mixed-use environments.

![Chart 20](chart_20.png)

**Key Issues to be Addressed**

Respondents were asked to describe the key issues that the City of Independence needs to address to improve the business environment and improve the overall competitiveness of Independence for attracting and retaining businesses. A plurality of responses (28%) related to the need to address traffic congestion and the timing of street lights in particular. This finding is consistent with the information gathered through business interviews and focus groups held with businesses in nine sectors of the local economy.

Another 10% identified the need to address the decline of downtown, which could contribute to a negative impression of Independence as a place to do business. Another 10% of responses related to the need to enhance the aesthetics of the community, with a focus on the business districts. Infrastructure improvements elicited another 10% of responses, focusing on solutions to infrastructure issues that appear to be important but highly localized in areas throughout the community.
Other key issues to be addressed include marketing/identity, the ability of businesses to use City recreation facilities, the need to improve “walk-ability” for workers in the business areas, the need for more business networking and collaborations, and more retail and amenities in those same business areas.

Independence is about LOCATION
The frequency of words used by respondents in describing Independence’s brand and its key competitive advantages was calculated and an image created to illustrate this frequency, shown above. “Location” is clearly the key word that appears most often when business people describe Independence and its strengths. Other important words include “central,” “access,” “services,” and “safe.”

Chart 22

As in the focus groups, the survey elicited input on the City’s brand, with key phrases identified. Particularly strong is the phrase: “Great central location with highway access.” Other key phrases include “nice safe area,” “prestigious, reputable business address,” “clean/attractive/well-maintained,” and “supportive local government.”

Community Workshops

Two community-wide workshops were held to focus on gaining resident input and feedback on the Economic Development Strategic Plan. The first workshop was held on June 6, 2013 at the Community/ Civic Center. This workshop attracted 60 participants from a broad cross-section of Independence residents. An introduction to the process and a set of preliminary findings were presented relating to the City’s overall economic conditions within the context of regional change.
Several key questions were addressed in the initial workshop. The first asked the participants to discuss “What I treasure about Independence.” The primary responses related to the City’s high-quality services, location and accessibility, and sense of safety. The second question, “What can we do in the future to ensure the continued prosperity of our community” elicited as primary responses, the following:

- Redevelop underperforming areas
- Practice fiscal responsibility
- Improve downtown Independence
- Develop better amenities
- Provide senior housing

Further information from the workshop, including detailed demographic characteristics of the participants, is included in the Appendix, ACP Memorandum dated June 19, 2013.

A second community workshop was held on August 8th at the Civic Center. This workshop focused more specifically on presentation of key findings on the opportunities for future economic development in order to solicit input on preferences for how Independence should develop. There were approximately 30 community stakeholders present for this workshop, again representing a cross-section of the City’s residents. After hearing the presentation of the key opportunities, participants used scorecards to rank the various opportunities identified in terms of their personal preferences as part of Independence’s future development.

This effort produced the highest scores for several of the City’s strong existing clusters, including administrative services (with a score of 4.7 out of 5.0) and information services (4.7). Also ranked highly were health care services (4.6), professional and technical services (4.5), tourism and accommodation services (4.4), and biotech/IT (4.3). Downtown, which is not really a sector per se but is an important opportunity, was also ranked highly (4.6) by the participants as a focus area. The lowest scores were given to regional retail trade (2.3) and transportation services (3.4).

The group was also prompted to respond to the question: “Are there any opportunities we missed, and if so, what?” To this, respondents identified health care, the use of the middle school, capitalizing on natural assets, enhancing small-scale retail, and building on current success. The group was also prompted on the question of whether they would support redevelopment of downtown if it included “walk-ability, enhanced public realm, higher-density housing, and/or more destination venues.” In response, the group recommended maintaining the character of the community while allowing for a greater diversity of uses. It was also noted that the community is lacking in the younger
professional age demographic. There was also the need identified to include business start-ups among the opportunities for downtown.

On the question of whether the City should invest in additional, separate amenities for use by the business community, there was a lack of consensus. It was agreed that a business recreation center could be a powerful business retention/attraction tool. There was also the concept that investment in recreation amenities should focus on the natural environment (such as through trails and outdoor recreation amenities that benefit both residents and workers alike). The output from this second community workshop is summarized in the Appendix, ACP Memo dated August 20, 2013. Input from the Steering Committee was also recorded at each meeting and is included in the Appendix of this report.
Section 5. OPPORTUNITIES ASSESSMENT

An opportunities assessment was conducted to define the economic development targets for marketing, recruitment and retention in Independence. Key objectives and overall guiding principles were recommended to help provide context for decisions regarding the types of businesses the City should recruit and assist, and the specific opportunity areas where business development should be directed. Strengths identified through the SWOT analysis and summarized in this section help provide a foundation for understanding the types of businesses for which Independence is most competitive.

The City’s existing business concentrations within the region were identified through a Location Quotients (LQ) analysis. LQs provide one indication of the City’s competitive advantages, since businesses tend to cluster where there is an advantage to particular locations for their type of operations. Future growth projections were used to focus on those industries for which the region and the nation are expected to see significant employment growth in the near future. Finally, competitive communities were assessed to identify niches where Independence can and should compete or capture a larger share of the regional market. All of these strands lead to recommendations provided here on industries for which the city is competitive and that could serve as targets for economic development marketing, recruitment and retention.

Objectives and Principles

A list of guiding principles was developed early on to help shape development and prioritize short-term and long-term goals for economic development. This list was vetted through the project steering committee, public officials, and the broader community to ensure that they ultimately represent the City’s economic development objectives. Guiding principles relate to the broad set of values and philosophies guiding the identification of target industries as well as overall strategies for economic development. The key principles are summarized below:

- Recruit business to diversify the employment and tax base
- Strengthen and retain existing industry
- Focus on growth industries
- Focus on high-wage jobs
- Reduce “footloose” nature of existing base
- Exploit competitive advantages
- Ensure consistency with a community vision
- Retain Independence’s high quality of life
Also as part of this opportunities assessment, possible office, industrial and retail/commercial uses were identified based on the likely need which can help ensure stability in the City’s market base.

**Competitive Advantages**

The business interviews and focus groups, site reconnaissance, business surveys, economic analyses, and stakeholder input helped to define the City’s competitive advantages as a business location. Key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) were identified through this process along with the strategic issues and guiding principles noted above.

**Summary of Key Strengths**

The key strengths identified through the SWOT assessments are listed below.

- Central Location in Northeast Ohio Region
- Access to major highway grid
- Access to two airports
- Quality city services
- Perceptions of safety & security
- Available free parking
- Supportive local government
- Modest tax rates
- Well-maintained
- Available office space
- Good reputation
- Hotels & restaurant amenities

**Role of Central Location / Highway Access**

Regional accessibility was assessed in terms of its role as a critical factor in recruitment and retention of certain industries. The industries for which a central location and regional access are key determinants in site section include the following:

- Administrative Services / “Back Office”
- Distribution and Logistics
- Regional Retail Trade / “Big Box” Retail
- Lodging
- Destination Services
- Automotive / Transportation Services
- Businesses serving Cleveland & Akron-Canton
Businesses serving Pittsburgh, Columbus/Cincinnati, Detroit, and the Chicago Region

This list is not meant to imply a recommendation for target marketing, but rather, a set of industries against which other factors are tested including consistency with the community’s overall vision for development.

Industry Clusters

As noted previously, a Location Quotients (LQ) analysis was performed to identify industry clusters by location and to assess agglomeration and competitive advantages for the City of Independence. Findings are summarized below.

Chart 23

The Location Quotient (LQ) analysis compares the share of jobs in each industry in Independence with the share of jobs in those same industries in Metro Cleveland. An LQ of “1” indicates that the City has the same share of jobs in an industry as the share of those jobs in the region. Thus, the City has no more, nor less, of a cluster of those jobs than would otherwise be expected. However, if the City has an LQ of at least 1.2, then it would indicate that the City has a cluster (or
“agglomeration”) of employment in that industry compared with the region as a whole, and that the City may have some competitive advantages that have attracted a concentration of that industry within Independence. Thus, a high LQ can be an indicator of the City’s competitive advantage as a location for that industry.

**Major Cluster: Administrative Services.** It was already known that Independence has a large number of companies and significant employment in the administrative services sector. The location quotient analysis confirmed that this sector is not only large, but Independence has 314% times the Cleveland Metro-area share of employment in this sector, with a LQ of 3.14.

Administrative services are specialized activities that support “the day-to-day operations of other organizations,” according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. These services include general management, personnel administration, clerical activities, and cleaning activities. They also include various office administration (e.g., “back office” support), facilities support, HR/employment services, business support, travel services, security services, building services, etc. In general, these services are provided to support the operations of other businesses or other divisions within the same business.

Independence also has significant concentrations in **Information Services** and **Professional, scientific and technical services.** Independence has an LQ of 2.55 for information services, meaning that the City’s share of jobs in this sector is 255% of that share in the region as a whole. Independence share of professional and technical jobs is 234% that of the region’s as a whole.

Other important industry concentrations in Independence include real estate, finance, wholesale trade, and construction. By the same token, Independence has very low LQs in retail trade, manufacturing, transportation, and arts & recreation services. It is not surprising that the City has a low concentration of retail employment because Independence has discouraged large-scale retail development through its zoning and land use policies.

**Future Growth Industries**

An assessment of growth sectors identified future growing and declining industries based on national and regional industry employment growth projections, Business Survey responses, and in-person interviews or focus groups with specific industry sectors. The industries with the largest projected employment growth in the Cleveland region, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics are healthcare (expected to create 140,000 jobs by 2020), followed by administrative support (45,000 jobs), accommodation & foodservice (35,000), education (22,000), and computers (nearly 20,000).
The fastest projected growth rates for industries in the Cleveland region will be in healthcare (23.4%), followed by mining and extraction (21.0%), computers (19.0%), personal care services (17.5%), and sciences (16.5%).
Within the City of Independence, the fastest growing industries over the past 13 years have been administrative services (60% over 13 years) and health care (112%).

**Administrative Services Growth**

Within the administrative services sector, there is some variation in the projected regional growth rates by specific industry. The fastest growth will be in computer and information technologies (19.0%), followed by business operations specialties (16.2%) and human resources & training (11.2%). However, the largest number of jobs will be created in administrative support (46,340) by 2020, followed by computers/IT (21,120).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Category</th>
<th>Job Growth</th>
<th>Rate of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources/Training</td>
<td>6,070</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Operations Specialty</td>
<td>13,280</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer/IT</td>
<td>21,120</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounds Maintenance</td>
<td>12,720</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support</td>
<td>46,340</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>99,530</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.2%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**


Business operations include those providing services through management analysts, meeting planners, market research, etc. Meanwhile, administrative support businesses provide advertising/PR, travel agencies, telemarketing, operators, account collections, payroll & procurement, database management, order fulfillment, dispatchers, credit, other administrative support services. Within the administrative support industry, growth is expected as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admin. Support Activity</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>◦ Customer Service</td>
<td>6,780</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◦ Bill Collections</td>
<td>6,330</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◦ Computer Systems Analysis</td>
<td>5,450</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◦ Bookkeeping, Auditing</td>
<td>5,020</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within the administrative support category, the fastest skill and activity growth will be in meeting and convention planning (38.4%, followed by marketing (34.4%), database administration (26.4%), cost estimating (25.5%), and computer systems analysis (21.8%). However, the largest number of jobs will be created in customer service (6,780), bill collections (6,330), and again in computer systems analysis (5,450).

Competitive Communities

An assessment was conducted of comparable and competitive communities in Northeast Ohio, providing another source of input on the competitive advantages and disadvantages of Independence for certain types of businesses. Among the competitive locations identified through the course of this work were Beachwood, Seven Hills, Valley View, Hudson/Stow, the I-271 Corridor, Westlake/Crocker Park, Solon, and Downtown Cleveland. Among the factors considered as part of this analysis were location and accessibility, cost of doing business, real estate product, corporate agglomeration, and amenity value. Differences in business costs, particularly tax rates, were discussed earlier in this report.

Traditional areas like Beachwood have retained corporate office uses in part because of the communities and executive housing stock available locally to the leadership of these companies. A weakness identified for Independence was the lack of available housing both for executives as well as for low-level and mid-career professionals. Areas like Westlake/Crocker Park and Downtown Cleveland offer substantial amenity value that is increasingly important in attracting businesses with younger, mobile workers who prefer to work in lively mixed-use areas.

Ultimately, the assessment of competitive communities found that a central location and highway accessibility is important to businesses like administrative services firms that draw from a geographically-diverse labor force and service a geographically-diverse client base. This factor makes Independence more competitive for those types of companies that draw and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Activity</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5,020</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR, Training Specialty</td>
<td>4,230</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Consultants</td>
<td>3,240</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Representatives</td>
<td>3,050</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Estimating</td>
<td>2,380</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Security</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database Administration</td>
<td>1,090</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Plan/Expedite</td>
<td>1,080</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting/Convention Planners</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
serve regionally. Otherwise, businesses tend to locate in the region based on where the executives live and where the mix of amenities best suits the age demographics and other characteristics of the specific company’s workforce.

Key Economic Opportunities

Key industries and businesses were identified for recruitment and/or development in Independence based on Independence’s competitive advantages, industry clustering analysis, real estate market considerations and other factors discussed above. The list of economic opportunities has been further narrowed based in community input and policy review.

- **Administrative Services.** Independence already has existing strengths and a large concentration in administrative services. The City can build on these existing strengths, while broadening and deepening its agglomeration of administrative services. Key target industries within this sector include the following:
  - Administrative Support Services
  - Human Resources & Training Services
  - Business Operations
    - Meeting Planners
    - Market Research
    - Management Analysis

- **Information Services.** Independence has a strong cluster in information services and technologies. Like administrative services, there are opportunities to broaden and deepen the existing business base in IS/IT, and to potentially tie this sector more closely with Cleveland’s institutions and biotech business development initiatives.
  - Information Security
  - Logistics

- **Tourism & Accommodation Services.** The City’s lodging facilities remain strong, although any future opportunities should focus on diversification perhaps to include smaller inns and choices for downtown Cleveland visitors. Because of Independence’s central location and excellent access, there are unmet opportunities to capture a larger share of the regional meeting, events and conferencing activity. Also, there are opportunities to spin-off more tourism economic activity from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.
  - Lodging
  - Meeting, Events, & Conferencing
  - Restaurants
Food Industries. Among the few growing manufacturing industries is food production. Because of its central location, Independence is well-situated as a location for food process, catering and distribution on northeast Ohio and the Greater Cleveland area.

- Processing
- Catering/Regional Distribution

Oil & Gas / Extraction Industries Oil and gas extraction is one of the fastest-growing industries in northeast Ohio thanks to the area’s relative proximity to gas and oil fields now producing fuel profitably. A role for Independence would not be in the actual extraction of oil or gas but rather, in support to this activity in terms of administrative support, corporate office, and logistics.

- Administrative Services
- Logistics

Education. There are opportunities for Independence to capture the location of a branch or division of a regional university or a major training institution, which the City currently lacks. Again, the central location with excellent accessibility would be attractive to universities expanding their market reach.

- Training Services

Health Care Services. Health care is a growing sector, but the effects of ACA, rising costs, reduced federal support, and changing demographics are already starting to impact negatively on direct ambulatory care and other direct health care service activities (particularly those supplied for indigent care by private non-profit hospitals). Demographic coverage may be over-supplied in the Greater Cleveland area. Cost containment has become an important aspect of health care service delivery and Independence has an important role to play as a home for efficient back-office and administrative uses relating to operating efficiencies. Home health care is a rapidly-growing segment where Independence can become an important node for service administration, logistics, and delivery.

- Administrative Support
- Secondary Care
- Home Health Care Administration

Professional & Technical Services. Independence will continue to be a competitive location for professional and technical service companies that
cater to a broad geographic market base. Key service providers include the following:

- Surveyors, architects, aerospace engineers, environmental engineers, geotechnical engineers

- **Bio-technology (IS/IT).** Cleveland is developing its strengths in health care through the Health Tech Corridor, which is focusing activities in Cleveland. Much of the basic bio-tech research and spin-off entrepreneurial activity will remain near the key research institutions in Cleveland. However, there are opportunities for Independence to capture some of the growth in health technologies as companies expand for space outside of the city. In addition, Independence has a more immediate opportunity to “plug in” to the need for information technologies and services associated with bio-tech industries. Thus, Independence’s strength appears to lie on the IT side of the bio-tech industry.

- **Other Industries.** There were several other industries identified as potential targets but not recommended because these activities were not considered by residents or policymakers to be consistent with the City’s vision or image for how it should develop. These industries included installation & repair services; protective (safety) services; transportation services (e.g., material moving, logistics, warehousing and distribution, wholesale trade/showrooms, and aerospace and air travel services); and regional retail trade (home centers and category “killers”).

- **Downtown.** The downtown area was considered a critical target area within Independence for revitalization and growth. Downtown has its own particular strengths and market potentials, with key target retail activities as follows:
  - Art/Culture, Design, & Recreation
  - Entertainment
  - Specialty Retail

**Marketing Factors to leverage future opportunities**

Considering the target industries and businesses that have been identified for Independence in marketing, recruitment, and retention, there are several key marketing factors that form the basis for marketing strategies in the Part I report. These factors are identified below.
Amenity Value

There is a need to enhance the amenity value of the community to help recruit and retain businesses. Among the amenities most important for recruiting target businesses are restaurants, a strong downtown, housing (to support the downtown market and supply executive housing opportunities for prospective businesses), “walkable” streets, recreation amenities available to workers, and overall safety and security.

Traffic

Timing of lights and peak hour traffic amelioration are important factors that are addressed as part of the overall strategy for business retention and recruitment in the Part I report.

Ownership / Investment

There is the need to increase ownership tenure and investment as an approach for reducing the “footloose” nature of many Independence businesses. Offering a more substantial housing mix that appeals to executives and workers alike can also help reduce the threat of relocations out of Independence by increasing personal investment in the community.

Quality of Office Product

There is the need to enhance the office environment through more mixed-use integrating retail, personal services and other uses. There is also the need to upgrade and redevelop functionally obsolete or declining buildings.

Power/Bandwidth

Businesses identified the need for reliable power service, bandwidth, free WiFi, and other infrastructure, especially in support of IT/IS activities.

Building on Strengths

Independence should continue to build on its strengths in terms of location and transportation accessibility, supportive local government, and high-quality City services.

Outreach to Prospective Businesses

With buy-in from the Council on the target industries, outreach will be conducted to a sample of businesses identified within the specific target industries and that have expressed an interest in locating or growing in
Independence has proven to be highly competitive for several industry sectors, including administrative services; professional & technical services; and information services/IT. Retaining and growing these sectors are paramount to Independence's success. In terms of broadening and diversifying the mix of businesses, the target industries assessment identified other prospective growth industries for marketing, recruitment and retention. Some of these industries, such as “big box” retail, were not considered to be consistent with the community’s vision for development. However, other industries were recommended including food production, tourism, health care, education and the administrative functions associated with oil and gas. Overall, the City has excellent opportunities to retain its competitive strengths so long as it continues to enhance its amenity value and offer high-quality space at reasonable rental rates.
APPENDIX: Supporting Material

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGIC PLAN
For the City of Independence, Ohio

City of Independence

November 1, 2013
Randall Gross / Development Economics (RGDE)
American Communities Partnership (ACP)
INTRODUCTION

The Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) Appendix contains some of the supportive materials generated during the planning process. Specifically, this section contains materials (agendas and summary reports) from the Steering Committee meetings and Public Workshops.
Agenda

Economic Development Strategic Plan
Steering Committee Meeting #1
Wednesday, April 10, 2013. 11:30am-1:00pm

1. Welcome  Gregory Kurtz, Mayor
              City of Independence

2. Introduction to the  Jeremy Rowan
               Strategic Planning Process
               Economic Development Director,
               City of Independence

3. Scope of Consultant Work  Randy Gross
               Randall Gross / Development
               Economics (RGDE)

4. Discussion of Goals & Objectives  Randy Gross

5. Stakeholder Engagement Process  Kyle May
               ACP Planning & Visioning

6. Summary and Next Steps  Jeremy Rowan
Mayor Kurtz welcomed the Steering Committee members and thanked them for their participation in this strategic planning process for the City’s economic development. Jeremy Rowan, Independence’s Economic Development Director, provided an overview of the purpose and process that led to the City’s hiring of Randall Gross / Development Economics (RGDE) as lead consultants for preparing the Economic Development Strategic Plan. This process included the issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP) and competitive bidding process in which a number of proposals were received.

RGDE was selected from among the three final consulting teams interviewed for this project. Randall Gross brings 27 years of consulting experience on over 500 economic and strategic planning studies throughout the world. Randall Gross has worked on a number of assignments in Ohio, often teamed with ACP Visioning + Planning, his Columbus-based stakeholder engagement sub-consultants on this assignment.

**Scope of Work**

Mr. Gross proceeded to explain the consultant’s scope of work, including a baseline assessment of existing conditions impacting the marketability of the City for business development. He will be conducting a number of interviews and focus groups with businesses and real estate industry professionals, and a survey will be implemented to reach a broader audience of local businesses. RGDE will prepare an analysis and identify future economic opportunities for Independence, help establish its marketing niche, assist with business recruitment and inform overall development. There will also be two public workshops to engage the residents in the discussion about the future economic development of Independence. Based on the various economic analyses and stakeholder inputs, RGDE will develop a strategic plan with specific recommendations for implementation of marketing and development strategies for Independence.
Discussion of Goals and Objectives

Mr. Gross sought input from the Steering Committee to confirm the overall goals and objectives for the study, to ensure that the end product responds to the economic development needs and vision for Independence. Overall, the need for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the City’s economic and fiscal base was identified. Key concerns relate to the viability of the City’s traditional model of development in attracting and retaining businesses.

Community Engagement Process

Kyle May, of ACP Visioning + Planning, described the concepts for the public workshops that would be held in June and July/August. The hope is that the workshops elicit input from residents and businesses on the overall vision for the City’s economic development. Various outreach efforts are being conducted in anticipation of these meetings, such as communication through the City’s newsletter.

The Economic Development Director and consulting team noted that the plan would be produced largely based on the consulting teams’ technical analysis and experience, while the stakeholder input will help provide guidance on key questions.

Next Steps

Mr. Rowan and Mr. Gross provided a summary of next steps, including the document review and data collection analysis just now underway. Planning in anticipation of the first Public Workshop has begun. It was requested that the Steering Committee assist with any data and information that might be helpful to the process as it moves forward.
Agenda

Economic Development Strategic Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #2
Thursday, June 6, 2013. 11:30am-1:00pm

1. Welcome and Introduction     Jeremy Rowan
   Economic Development Director,
   City of Independence

2. Progress Report              Randy Gross
   Randall Gross / Development
   Economics (RGDE)

3. Findings: Focus Groups & SWOT Randy Gross

4. Discussion

5. Community Meeting            Jamie Greene
   ACP - Visioning & Planning

6. Next Steps                   Randy Gross
Economic Development Strategic Plan
Key Findings To-Date

1. Regional Economic Malaise. Metro Cleveland lost 14% of its employment base (1998-2011) but saw an increase in education and health care.

2. Diverse Local Area Economy. The Independence-area economy (Zip Code 44131) is relatively diverse, lost jobs in manufacturing and trade but gained employment in information, administration, health care, and accommodation services.

3. Large Administrative Services Cluster. Independence has a large and growing Administrative Services cluster, with high location quotient (LQ) of 3.14. Other clusters include information services (2.55), and professional/technical services (2.38); plus real estate, finance, wholesale trade and construction. A high LQ indicates a competitive advantage as a location for these industries.

4. Limited Retail Activity. Independence area has lower-than-expected representation of retail, education, health care, and accommodation services. Given the city’s location at the major regional crossroads, it has surprisingly avoided development of destination retail uses.

5. One Major Employer. Cleveland Clinic facilities account for nearly 12% of the city’s jobs base, or more than 2,100.

6. High Jobs-to-Resident Ratio. The city itself has almost 18,000 jobs, 152% more than its 7,100 residents. Independence has a daytime population of nearly 21,000. Like the surrounding area, the city has seen job growth in administrative services, health care, real estate, and professional/technical services. Information services, accommodation, and trade were down between 2002 and 2007.

7. Office Market Improving, but Price Sensitive. The office market is improving, with vacancy down to about 13% and absorption of 79,000 square feet in 2012. However, there is still a significant amount of available space, almost 20%. Also, the market is still price-sensitive and rents have fallen over time to less than $20.00 psf. Over time, stagnant rents will translate into a lack of investment and perhaps lower-wage employment.
8. Office Environments are Evolving away from Suburban Models. Office dynamics are changing. More companies are looking for large, open floor plates with long-term operational and energy efficiencies, increasingly in mixed-use environments.

9. Industrial Market is Stable. The industrial market is stable, with 6.2% vacancy and -14,000sf absorption in 2012. Average building age is now almost 50 years.

10. Retail Market Strong, but Downtown Lacks Exposure. The retail market is relatively strong, with only 4.8% vacancy and positive absorption. Indicative demand suggests existing resident market for 103,000 square feet, which accounts for only 24% of the city’s retail market base. Thus, most demand is driven by workers and pass-through traffic. Downtown suffers from a lack of exposure to the primary market base, and some Downtown businesses have struggled.

11. Business Generates 96% of Key Revenues. The fiscal base is heavily dependent on business. Income taxes represent 2/3 of the revenue base. An estimated 96% of income taxes are paid by non-residents. About 47% of the property tax base is paid by businesses. Together with other key revenues, business supports an estimated 96% of the overall revenue base (excluding transfers, investments, and other non-attributable income). Clearly, maintaining a strong employment base is critical for Independence’s fiscal health.

12. Businesses are Footloose: This is not their Market. The market base for many Independence businesses is national and international, not northeast Ohio. Thus, there is no direct reason for their presence in the Cleveland area, in terms of market base. Some have history and senior staff here, but are likely footloose in the future. It will be critical to be proactive in retention and recruitment efforts, not only for Independence but also with regional implications.

13. Key Strength is Central Location and Access. Key strengths identified by business are: accessibility and central location (for labor force), low-cost parking, hotels and restaurants, and relatively low tax rate.

14. Key Challenge is Traffic. Challenges identified by businesses include: traffic congestion (I-77/Rockside), lack of walkability, lack of engagement (between businesses), and perceptions of a declining Downtown.

15. The Independence Brand: Clean, Convenient, and Prestigious. The Independence “Brand” elicited the following description: nice, clean, safe, and comfortable; convenient and centrally-located; well-kept, manicured, and tidy; a prestigious business address; friendly; and family-oriented.
REPORT: Steering Committee Meeting #2

Economic Development Strategic Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #2
Thursday, June 6, 2013. 11:30am-1:00pm

The second Steering Committee meeting was held in Independence on June 6, 2013, from 11:30am to 1:00pm. The welcome and introduction was provided by Mayor Kurtz and the Economic Development Director Jeremy Rowan. Members of the Steering Committee introduced themselves. Several new members were in attendance that had not participated in the initial Steering Committee Meeting in April.

Progress Report

Economic Consultant Randall Gross (Randall Gross / Development Economics) proceeded to describe the overall progress to-date on the project, including completion of initial document reviews, data collection, and stakeholder interviews and focus groups. He described the focus groups conducted earlier in the week with nearly 30 representatives of Independence businesses clustered into seven key sectors that are prominent in the local economy. The representatives were drawn from the City’s database of businesses and selected based on their diversity in terms of size and type of business. Mr. Gross also described the upcoming survey that will collect additional information from a broader spectrum of local businesses, and a prospective regional survey that could collect information pertinent to site selection and business development at the regional level.

Key Findings To-Date

Mr. Gross then provided a summary of findings to-date from his baseline economic analyses and from stakeholder meetings. These findings (see attached summary document) provided a preview of the power point presentation that he would be making later that evening at the first Public Workshop on the project. Among the key findings was the fact that the Independence economy is performing relatively well, but the City is part of a broader regional economy that has lost a significant share of its employment base over the past 15 years. Independence has a major administrative services (e.g., “back office”) business...
cluster that represents almost 315% of the regional average. The City also has a large share of the region’s information and professional/technical services. Cleveland Clinic holds nearly 12% of the City’s at-place employment base, a significant share, but many of which are back-office jobs. There is a limited amount of retail activity in the City, with older downtown area businesses having to compete with the restaurants and convenience uses that have a much greater exposure to the office workers that form the bulk of the City’s market base.

Overall, the City has 52% more jobs than it has residents, which have helped support City services through income tax and other revenue streams. But, the City’s revenue base may be threatened over the mid-term as large companies become increasingly “footloose” and lack direct ties to either Independence or the regional market. Office environments are gradually evolving away from traditional suburban office models, with an increasing number of businesses seeking walk-able, urban locations that do not fit the mold of most 1980’s Independence office parks. Office vacancy remains above 20% within the sub-market and some office space has become functionally obsolescent.

Local businesses agree however, that Independence retains as its core strength its central location and accessibility to the regional labor force. A key challenge is traffic management, although strides have been made to improve flow through the area’s major highway interchange. Representatives of local business also suggested the need for more social events and networking that bring business people together. Businesses associate the Independence brand with a “clean, convenient, and prestigious” business location. Businesses also applauded local government for maintaining the City’s aesthetic qualities and high level of service.

Discussion

The Steering Committee members noted the findings and made several comments as follows:

- Office vacancies are much higher than stated. A representative of Newmark Grubb Knight Frank promised to make alternative information available indicating much higher office vacancy rates in the area.
- Availability of housing, integrated with employment nodes, is important. There is a need for more housing, and for more diverse housing formats that appeal to the full range of office workers who are employed (or potentially employed) in Independence. The availability of housing can help make Independence more attractive to business.
- Downtown Independence needs to be revitalized. Suggestions include the integration of housing, restaurants/microbreweries, and cultural venues that improve the overall quality of life for everyone in the City. A “restaurant row” would be very appealing.
There are opportunities to work more with the Cuyahoga Valley Chamber of Commerce, in conducting business networking events, and in collaborating with the City.

A health care industry representative agreed that cost containment is a major challenge and a constraint on the industry that has fed one of the region’s only employment growth sectors for the past 15 years.

Public Workshop and Next Steps

Jamie Greene, of ACP Planning & Visioning, discussed the purpose of the upcoming Public Workshop, where the consultant team would strive to educate the community about the strategic planning process and economic conditions. Input would be collected from the community that would be helpful in guiding the strategic planning process as it moves forward.

Lead consultant Randall Gross noted that the next step includes the analysis and determination of the City’s key future economic opportunities. Economic Development Director Jeremy Rowan followed up on Randy’s discussion of next steps, noting that there will be another Public Workshop towards the end of July or early August, where the findings on future opportunities will be described and where the community will have the opportunity to weigh in on the future economic development of Independence.
Agenda

Economic Development Strategic Plan
Steering Committee Meeting #3
Thursday, August 8, 2013. 11:30am-1:00pm

1. Welcome and Introduction
   Jeremy Rowan
   Economic Development Director,
   City of Independence

2. Progress Report
   Randy Gross
   Randall Gross / Development
   Economics (RGDE)

3. Survey Findings & Key Opportunities
   Randy Gross

4. Discussion

5. Output of Public Meeting #1
   Jamie Greene
   American Communities
   Partnership

6. Expectations for Public Meeting #2
   Jamie Greene

7. Next Steps
   Randy Gross
Economic Development Strategic Plan  
*Key Findings for August 8, 2013*

1. **Business Survey Findings** (120+ responses)

   a. **Demographics/Basic**
      
      i. All industries represented
      
      ii. Average 12 years in business
      
      iii. Average 20 employees (median 8)
      
      iv. 10% telecommute
      
      v. Average size 18,300sf (median 4,000)
      
      vi. 20% planning to expand (average 6 hires, 1,300sf)
      
      vii. Two-thirds in office.

   b. **Under-Investment: Businesses are Footloose.** Only 9% of the surveyed businesses own their space, while 91% are renters. This is another indication that businesses in Independence are potentially “footloose” and are less invested for the long-term in the local real estate market. A similar issue affects housing.

   c. **Fewer Young Professionals.** Independence has a much higher share of mid-career professionals than the regional average; but a somewhat lower share of younger workers (especially recent graduates). Despite job opportunities, there may be a dearth of amenities for recruitment to local businesses. There are also fewer workers nearing retirement age.

   d. **Primary Market is Northeast Ohio.** The NE Ohio region is the primary market for 37% of businesses (and Independence is the market for 16% specifically), but nearly 40% state that their primary market is outside of the region, implicating a degree to which some businesses are “footloose.”

   e. **Location, Location, Location.** Independence was selected as the location of businesses due to convenience and accessibility, which accounted for nearly 60% of all responses. Highway access and central location are the two most important factors in location decisions, and are perceived as Independence’s competitive advantages. Other key factors affecting location decisions include available space, operating costs, and growth potential (market base). Businesses selected their specific sites because of safety & security, available parking, exposure & access, and bandwidth/power capacity. Independence emerges as a “Great Central Location with Highway Access.”

   f. **Other Strengths: Quality City Services, Safety, Free Parking.** These are among the key strengths (besides location and access) most often
noted by local businesses. A supportive local government was often mentioned as a key strength, and specific examples have been provided of how local government assisted businesses. Modest tax rates, good reputation, available office space, and hotel & restaurant amenities were also seen as key strengths.

g. **Amenities are Important.** The business setting is somewhat important to businesses, and there is a slight preference among existing Independence businesses for a green, suburban setting over more urban environments. Amenities on-site or nearby are important because they increase QoL for workers and reduce travel times, thus increasing productivity.

h. **Challenges: Aging Office Space, RE Cost, Lack of Walk-ability.** These three issues were singled out as the most important ones impacting on business in Independence. The “functional obsolescence” of office space was noted in particular. These issues were ranked as more important than regulation, labor issues, and other factors.

i. **City Should Address: Traffic/Lights, Downtown, Infrastructure.** These three issues were singled out as the most important ones for the City to address, although no particular issue was identified by more than 10% of the respondents.

2. **Opportunities Assessment Findings.** Considered findings from business interviews, focus groups and surveys; location, existing clusters (e.g., administrative services, information services) and competitive strengths; regional supply chains; future national and regional growth industries; and other factors.

a. **Accessible/Central Location Critical.** Independence success is tied largely to its highway-accessible, central location. This location is attractive for a number of different types of industries ranging from retail and logistics to back office and transportation services.

b. **Future Growth: Healthcare, admin support, accommodation.** The largest growth will be in industries where Independence already has a foothold and for which it has certain competitive strengths. Independence is similarly competitive for other growth sectors including education, IT, transportation, retail trade, social services, and others. The fastest growth in the region will be in health care, but also in such sectors as oil & gas extraction.

c. **Administrative Services Growth.** The largest number of admin jobs will be added in administrative support industries (advertising, telemarketing, customer support, bill collections, bookkeeping, procurement, order fulfillment, etc). The fastest growth will be in information services / computer support services.
d. Key Economic Opportunities:

- **Administrative Services**
  - Administrative Support Services
  - Human Resources & Training Services
  - Business Operations
    - Meeting Planners
    - Market Research
    - Management Analysis

- **Information Services**
  - Information Security
  - Logistics

- **Tourism & Accommodation Services**
  - Lodging
  - Meeting, Events, & Conferencing
  - Restaurants

- **Food Industries**
  - Processing
  - Catering/Regional Distribution

- **Oil & Gas / Extraction Industries**
  - Administrative Services
  - Logistics

- **Education**
  - Training Services

- **Health Care Services**
  - Administrative Support
  - Secondary Care
  - Home Health Care Administration

- **Transportation Services**
  - Material Moving
  - Logistics, Warehousing & Distribution
  - Wholesale Trade/Showrooms
  - Aerospace & Air Travel Services

- **Installation and Repair Services**

- **Professional & Technical Services**
  - Surveyors, architects, aerospace engineers, environmental engineers, geotechnical engineers

- **Protective Services**

- **Bio-technology (IS/IT)**

- **Regional Retail Trade**
  - Home Centers, Category “Killers”

- **Downtown**
  - Art/Culture, Design, Recreation
  - Entertainment
  - Specialty Retail
3. **Marketing Factors.**

- **Amenity Value**
  - Restaurants
  - Downtown / Town Center
  - Housing to support Downtown Market
  - Walk-able Streets
  - Recreation Amenities
  - Safety & Security

- **Traffic**
  - Timing of Lights
  - Peak Hour Traffic Amelioration

- **Ownership / Investment**
  - Office Ownership
  - Housing

- **Quality of Office Product**
  - Office/mixed-use Environments
  - Upgrading & Redevelopment

- **Power/Bandwidth**
  - Reliable Power Service, Bandwidth, Free WiFi, etc.

- **Building on Strengths**
  - Location and Transportation Accessibility
  - Supportive Local Government
  - High-Quality City Services

4. **Strengthening Downtown.** Residents and businesses alike have noted the importance of strengthening downtown. Key challenges include the fact that office workers in the Rockside Road Corridor generate nearly 80% of the retail demand, yet downtown has an “isolated” location that lacks exposure and access to this market. Downtown lacks market support, which explains why only about 40% of the commercial space is occupied by retail businesses and there is significant vacancy. The market for downtown can be built through a two-pronged approach: establishing destination appeal (such as through culture, entertainment, restaurants) and by strengthening the Primary Market Area (increasing the downtown housing and employment base, making downtown more “walk-able”). A baseline retail assessment suggests that up to 250 more households in the downtown area would help support an additional 60,000 square feet of retail activity, bringing downtown destination scale.
Economic Development Strategic Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #3
Thursday, August 8, 2013. 11:30am-1:00pm

The third Steering Committee meeting was held in Independence on August 8, 2013, from 11:30am to 1:00pm. The welcome and introduction was provided by the Mayor and by Economic Development Director Jeremy Rowan. Several new members were in attendance that had not participated in the initial Steering Committee Meetings.

Progress Report

Economic Consultant Randall Gross (Randall Gross / Development Economics) provided a progress report on work completed to-date. Mr. Gross described the process for conducting the business survey and for determining the economic opportunities.

Key Findings To-Date

Mr. Gross then provided a summary of findings from both the business survey and the economic opportunities assessment. These findings (see attached summary document) provided a preview of the power point presentation that he would be making later that evening at the 2nd Public Workshop on the project.

The business survey received 120+ responses. Among the key findings from the business survey was the fact that only 9% of respondents own their business space, and 91% are renters. This brings additional focus to the issue of the “footloose” nature of many Independence businesses, where they have no particular ties to the city (since their market is elsewhere and they do not own their space). The business survey also determined that the city’s employment base is much more heavily weighted to mid-career professionals than to young, recent graduates or older long-term workers. This characteristic was tied to the demographics of the firms and the appeal of Independence as a more suburban location. The survey confirmed many of the factors that had been identified previously as Independence’s competitive advantages, such as central location and transportation accessibility. Businesses recommended that the City help
address lingering issues with traffic congestion and the timing of traffic lights, perceptions of a declining downtown, and several localized infrastructure problems.

Mr. Gross then discussed findings from the Economic Opportunities Assessment, which found that the central/accessible location is critical to a number of industries, there is future growth potential in healthcare and administrative support, and the fastest growth will be experienced in information services and technologies. Key target industries were recommended based on the various analyses and inputs, and discussed with the steering committee. Among the recommended targets were industries for which Independence already has a substantial cluster, such as administrative services, information services, and accommodation. But also, targets were identified in industries that could help diversify the local economic base, such as food production and catering, bio-technology, corporate offices, and educational institutions. The targeting of downtown as a key location for revitalization was also discussed, with findings on the market requirements for strengthening downtown to include development of housing that would support retail activity.

Discussion

The Steering Committee members noted the findings and held a brief discussion in which there was general agreement that the key targeted industries are appropriate for the city. There was a discussion of office buildings and the need for retrofitting buildings as they age. Downtown was also a focus of discussion, with a general agreement on the need for housing (“rooftops”) to support retail demand. Downtown was seen as the “identity” for Independence and therefore, a critical component of the overall economic development strategy, with assistance necessary for building upgrades and other business improvements. Comparable and competitive communities including Westlake (Crocker Park), Brecksville, and Broadview Heights were discussed, with a focus on housing. There was some discussion over the targeting of oil and gas industries (which are growing rapidly in the broader region), although it is mainly the administrative functions within these industries that would be targeted and not “fracking” activity or oil drilling.

Community Workshop and Next Steps

Jamie Greene, of ACP Planning & Visioning, discussed the output from the previous Community Workshop, as well as the purpose of the 2nd workshop being held that evening. Lead consultant Randall Gross noted that next steps included assessment of findings from the community workshop and the drafting of the strategic recommendations based on the analytical work and stakeholder engagement that had been accomplished to-date. The timeline for completion of the work was discussed, with a target of October for a presentation of findings and recommendations to the full City Council.
Agenda

Economic Development Strategic Plan
Steering Committee Meeting #4
Tuesday, October 29, 2013. 11:30am-1:00pm

1. Welcome
   Jeremy Rowan
   Economic Development Director,
   City of Independence

2. Progress Report
   Randy Gross
   Randall Gross / Development
   Economics (RGDE)

3. Output of Public Meeting #2
   Kyle May
   ACP

4. Present Strategic Recommendations
   Randy Gross

5. Discussion

6. Next Steps
   Randy Gross
REPORT: Steering Committee Meeting #4

Economic Development Strategic Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #4
Thursday, October 29, 2013. 11:30am-1:30pm

The fourth and final Steering Committee meeting was held in Independence on October 29, 2013, from 11:30am to 1:30pm. The welcome was provided by the Mayor and by Economic Development Director Jeremy Rowan.

Progress Report

Economic Consultant Randall Gross (Randall Gross / Development Economics) provided a progress report on work completed to-date. Mr. Gross noted that the written Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) report has been drafted, including strategic recommendations for economic development. The purpose of this meeting was to quickly review the background findings and then present and discuss the strategic recommendations contained in the report. Kyle May of ACP also provided a brief summary of the outcomes from the second Community Stakeholder Workshop, held on August 8th.

Review of Findings

As noted above, a brief review was provided of the findings from the various analyses contained in the Background Report (Part II). Steering committee members asked several questions, one pertaining to the business survey responses. There appeared to some a discrepancy in the numbers, with nearly one-third of survey respondents feeling that the “lack of walk-ability” was one of the city’s primary disadvantages, yet only 5% of respondents felt that “walk-ability” was an important issue for the City Government to address. Mr. Gross explained that some respondents were not sure that walk-ability was necessarily a City Government issue but also, the question about City Government was open-ended and the question about disadvantages was not. Either way, “walk-ability” was identified as an issue by survey respondents.
Key Recommendations

Mr. Gross provided a summary of recommendations from the Strategic Report (Part I) for discussion. Among the key overall recommendations are 1) to build on the City’s existing strengths for business recruitment and development, 2) to enhance the amenity value of the City as a way of recruiting and retaining business and also improving the lives of residents, 3) to update the office building product and the office environment to meet the needs of evolving business models, 4) to enhance the City’s infrastructure and establish a “ready” site for development, and 5) to attract and promote entrepreneurship and small business development.

Detailed strategies based on each of these five primary recommendations were then presented. The City would focus on recruiting and retaining business support, information technology, and engineering-related businesses among the list of seven primary target industry sectors. Marketing would focus on how the City, by virtue of its location and other advantages, can assist businesses with cost containment, collaboration, and innovation.

Amenity value would be enhanced in part through redevelopment in aging office nodes (enabled through sub-area planning and market assessment), by enhancing the City’s already wonderful recreation and open space amenities, and through coordination with a restructured Chamber of Commerce that can focus on Independence rather than the needs of six different communities. Downtown was emphasized as an important “amenity” not only for residents but also for business recruitment and retention. It was shown that there is a need to build the downtown market base through more downtown housing and through destination marketing and tenant recruitment, development of underutilized sites, establishment of a “100% corner,” and creation of a Downtown Improvement Authority (DIA) to assist with development and marketing of Downtown Independence through various incentives, marketing and facilitation efforts.

The City’s under-performing office environments would be stabilized and improved over time as enabled through sub-area planning, and encouraged through mixed-use development and a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) designation. Marketing and business recruitment would also focus on these redevelopment areas. Infrastructure would be enhanced for information technologies such as through increased band width and power capabilities. The City would continue to work on strategies for reducing traffic congestion such as through staggered work hour programs and signal timing. Industrial districts would be created in East Pleasant Valley and in the Cloverleaf area through urban design improvements, identity signage, branding, and promotion. A “ready” investment site would be established in the “northwest quadrant” of I-77 and Rockside Road.
Independence would help attract, retain, and grow its entrepreneur base through partnerships and collaborations, including establishment of a Technology Council in concert with local tech businesses and a direct relationship with the Cleveland Health Tech Corridor. Entrepreneur financing would be encouraged through partnerships with area funders and non-profits and perhaps through a Tech Incubator in the Rockside Road area, if proven to be feasible. Importantly, the city would encourage business owners to put down roots in the City, through more office condominium ownership, land banking, and executive housing development (including mixed-use in Downtown and other areas as appropriate).

An implementation plan was recommended that focused on outreach, planning, facilitation, and collaboration. The implementation matrix provided in the report was established for a three-year timeframe to enable start-up of the recommended programs. Finally, metrics for measuring progress on the Economic Development Strategic Plan were also provided.

Discussion

The Steering Committee members held a brief discussion in which there was general consensus around the recommended strategies in the Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP). It was noted that the Middle School building is an important City asset and that demolition of the building would show that something is moving forward with Downtown. Steering Committee members also noted the need to prioritize and to identify the catalyst, or a place to start, for people to rally around. Redevelopment of the Middle School site was identified as just such a catalyst because of its importance to both the business community and residents. Mr. Gross agreed but cautioned that the City should also avoid giving the impression that there is impending development, since these things do take time. Mr. Rowan noted that the EDSP provides a “tool box” for the City as it moves forward with implementation. Prioritization would come from the Council and City staff, working with residents and businesses on implementation.

Steering Committee members agreed that allowing more mixed-use “activity centers” in target areas is an important direction for the City. Zoning also needs to be addressed in those areas of the City where we want to encourage redevelopment, such as in Downtown or in Rockside Road. It was stated that developers need a reason to come to Independence. Costs need to be addressed.

Mr. Gross noted that sub-area planning can help establish the community’s framework for zoning changes and can provide the private sector (including developers) with a vision for how the City wants to develop. Planning is also an education process that allows residents, businesses, developers, and other stakeholders to coalesce on the vision. Marketing would help focus on the City’s strengths as a low-cost location and on City incentives and programs to help lower operating and investment costs. Mixed-use can also reduce traffic...
congestion as it puts less cars on the road for the short trips that often create congestion. Mr. Gross also noted the importance of diversity in real estate product and business base to a healthy economy.

There was some confusion over whether the City may be involved in development or rehabilitation of office buildings. Mr. Gross clarified that the City would have no direct involvement in office development but rather, would work with building owners and facilitate or encourage rehabilitation and redevelopment through a sub-area planning process and a package of incentives. The issue of housing was discussed in the relation to business recruitment and retention as it was noted that there needs to be housing to accommodate executives as well as younger professionals who are attracted to a “hub.” With such housing, it will easier to attract and retain businesses that can put down roots in the city. Otherwise, Independence could become dependent on an unstable and transient business base for much of its tax revenue stream. There is significant competition in the region, so Independence must remain competitive in terms of its business offering including housing opportunities.

It was emphasized that the City’s tax base is highly dependent on income taxes generated by the 18,000+ workers who are employed in the city, and that property taxes generate only a small portion of the City’s revenues. So keeping those employees in Independence will be an imperative for the City’s ability to provide the same level of high-quality services that residents have come to expect. A competitive housing mix is part of the City’s overall offering for business retention and development.

The Mayor noted that Independence has been successful and never used to be faced with these issues (like aging business districts) when the City was growing. He emphasized that the next Council will be challenged to make decisions about the future so that Independence can avoid the problems faced by other communities. He also emphasized the need to be pro-active in order to face the issues head-on and make decisions about the future.

Next Steps

Randall Gross noted that the EDSP process is nearly complete. The findings and recommendations would be presented to the City Council at the evening meeting for their input. The last remaining element of the process is the completion of a brief summary of findings from outreach to industry consultants and businesses regarding the City's target sectors. The work will be completed following any Council discussion on the industry recommendations. The summary will be attached as an Appendix to the draft report that has already been submitted.
Public Workshop #1
Economic Development Strategic Plan

AGENDA
June 6th, 2013, 7:00 – 9:00pm
City of Independence Civic/Community Center.

Purpose:
To initiate public input for the Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Welcome 7:00pm
Mayor Gregory P. Kurtz

Introduction the Strategic Plan 7:10pm
Jeremy Rowan, Economic Development Director
a. What is an Economic Development Strategic Plan?
b. Why now?
c. How will the process be conducted?
d. What do we need to do tonight?

Initial Findings 7:30pm
Randall Gross, Economic Consultant
a. Comparing Independence with regional and national economic trends
b. Initial perspectives from the business community

Planning for Prosperity, Community Input Session 8:00pm
Jamie Greene AICP, Community Engagement Consultant
a. One Big Question

Next Steps 8:55pm
Jeremy Rowan, Economic Development Director

Adjourn 9:00pm

PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES
• Be respectful of others in your group.
• Be open and frank in expressing yourself.
• Keep comments brief and to the point.
• Listen to what others have to say.
• Stay on task.
• If you need to take a break, feel free to do so.
• Please turn off cellular phones.
July 3, 2013

To: Jeremy Rowan, Economic Development Director, City of Independence
From: Kyle May
Cc: Jamie Greene, AIA AICP
Re: Independence Economic Development Strategic Plan Public Workshop #1

This memorandum summarizes the Public Workshop conducted on behalf of the City of Independence for the Economic Development Strategic Plan and is organized in the following format:

I. Overview
   A. Purpose
   B. Workshop format
   C. Results by the numbers

II. Workshop Results
   A. What did we learn?
   B. Who did we hear from?

III. Appendix
   A. Full Responses to Prompt 1
   B. Full Responses to Prompt 2

Attached to this memo is the input gathered from the first Public Workshop (see Appendix). The results of the workshop will be discussed at the August 8th Steering Committee Meeting.

I. OVERVIEW

The Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City of Independence will include analysis of the current economic conditions within the community, information on regional and national trends, and a set of recommendations for the community. This process will take place over six-months and include input from local stakeholders, elected officials, the business community and the public. In all, the process will include two public workshops where the consultants will share their analysis and collect input from the public. The following summarizes the first of two workshops, which took place June 6, 2013, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the City of Independence’s Community/Civic Center.

A. Purpose

The purpose of the first workshop was three fold: 1) To inform the public of the impetus for the project; 2) Share initial results from the ongoing economic analysis and; 3) Engage citizens in an activity with the consultant team to gather initial feedback and ideas.
B. Workshop format
The workshop was broken down into two distinct parts. During the first half of the workshop, the consultants introduced the project and presented initial findings from the economic analysis. The second half of the workshop was interactive where participants were asked to reflect on the analysis and share their opinions on important issues to be addressed by the consultant team.

Participants were asked to consider two questions:

1. **What do you treasure about Independence?**
The first activity was an individual brainstorming exercise. The facilitator reflected on the presentation and posed the question, “What do you treasure about Independence?” Participants were asked to record their treasure statements on a small notecard that was collected at the end of the workshop.

2. **What can we do in the future to ensure the continued prosperity of our community, Independence?**
Following the first activity, the facilitator read a vision statement to the participants. The audience was then asked to consider, “What can we do in the future to ensure the continued prosperity of our community, Independence?” Participants reflected on the statement and wrote their answers on piece of paper. Table leaders then asked each participant to share their ideas. After the results had been accurately recorded, the facilitator asked several of the groups to share their top ideas or responses to the question.

C. Results by the numbers
The workshop was open to anyone with a vested interest in the continued prosperity of Independence. Sixty-three participants were engaged in the first Public Workshop. That number excludes volunteers, facilitators and participants who did not sign an attendance sheet. The following are key points collected from the workshop:

- **63** total participants
- **60** treasures, with **198** identified treasured characteristics
- **171** ideas for continued prosperity
- **52** exit questionnaires received

II. WORKSHOP RESULTS
The remainder of this memo summarizes the input gathered during the workshop. The results are organized into two sections:

1. **What did we learn?**
   A. What do you treasure about Independence?
   B. What can we do to ensure the continued prosperity of our community, Independence?

2. **Who did we hear from?**
   A. Attendance and participant satisfaction
1. What did we learn?

A. WHAT I TREASURE ABOUT INDEPENDENCE

Sixty treasure statement cards were collected during the first activity with 198 characteristics identified. These statements were entered verbatim into a database and analyzed for recurring ideas/themes. The ideas were then assigned to ten broad categories with several ideas assigned to more than one category. The ten categories are organized by their frequency.

1. High quality services. (39) Participants treasured the overall level of services within the City. Sixty-five percent of participants mentioned this as one of the top aspects of Independence that they treasure.
2. Location and accessibility. (32) The City’s convenient location at the intersection of two major interstates was mentioned more than thirty times as a top treasure of living in the community. This access to the region makes the City competitive for jobs, but also provides residents greater mobility.
3. A sense of safety. (21) A significant number of participants noted that the community has a very strong sense of safety. They mentioned strong police and fire departments, as well as an overall sense of duty from residents to maintain a safe environment.
4. Relatively low taxes. (15) Many respondents treasured the City’s relatively low tax rate and the benefits of a strong local economy as a top aspect of living in the community.
5. Great place to raise a family. (15) Participants treasured the positive environment Independence provides to families raising children. Community safety and a good school system were identified as key contributors to the positive environment.
6. The natural environment. (15) The combination of the National Park and the significant tree canopy within the City gives Independence an interesting mix of ecological assets.
7. Sense of community. (13) Respondents treasured how their neighbors genuinely cared for their well-being. Many credited this sense of community as an important reason for staying in Independence.
8. Top school system. (11) The Independence Local Schools were treasured by many participants as an extremely positive asset for the community.
9. Small town feel. (10) Along with a general sense of community, participants felt that while the larger region has grown, Independence has managed to maintain the feel of a small town.
10. Vibrant business community. (8) Many respondents treasured the vibrant business community in Independence for its contribution to tax revenue.

Other themes included: The City’s overall cleanliness, friendly nature, entertainment amenities, and affordability.

Distribution of Treasures

This ordering is an aid for assessing general community sentiment communicated through the 198 treasures and should not be construed as a deliberate ranking of priorities by the public.

The ranking shows that overall; there is a clear hierarchy among the ten plus categories. The City’s high quality services and location were the most commonly mentioned top treasures. When mentioning the City’s high level of services, respondents routinely expressed a respect and gratitude for local officials. The location of Independence was typically associated with its access to the Interstates I-480 and I-77. Participants
mentioned that proximity to the freeway provided access to downtown Cleveland, the Airport and the overall region.

Beyond these top two categories, a third of participants mentioned Independence’s community safety, low tax burden, family friendliness and natural environment as important treasures.

B. WHAT CAN WE DO IN THE FUTURE TO ENSURE THE CONTINUED PROSPERITY OF OUR COMMUNITY, INDEPENDENCE?

Following the “What I treasure most about Independence?” activity, participants were asked to break into groups and work together on one key question. The small groups were asked to respond to the following question:

What can we do to ensure the continued prosperity of our community, Independence?

After five minutes of silent idea generation, the appointed table leader collected each participant’s responses. Several of the groups were asked to share some of their top ideas with everyone in attendance.

The top responses to the group discussion on prosperity included:

1. **Redevelopment of underperforming areas.** Many groups agreed that if Independence is to remain competitive in the region it must modernize its aging building stock. This modernization will allow Independence to meet the evolving demands of businesses.
2. **Practice fiscal responsibility.** Several groups mentioned that a key aspect of the City’s success and prosperity to date is the fiscal responsibility of Independence’s leadership. Many participants want to see this fiscal responsibility continue.
3. **Improve downtown.** Many participants identified downtown as a significant area of opportunity for growth and new forms of development.
4. **Develop better amenities.** To remain competitive with other business locations in the region, a number of participants would like to see the City invest in greater amenities for its corporate citizens and residents.
5. **Provide senior housing.** Many participants were concerned that the current environment may not allow citizens to age in place. Participants would like the City to consider new forms of housing for seniors.

Other responses to the question included:
- Attract new businesses
- Enhance mobility
- Improve marketing
- Engage citizens
- Provide housing alternatives
- Maintain high quality of services
- Maintain the community feel
- Compete regionally and nationally for jobs
### Figure 2. Group Prosperity Statement

**What can we do to Maintain our Prosperity?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redevelopment of Underperforming Areas</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Fiscal Responsibility</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Downtown</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Better Amenities</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Senior Housing</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction - Business</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Existing Building Stock</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance Mobility</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve our Marketing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage with Citizens</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Housing Alternatives</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Quality Services</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain our Community Feel</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compete Regionally and Nationally for Jobs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Who did we hear from?

The following are key points about workshop participation based upon returned exit questionnaires from approximately fifty-two participants. The results of the exit responses are then compared to Census data.

Characteristics of participants

The exit questionnaires provide insight into the demographic makeup of workshop participants. This information is not intended to offer statistical validation of the process, but to understand the characteristics of those that participated (the exit questionnaire data reflects only those who responded, not all participants). Because not all of the participants answered every question, there may be a variation in total responses among different topics.

Residency. Participants ranged in City residency from less than one year all the way to over eighty-five years. Twenty-three percent of participants had resided in the community for less than a decade. Approximately, twenty-six percent of all participants resided in the City between ten and nineteen years. The greatest number of participants (fifty-one percent) has resided in the City for more than twenty years. This is slightly more than reported in the Census, which states forty-one percent of Independence residents have lived in the community for twenty or more years.

Employment and Property Ownership. A significant number of participants owned a business within the community. Only thirteen percent of participants were not Independence residents. Some of the other communities represented included Stow, Brook Park, Brecksville, Mantua and Cleveland.

Age. Eighty-six percent of participants were over the age of forty-five years, and fourteen percent identified as younger than forty-four. When compared to the Census, the meeting’s age distribution skewed slightly older than the statistical reality. A true representation would have seen around fifty percent of participants over the age of forty-five.

Race. Ninety-six percent of participants identified as White/Caucasian. One participant identified as Black/African American and one as Native American. This distribution aligns with the Census.

Income. The highest percentage of participants (forty-three percent) identified themselves as having an annual household income exceeding $100,000. Ten percent reported annual household incomes less than $20,000 and the remaining forty-seven percent were between the two groups. Compared with the Census, this distribution of income was slightly above the averages for the community.

Educational Attainment. A significant number of participants (sixty-eight percent) identified as having a degree at or above a Bachelor’s. This included more than forty percent of participants with a Masters and/or Ph. D. Eleven participants or twenty-two percent of attendees identified as having some college. Compared to the Census, the meeting’s educational attainment skewed higher than what would be expected. The Census reports thirty-one percent of Independence residents as having a Bachelor’s degree or above.
Opinions About the Workshops
In addition to demographics, the exit questionnaire polled participants on their interests and opinions of the workshop. The results indicate overwhelmingly high levels of satisfaction.

1. How did you hear about this workshop?
- Around thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that they heard about the workshop through their email.
- The community newsletter attracted eighteen of the respondents followed by eight who found out about the workshop through the newspaper or other media.
- Several participants were invited to the workshop by a friend or neighbor.

2. What interests or concerns caused you to attend this workshop?
Participants brought a variety of concerns to the workshops.
- The majority of respondents expressed general desire to learn more about the economic development strategic planning process and how their voices would be heard.
- Specific issues most frequently cited were:
  - Future prosperity of the City;
  - Concern for the downtown;
  - Concerns over viability of businesses;
  - Maintenance of City services.

Satisfaction

Did you feel the information was presented in a clear manner? 100%
Did you have an opportunity to fully express your ideas? 94%
Were your ideas received and recorded appropriately? 96%
Was the process fair to everyone in your small group? 100%
Were you exposed to new ideas and concerns? 88%
Will you continue to participate in the planning process? 100%

Rate the workshop length. 10% 2% 88%
## Appendix

1. “What do you most treasure about Independence?” All responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response #</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response2</th>
<th>Response3</th>
<th>Response4</th>
<th>Response5</th>
<th>Response6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Size of the City</td>
<td>Was close to my job for 24/7 responsibility. Less than 10 miles.</td>
<td>Low taxes and good services.</td>
<td>Good place to raise a family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Grew up in community- Went through school system.</td>
<td>Like small town atmosphere.</td>
<td>Amenities</td>
<td>Civic center activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family oriented community</td>
<td>Small community with easy access to all cities around us.</td>
<td>City services provided to residents</td>
<td>Educated professionals</td>
<td>Families stay in this town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
<td>Responsive city government and service department</td>
<td>Location to national park.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Living in Independence for a person of my age at 55 is like having a large family- people look out for each other and we care about each other.</td>
<td>Services are excellent and the administration is extremely approachable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Good schools</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
<td>Central location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Small town community</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
<td>Good City services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Services offered to residents</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>City services including response time.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>Asset</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Short work commute/access</td>
<td>Low taxes/good value</td>
<td>Safety/cleanliness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Community services</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Safety and security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td>Location - central to all of Northeastern Ohio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>Inexpensive</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Park areas (City and national)</td>
<td>Convenience to downtown Cleveland</td>
<td>Convenience to Interstates I-77, I-480, I-271 and turnpike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quiet after 9-5 workers go home (except I hear Rockside area is getting wilder)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Small town “feel”</td>
<td>Very accessible location</td>
<td>Community/civic center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Centrally located</td>
<td>Civic Center</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
<td>Good schools</td>
<td>Park volunteer organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Location!</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Safe, clean neighborhoods</td>
<td>Excellent school system</td>
<td>Community/City involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Quiet, old fashioned, safe, caring, neighbors, good schools, wonderful amenities</td>
<td>Respecting and maintaining the history of the place as well as trying to keep up with the changing times.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td>General environment</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Strong family ties</td>
<td>Great services</td>
<td>Successful business community</td>
<td>Friendly people</td>
<td>Accessibility to NE Ohio</td>
<td>Recreational Amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business support</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>Community events/engagement</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Business accessibility</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Comfortable environment</td>
<td>Convenient location</td>
<td>Good city services</td>
<td>Small town atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>People have similar values</td>
<td>People connect and help each other in need</td>
<td>Great place to raise family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>History-proud people/help people</td>
<td>Quality of life-taxes, services, &lt;illegible&gt;</td>
<td>Heart of county-heart of county-&lt;illegible&gt;(access easy everywhere)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Large economic base small population location</td>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>Pride in the City</td>
<td>Ability to live and work in same City</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Single-family residences only</td>
<td>Low crime rate</td>
<td>Outstanding school system</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Small town feel</td>
<td>Single-family residences only</td>
<td>Low crime rate</td>
<td>Outstanding school system</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Low taxes/approachable</td>
<td>Quality services</td>
<td>Secure/safe</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Has been home base for 43 years</td>
<td>Family is still here</td>
<td>National park goes through the city</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Old time community with traditional values</td>
<td>Services and recreation-young to old</td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Convenience of location to all areas in the vicinity</td>
<td>Community activities for families</td>
<td>Closeness to recreation national park areas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>The greenery surrounding my neighborhood</td>
<td>The relative safety I feel when I'm out and about</td>
<td>The neighbors and friends I share around the city of ours.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Central location</td>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>Potential for development</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Continuing to make it family oriented</td>
<td>Vibrant work area-up to date</td>
<td>Fun shopping</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>City is well run</td>
<td>Amenities-family oriented-good place to raise children-good for seniors</td>
<td>Location, location, location-convenience</td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Great place to raise a family! Good values, good community, good schools and churches, good shopping, entertainment and nearby, close to airport and highways</td>
<td>The City workers are for the resident's police, council, mayor; City workers have a &quot;can do&quot; attitude.</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Best kept secret in Cuyahoga County</td>
<td>We take care of our own, 1st rate administration-honest and care for City.</td>
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<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Quiet-safe</td>
<td>Convenient</td>
<td>Great services</td>
<td>Reasonable taxes</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>Safety for my child</td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Safe City</td>
<td>Family oriented</td>
<td>Residents care about their property and the way it looks</td>
<td>Good schools</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community spirit</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Services/activities/recreation</td>
<td>Educational opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Better modernize the commercial real estate to attract tenants</td>
<td>Filling the vacancies is imperative</td>
<td>Consider retail</td>
<td>More business downtown</td>
<td>Walkways near Rockside/traffic control</td>
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<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Excellent schools</td>
<td>Great City services</td>
<td>Engaging community events</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>High quality of City services at little to no cost to home owner</td>
<td>Low tax rate</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Cooperation and accessibility of civic services/local government</td>
<td>Physical accessibility (live in Cleveland, work here, easy to get to)</td>
<td>Maintain low tax rate</td>
<td>Maintain level of civic openness and accessibility</td>
<td>Reduce crime rate (primarily Rockside Rd.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Strong sense of community. It's safe, it's a great City. It's home. The people. The families. It's unique. Coziness.</td>
<td>Services.</td>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>This City sets the standard, doesn't follow it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>City services</td>
<td>Central location</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Beautiful community</td>
<td>Great accessibility</td>
<td>A family feel</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>A small town feel</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Low taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Location-access to airport, equal time to access downtown or metro parks</td>
<td>School system</td>
<td>Safe</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>54</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What can we do to ensure a prosperous future for our community? For Independence, speak the truth in love if in need of change. We must change.

| 55 | What can we do to ensure a prosperous future for our community? For Independence, speak the truth in love if in need of change. We must change. |
| 56 | Safety- no. 1 Low taxes- no. 2 Location- no. 3 |
| 58 | Access to the natural environments of Metro Parks and national park Central location in the multi-county area of Northeast Ohio. Good City amenities and services |
| 59 | Safety Amenities- family oriented- good place to raise children- good for seniors Proximity |
| 60 | Sense of community involvement- people caring about each other Comprehensive and responsive City services for our residents Location-proximity and safety- great place to raise a family. |
2. “What can we do to ensure the continued prosperity of our community, Independence?”
All responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group #</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Need entertainment attractions</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Reevaluate position in the area</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Find out why businesses move</td>
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<td>Expand benefits to non-residents</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Keep business separate from residential</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>No multi-family housing</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Improve &quot;Center&quot; of town (rt. 21)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Make buildings more environmentally friendly</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>We have enough offices space - what to do with NW Quadrant of Rockside and 77</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Improve office complexes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Make office atmosphere more comfortable</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pedestrian walkways over Rockside Rd. More eateries like Panera, Melt west of 77</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Market office space better</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Senior housing opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Young adults can’t afford to come back</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Takes a package of everything to attract the young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Independence is not a destination except to work. Breakfast - I would love to have one and there is no restaurant downtown must go to Rockside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Give opportunities for younger people to come and stay</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Forum like this gets people to consider new ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Redevelop downtown we have lots of nice downtown I would love to see condos downtown</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If downtown had people living there businesses would thrive</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bring businesses downtown. We need a bookstore Trader Joe’s and other stores not found here in Indy</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Recognize breadth of stakeholders in community and keep them engaged</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This made me think about these groups as part of the community</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Keep taxes low</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Get rid of Middle School</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Bring in housing for younger adults and seniors. Way people get a house is for parents to die and get a house</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Assisted living would be awesome to have here. Many oldsters can’t afford to stay in their homes and must leave sad situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>As one senior fell and was taken care of. Went to assisted living</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Assisted living and senior facilities would be helpful for our house is without families or friends</td>
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<td>What will happen to me?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Services awesome here</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Develop services that reflect the changing needs of residents</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Walkability is what killed small business downtown</td>
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<td></td>
<td>City of Independence Economic Development Strategic Plan</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>City council needs to work together to create a plan to pump new blood and business</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Increase walk ability throughout downtown</td>
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<td>No condos at all</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>No multi-family houses</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>More housing options for younger workers</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Draw workers and residents (small stage / social)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>More retail</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Tax abatements and grants to attract Arts and entertainment</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>mixed use space like first and main in Hudson</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Flex to changing trends</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Resident involvement in City government</td>
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<td>Eco friendly housing/business options</td>
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<td>Maintain the housing stock</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>House services</td>
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<td>Maintain and improve office stock makeover of existing</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Maintain and improve infrastructure</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Strong incentives for police and fire</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Independence chamber of commerce</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>More public transport options</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Ties to national park</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Sports complex - indoor or out bring people in, public not just for the City.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Redevelopment of current businesses and grocery store</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Rezone commercial lands</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maintain good educational system</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>More senior options, cluster homes and condos</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Improve City's gateway appearance (landscaping, welcome sign)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Affordable housing for young residents</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Continue community events possibly incorporate businesses (i.e. concerts by bandstand tree lighting home days etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Improve entertainment venue art shows concerts etc...</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>More local and regional businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Socially vibrant downtown area (Brecksville and chestnut roads)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Update Rockside office areas, renovate</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Retail lower level housing above</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Possible shuttle service from business community to downtown area and for one end of town to the other.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Access to metro and national parks</td>
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<td>Small shopping complex on Rockside.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Keep improving school system</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Senior housing. Alternate housing for all ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Maintain quality of City services</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Encouraging diversity in types of businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Increase improve walking / biking paths</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Retail grocires</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Embrace diversity</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Town center</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Residents should be more informed and encouraged</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Business and residence engagement</td>
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<td>Decrease dependency on business income tax</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Live within our means</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cluster housing</td>
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<td>Put sign on Rockside Road corners businesses</td>
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<td>Business profiles in the City newsletter and on the website</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Bike paths and sidewalks</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Public transportation</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Senior housing</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Keep the snow plowing but raise the fee to $50</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Need to attract more businesses like Cleveland</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Planning commission more respectful to businesses trying to enter the community</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Family oriented residential neighborhoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Maintain high quality of life and traditional values</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Create better business environment (ex. Free Wi-Fi shuttle service free, business committee, create loans)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Something like Crocker park or legacy village ideas in old middle school center of town.</td>
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<td>Orientation for small businesses within the area</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>More social environment to bring businesses community and residents together</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Very strong fiscal responsibility</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Don't pass debt to future generations</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Control government expansion why are we one of the largest employers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Earmark funds for projects without reallocation of everything in pencil</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>&quot;Plan&quot; for paying off debt not helter skelter</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Keep taxes low for businesses</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Avoid political corruption</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Diversified housing i.e. Cluster assisted living</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Improve buildings</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Changing council to a ward system reduce to 5 to 7 5 wards to at large</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Downtown middle school and shopping center design needs improvement boring areas in town.</td>
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<td>Police and reduce heavy crime in business areas</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Keep whole area safe</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Attract more jobs build on location</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Continue to support good values culture and traditions</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Revitalize downtown</td>
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<td>Make sure revenues cover expenses rainy day fund</td>
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<td>Help community and add multi housing</td>
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<td>Develop 21st century housing policy (vertical)</td>
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<td>Maintain City’s infrastructure including City property</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Multi use zoning</td>
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<td>Meetings with commercial retail developers - northwest Columbus</td>
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<td>Retrofit and raising business buildings to accommodate new tenants businesses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Surveillance cameras</td>
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<td>Maintain excellent school system</td>
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<td>Excellent council mayor division leaders extremely important</td>
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<td>Continue to have excellent police fireman cameras</td>
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<td>Retain businesses maintain small town</td>
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<td>Better entrepreneurial guidance</td>
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<td>Provide assistance for commercial remolds</td>
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<td>Manage debt operate efficiently</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Housing variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pedestrian bridge over Rockside road</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Sidewalks on Rockside</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Extra off ramp 480/ Rockside</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Build upon service and community strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Keep all parking free</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Make amenities for workers</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Office supply store on Rockside Road</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Attract long-term businesses</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Diversity of retail establishments in area</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Concentrate on recruiting large regional companies</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Support local merchants</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Develop downtown area</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Maintain civic discourse</td>
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<td>Keep taxes low</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Remodel current office buildings</td>
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<td>Reduce vacancies</td>
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<td>More support for local chamber of commerce</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Traffic control on Rockside road</td>
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<td>Regional transportation support to provide access to markets</td>
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<td>Promote the national park</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Reduce crime rate on Rockside road</td>
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<td>Keep up education quality</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Take care of the elderly</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Some type of senior housing</td>
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<td>Keep services high</td>
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Opportunities Workshop

AGENDA
August 8th, 2013

Purpose: To discuss opportunities as an input to the City of Independence’s Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Welcome 7:00pm
Mayor Gregory Kurtz

Status of the Strategic Plan 7:10pm
Jeremy Rowan, Economic Development Director
a. What is the status of the Strategic Plan?
b. What we heard in Workshop 1
c. What do we need to do tonight?

Opportunities for Economic Development in Independence 7:30pm
Randall Gross, Economic & Strategic Planning Consultant
a. Summary of existing conditions (presented previously)
b. Findings from local business surveys

Capturing the Opportunities, Community Input Session 8:00pm
Jamie Greene AICP, Community Engagement Consultant
Randall Gross, Economic & Strategic Planning Consultant
a. Future opportunities for economic development
b. Discussion of the critical questions

Adjourn 9:00pm

PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES
• Be respectful of others in your group.
• Be open and frank in expressing yourself.
• Keep comments brief and to the point.
• Listen to what others have to say.
• Stay on task.
• If you need to take a break, feel free to do so.
• Please turn off cellular phones.
Memo

August 30, 2013

To: Jeremy Rowan, Economic Development Director, City of Independence
From: Kyle May
Cc: Jamie Greene, AIA AICP
Re: Independence Economic Development Strategic Plan Public Workshop #2, Aug. 8th, 2013

This memorandum summarizes the second Public Workshop conducted for the City of Independence Economic Development Strategic Planning process. It is organized into the following structure:

I. Overview
   A. Purpose
   B. Workshop format
   C. Results by the numbers

II. Workshop Results
   A. What did we learn?
   B. Who did we hear from?

III. Appendix
   A. Full responses and scores to Opportunity Rating Worksheet
   B. Full responses to group Questions

The input gathered from the workshop participants is included in the Appendix. The results of the workshop will be discussed at the upcoming Steering Committee Meeting.

I. OVERVIEW

The Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City of Independence includes analysis of the current economic conditions within the community, information on regional and national trends, and a set of strategic recommendations. The process is taking place over an eight-month period and has included input from local stakeholders, elected officials, the business community and the public. In all, the process has included two public workshops where the planning team shared its analysis and collected input from the public. The following summarizes the second of these meetings, which took place August 8, 2013 from 7:00 to 9:00 pm in the City of Independence’s Community/Civic Center.

A. Purpose

The purpose of the second workshop was three fold: 1) To provide workshop participants with a project update; 2) Present findings on potential economic development opportunity areas (sectors) and; 3) Engage participants in a set of activities to gather reactions to the initial set of opportunities.
B. Workshop format

The workshop was organized into two distinct parts. During the first part, the consultant team provided participants with a project update and presented economic development opportunities resulting from the previous economic analysis. During the presentation of the opportunity areas or sectors, participants were asked to assess the appropriateness of each potential sector and provide comments on a worksheet. Following the opportunity presentation, participants were asked to form small groups. Each participant was asked to individually react to a series of questions and discuss their reactions with the other small group members. The small group conversations were recorded and presented to the larger group.

Opportunities Reaction Form: As participants were presented with the opportunity sectors for Independence, they were asked to provide feedback. Participants were asked to rate each of the fourteen opportunity areas from one to five based on how appropriate the specific opportunity area would be for Independence. Additionally, participants were encouraged to include clarifying statements in the comment section adjoining each opportunity area. To the right is an example of the worksheet distributed to each participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>How appropriate is the opportunity (Please circle)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Administrative Services</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Participants were asked to consider three questions in the small groups: Following the opportunities presentation, participants were asked to react to a set of pertinent questions in their small groups. One of the small group members served as the recorder for the group. The recorder documented the conversation that occurred in each small group. The discussion questions included:

1. Are there any opportunities we missed? If so, what?
2. If successful redevelopment of downtown includes the following, would you be supportive:
   - Improved walkability
   - Enhanced public realm
   - Higher density housing
   - More destination venues
3. Should the city invest in additional amenities that can be utilized by the local business community?

C. Results by the numbers

The workshop was open to anyone with an interest in the continued prosperity of Independence. Twenty-nine participants took part in the second public workshop. That number does not include volunteers, facilitators, or participants who did not sign an attendance sheet. The following are key points about workshop participation and the input collected.

- 29 total participants
- 179 comments on opportunity sectors, 406 opportunity scores collected
- 43 reaction statements from group prompts
- 23 exit questionnaires received
II. WORKSHOP RESULTS
The workshop results are organized into two sections:
1. What did we learn?
   A. What are the best opportunities for Independence?
   B. Group discussions
2. Who did we hear from?
   A. Attendance and participant satisfaction

1. What did we learn?

A. RANKING OF OPPORTUNITY SECTORS
Participants were asked to assess potential opportunity sectors for Independence and provide any additional feedback. Respondents rated an opportunity a (1) if they felt the opportunity was very inappropriate for Independence. A score of (5) meant that the respondent believed the opportunity to be very appropriate for the City. The following provides a summary of participant reactions rated by the average score given to each opportunity. The comments are taken verbatim from participant worksheets and represent a sampling of the reactions.

1. Administrative Services, 4.7
   a. With the new medical mart and convention center, meeting, planning and support services would be very appropriate.
   b. Develop this strong entity to match external market demands for these services.
   c. With 40% non- Northeastern Ohio employers, is this truly a growth segment? Also, space allocation per office worker is declining due to office sharing with no “personal” office.

2. Information Services, 4.7
   a. Match our office space with increasing growth of this field; particularly attract younger workers.
   b. This is an important area of growth.

3. Tourism and Accommodation Services, 4.4
   a. This will go hand-in-hand with developing downtown. Target natural resources (metro parks, bike paths) and focus other meetings, restaurants towards this area. May be an impetus for people to stay and work here, and buy local.
   b. Support services for entire region. Strong need for hotels, restaurants, and downtown development.

4. Food Industries, 3.7
   a. What is the potential to bring those high wage earners to stay, play and invest?
   b. As long as this area does not grow disproportionately, so we become too dependent upon it.
   c. It is a clean and quiet industry to attract.

5. Oil & Gas / Extraction Industries, 3.8
   a. Management! This is a growing area and may pair up with administration and information services, plus the use of current natural resources.
   b. Would not like to see fracking here.
   c. We have a reputation, and it should not be associated with these controversial businesses.
6. Education, 4.0
   a. We are already doing this well!
   b. Education will be needed to attract young professionals.
   c. Develop a college community atmosphere; tap into community colleges and regional campuses.

7. Health Care Services, 4.6
   a. Possibly address long term care; assisted living or nursing homes.
   b. [Health Care Services do] not set us apart from other areas- these opportunities are all over. Perhaps concentrate on administration support and other home services only.

8. Transportation Services, 3.4
   a. This would be a potential opportunity that could work hand-in-hand with tourism services.
   b. Depends on size of operations to utilize space effectively.
   c. No advantage to City as far as generating revenue compared to the footprint of facility.

9. Installation and Repair Services, 3.9
   a. Don’t see as much potential here…Unless paired up to support healthcare or other industries.
      Marketing and placement would be important.
   b. Storefront repair shops may bring more people in to shop and eat.
   c. A medical equipment business would be a great area of growth.

10. Professional & Technical Services, 4.5
    a. High wages- low impact on community services.

11. Protective Services, 3.9
    a. Protective services would add diversification.
    b. Protective services can serve our business community and that of the surrounding areas.

12. Bio-Technology (IS / IT), 4.3
    a. Increase presence of hospital systems and develop other tiers of unused space for these labs.
    b. Great opportunity for institutional companies participating in medical mart and our hospital systems.
    c. This is something that has a future, but may be hard to attract now. May be better to concentrate on other areas with goal for the future, and tie this in at a later date.

13. Regional Retail Trade, 2.3
    a. Not large box store unless there is one specialty anchor like “Whole Foods” or “Cabella’s”- Again, use what we have to springboard and attract businesses.
    b. Land is too precious for this- rather have an industrial base that uses the land.
    c. Enough exists in close proximity within surrounding communities.

14. Downtown, 4.6
    a. Downtown must be redeveloped including multi-generational mixed use and condo cluster housing.
       Not senior housing exclusively. Art and culture may not be viable if you are suggesting galleries or entertainment.
    b. Our downtown is nearly extinct. Something needs to be done to make it attractive. The sidewalks roll up at night and on the weekends. Need to attract more young people who bring entertainment, restaurants, etc.
Support for Opportunities

B. GROUP DISCUSSION

Following the individual rating and commenting on the opportunity sectors, participants formed small groups and were asked to discuss a set of three questions. The following is a summary of the feedback from the small groups.

**Question 1: Are there any opportunities we missed? If so, what?**

Themes from Question 1 include:

1. **Healthcare or emerging markets** – The City should attract sectors that are actively expanding not just nationally, but regionally as well. Healthcare provision and support services were two sectors mentioned as an example of this type of opportunity.

2. **Utilizing the former Middle School site for impactful redevelopment** – The tremendous potential in redeveloping the former Middle School property in the center of downtown. Groups posed a number of ideas for the property that supported the education opportunity area, healthcare and the administrative services.

3. **Capitalize on natural assets** – The community’s tremendous wealth of natural amenities could be better highlighted and taken advantage of. There are opportunities that could be explored like a visitors center, educational facility and/or the school’s Land Lab.

4. **Enhance small-scale retail, especially in the downtown** - The lack of retail outlets as a chief detriment to the success and vibrancy of downtown. They wanted to address this with the attraction of smaller-scale retail to the area. These groups were clear however to draw a distinction between the recommended small-scale retail and the
larger “Big Box” regional trade. It was clear in the opportunity scoring and group conversations that attracting “Big Box” regional retail has very little support.

5. **Building on current success** – The City should continue to build on its past successes. Retaining and attracting companies in sectors that are already thriving in Independence. Participants emphasized that the needs of current businesses in successful sectors should continue to be met and exceeded.

**Question 2**: If successful redevelopment of downtown includes the following, would you be supportive:

- Improved walkability
- Enhanced public realm
- Higher density housing
- More destination venues

Themes from Question 2 include:

1. **Maintaining the character of the community while allowing for a greater diversity of uses in downtown** – There is a need to permit a general easing of restrictions on building types and uses but this should be limited to the downtown area. There is a concern that the character of the community should be carefully considered when allowing for a mix-of-uses in downtown.

2. **The community is missing a demographic** – There is a general lack of young people in the community and this directly correlates with the cost and variety of housing. By allowing for a greater diversity and concentration of uses in the downtown, including different housing types, young people would have a greater opportunity to re-enter the community after college.

3. **Business start-ups are not included in our opportunities and should be given a place in the downtown** – Business start-ups can play an important role in economic development. Currently, the City has few locations for these types of businesses to grow. The downtown (or specifically the former Middle School) should be developed in a way that includes opportunities for business start-ups.

**Question 3**: Should the City invest in additional amenities that can be utilized by the local business community?

Themes from Questions 3 include:

1. **Lack of consensus on whether the city should invest in amenities for businesses** – Groups failed to reach general agreement on whether the City should be allocating resources on amenities designed specifically for businesses. Some groups mentioned the importance of businesses retention. Participants recognized the connection between a strong business community and the City’s ability to fund services. However, several participants did not see a clear role for the City in developing these amenities.

2. **A business recreation center would be powerful retention / attraction tool** – There is support for developing limited amenities for businesses and their employees, such as a recreation center. This could include the possibility of attracting a commercial chain such as L.A. Fitness or Bally’s Total Fitness. The City could potentially subsidize memberships, but not be involved in building the facility.

3. **Investment in amenities that accent the natural environment** – There are opportunities offered by the surrounding natural environment for additional trails and recreation. The City could help develop and highlight these amenities in the attraction and retention of business.
2. Who did we hear from?

The workshop gathered input from approximately twenty-nine participants. That number does not include volunteers, facilitators, or participants who did not sign an attendance sheet. The following are key points about workshop participation based upon exit questionnaire responses of 23 participants.

Characteristics of participants

The exit questionnaires provide insight into the demographic makeup of participants. This information is not intended to offer statistical validation of the process, but to understand the characteristics of those that participated (The exit questionnaire data reflects only those who responded, not all participants). Also, since not all participants answered every question, there may be variation in total responses among different topics.

Residency. Participants ranged in residency within the City from less than one year all the way to over 50 years. The largest group of participants has resided in the City between 30 and 39 years. They represented 24% of all participants. Sixty-two percent had lived in the community for longer than 20 years while 29% had resided in the community for less than a decade.

Age. Eighty-six percent of participants were older than 45 years of age. Only 14% identified as being younger than 45. When compared to the Census, the meeting’s age distribution skewed slightly older than the statistical reality.

Race. One hundred percent of participants identified as White / Caucasian. One participant identified as Middle Eastern in addition to White / Caucasian. This distribution aligns with the Census.

Income. The highest percentage of participants (53%) identified themselves as having household incomes exceeding $100,000 per year. Twenty percent identified having an income between $40,000 and $59,999, while the remaining 26% identified with the income range of $60,000- $79,999.

Educational Attainment. A significant number of participants (73%) identified as having a degree at or above a Bachelor’s degree. This included more than 60% of participants with a Masters or Ph. D. Compared to the Census, educational attainment reported by workshop participants skewed higher than expected. The Census counts 31% of Independence residents with Bachelor’s degree or above.
Opinions About the Workshops
The exit questionnaires polled participants about their interests and opinions about the workshop. The results indicate overwhelmingly high levels of satisfaction.

1. How did you hear about this workshop?
   - Around 45% of respondents indicated that they heard about the workshop through their email.
   - The community newsletter attracted three of the respondents.
   - Three participants also heard about the meeting from the first public workshop.

2. What interests or concerns caused you to attend this workshop?
Participants brought a variety of concerns to the workshops.
- The majority of respondents expressed general desire to learn more about the future growth and prosperity of Independence.

Satisfaction

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<td>Did you feel the information was presented in a clear manner?</td>
<td>91%</td>
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<td>Did you have an opportunity to fully express your ideas?</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>Were your ideas received and recorded appropriately?</td>
<td>96%</td>
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<td>Was the process fair to everyone in your small group?</td>
<td>96%</td>
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<td>Were you exposed to new ideas and concerns?</td>
<td>96%</td>
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<td>Will you continue to participate in the planning process?</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Rate the workshop length.

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<th>Too Long</th>
<th>Too Short</th>
<th>About Right</th>
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<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>91%</td>
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## Appendix

### 1. Opportunity grading exercise

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<tr>
<th><strong>1. Administrative Services, 4.7 avg. score</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Competitive with business operations and growth potential is strong. Will pair up well in conjunction with other opportunities.</td>
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<td>Low wage earner but provides excellent base.</td>
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<td>Clean businesses, high paying jobs, good growth potential as Randy Gross stated.</td>
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<td>High wages- low impact on City services.</td>
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<td>This already exists and should grow</td>
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<tr>
<td>With the new medical Mart and Convention center, meeting, planning and support services would be very appropriate.</td>
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<td>With 40% non- NE Ohio employers, is this truly a growth segment? Also space allocation per office worker is declining due to office sharing with no &quot;personal&quot; office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good area to grow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop this strong entity to match external market demands for these services</td>
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<td>Always a need- hotel and rec center and civic center can provide an appropriate venue.</td>
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<td>It is a high growth industry</td>
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<th><strong>2. Information Services, 4.7 avg. score</strong></th>
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<td>Higher wage earner- central location may be an asset to industry.</td>
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<td>Again, high paying jobs and clean industry.</td>
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<td>Industry Growth</td>
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<td>See above</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information security</td>
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<tr>
<td>good area to grow</td>
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<td>Match our office space with increasing growth of this field; particularly attract younger workers.</td>
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<td>no thoughts</td>
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<td>This is an important industry of growth</td>
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<th><strong>3. Tourism and Accommodation Services, 4.4 avg. score</strong></th>
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<td>This will go hand in hand with developing downtown. Target natural resources (metro parks, bike path) and gear other meetings, restaurants towards this area. May be impetus for people for people to stay and work here and buy local.</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Park connections</td>
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<td>There is a base of local retail that could support local tourism (Cleveland?)</td>
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<td>Hotels good downtown Cleveland is close.</td>
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<td>Have plenty of hotels. Could use a tourism office- No conferences downtown.</td>
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<td>We need more restaurants, perhaps a micro-brewery / urban winery or bar.</td>
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<td>Location good for conference, not someone from Chicago on vacation and had been to civic center for &lt;&lt;illegible&gt;&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support services for entire region. Strong need for hotels, restaurants, Downtown development.</td>
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<td>More dependent &lt;&lt;illegible&gt;&gt; economy/ tends to be more cyclical.</td>
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<td>Good lodging fare and location</td>
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Lodging and meeting event areas - an additional conference area would be beneficial to attract national meetings.

Location for events/meetings rental conference space that may or may not be hotel based.

Lodging meetings/conferences restaurants

lodging and restaurants- and close to Cleveland, but need more tourism here

Coordinate efforts and development and demand of Cleveland area, we are in natural <= >> due to our location.

Missing from area- many are using the internet refusing travel agencies- recommendation already here

Yes, it is <=Illegible>> to have meeting areas to attract business meetings.

### 4. Food industries, 3.8 avg. score

Reserved- what is potential to bring those high wage earners to stay and play and invest?

Everybody needs to eat

Feel we are overly abundant with eateries.

Again clean, quiet industry so continue to pursue

Existing restaurants attract

Catering for the above if implemented.

Not if that would be more trucks to transport load then no

Processing catering/ regional distribution

Not specifically attraction for here, unless non Frontage land to be used.

As long as this area does not grow disproportionately so we become too dependent upon it.

Could be a future endeavor

### 5. Oil & Gas / Extraction Industries, 3.8 avg. score

Management! This is growing in area and may pair up with admin and information services plus use of current natural resources.

Same as administrative services.

Not close enough to actual sites

Would not like to see this- Fracking here.

Again, good paying jobs clean industry- pursue.

Future is still controversial.

We have a reputation and it should not be associated with these controversial businesses.

Admin services, logistics

Not very familiar with this industry

Administration services- need to identify oil and gas can who work this area

We could tap into business in our region and have them headquarter here

### 6. Education, 4 avg. score

We are already doing this well!

KSU Podiatric Med

Not income producing- three local "trade" Colleges in town now.

Could be better than the ones already here

See all above comments

Would attract higher wage jobs.

We have a reputation and it should not be associated with these controversial businesses.

Access is a plus.

Regional branches for local college or distance learning.
Training vulnerable to online training
Will be needed to attract young professionals
Good to get more school, branch campus from main campus?
Develop a college community atmosphere; tap into community colleges and regional campuses.
Already have it at Cuyahoga County vocational school in Brecksville.
Yes, people are always refueled to learn and need places to do so.

7. Health Care Services, 4.6 avg. score

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<td>Good to get more school, branch campus from main campus?</td>
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<td>Develop a college community atmosphere; tap into community colleges and regional campuses.</td>
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<td>Already have it at Cuyahoga County vocational school in Brecksville.</td>
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<td>Yes, people are always refueled to learn and need places to do so.</td>
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However, this does not set us apart from other areas- these opportunities are all over. Perhaps concentration admin support and other home service only.

Strong growth in field

Cleveland Clinic. Rent or Buy TIF money?

City lacks "nursing" homes

See #6 for comments but what impacts will Obamacare have on this industry?

Possibly address long term care i.e. assisted living or nursing homes support services

Senior facility- Assisted living- Large hospital satellites would like to see more in town.

Admin support, home care admin, secondary care

Perfect match at health innovations center medical mart of downtown; we have proximity

Administration offices need to identify and sell on Independence.

Home health care services will be growing industry

8. Transportation Services, 3.4 avg. score

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<td>Yes, people are always refueled to learn and need places to do so.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This would be a potential opportunity that could work hand in hand with tourism services

Where would this be located?

Utilization of pleasant valley Rd.

Provided highway / rail access can be separated from downtown- support services may work.

This could be improved.

Depends on size of operations to utilize space effectively convention site.

See #6 comments take advantage of location of city at interstates.

No advantage to city as far as generating revenue compares to footprint of facility

Location presents opportunity.

Please avoid more tractor trailer companies

Showroom suites for local retailers

Too much traffic / trucks no airport

Materials moving, logistics/ warehouse/ wholesale, Aerospace, Air, TV, SVC showroom

uncertain of demand

No thoughts- may be a future endeavor

Where would we out these companies (showrooms)

9. Installation and Repair Services, 3.9 avg. score

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<tr>
<td>Yes, people are always refueled to learn and need places to do so.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Don’t see as much potential here! Unless paired up to support healthcare or other industries. Marketing and placement would be important.
Would require industrially zoned properties - may be enough available.
If certain types of services could be grouped or zoned with similar
Location is an asset.
Classy businesses would do wonders for our image. No industrial
Storefront repair shops may bring more people in to shop / eat.
Mechanical, IT Equipment
focus upon medical equipment in response to regional growth and needs
Need to identify Cos. Necessary for support of health care industry- fail and gas industries
Medical equipment businesses would be great and area of growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10. Professional &amp; Technical Services, 4.5 avg. score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High wages - low impact on community services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build on what we have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See above remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High - wage jobs/ professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey, Architects, environment engineers, geo-tech engineers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncertain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes engineers and other professionals</td>
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<tr>
<th>11. Protective Services, 3.9 avg. score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Businesses may face safer / residents feel safer if these are nearby- IF support service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure I understand the industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies that monitor fire / EMS / Police alarms billing services for the above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some opportunities as elsewhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety security, fire alarm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can serve our businesses community and that of surrounding areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective services would add diversification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12. Bio-Technology (IS / IT), 4.3 avg. score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But... this is something that has a future but may be hard to attract now. May be better to concentrate on other areas with goal in future to tie this in later date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to #2- ideal to promote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med mart may help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D to support medical field i.e. cancer research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Medical mart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This should grow with med centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great opportunity for institutional companies participating in medical mart and our hospital systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab space for regional / national health care operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support bio tech / R &amp; D need labs, brings high paying jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase presence of hospital systems and develop some of others tiers of unused Rockside Rd. Space for these labs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A future goal- need to identify how we can set this up.
Yes, always good to attract high paid professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. Regional Retail Trade, 2.3 avg. score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not large box unless have one specialty anchor like &quot;Whole Foods&quot; or &quot;Cabella's&quot;- Again- use what we have to springboard and attract businesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land to precious for this- rather have an industrial base that uses the land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not like to see department stores in our area. No mall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixing of business / big Box traffic traffic can be avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caveat- Regional draw to assist tourism. I.e. IKEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would this create or add congestion problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needs exploring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upscale market like a Trader Joe's or Whole Foods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target store developed space like crocker park/ Hudson 1st and Main.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home centers, category killers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough exists in close proximity within surrounding communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to do- big sale must be done to obtain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>14. Downtown, 4.6 avg. score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The sidewalks roll up at night and on the weekends. Need to attract more young people= entertainment/ restaurants, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not 250 housing units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need multi-use housing types to create critical mass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a &quot;downtown&quot; needed in the center of town or on Rockside Rd?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could use upgrading and could add more small stores would not care to see Crocker Park in Independence like the small town feel more like Chagrin Falls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookstore please. There are none within 5-10 miles of us. Theatre is a possibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High priority to revitalize community's ID.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown is poorly defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our downtown is nearly extinct. Something needs to be done to make it attractive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and entertainment, housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But small land area with which to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art culture/ design, entertainment, improved walkability, enhance public realm, high density housing, more destination venues. Downtown must be redeveloped including multi generation mixed use and condo cluster housing. Not senior housing exclusively. Art/ Culture may not be viable if you are suggesting galleries or entertainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalize- create a destination print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave to city- 100 rooftops seniors 150 rooftops condos (no apartments)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**What's Missing?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I think the city needs to attract whatever companies they can. With limited resources, I understand the need to focus on specific industries; however, I see this entire exercise as a waste of my 154 minutes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify how &quot;opportunity corridor&quot; can be an asset to community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that we need to be diversified- there is very little that would disapprove of as long as it makes Independence a desirable and upscale to maintain our desirability. Senior Housing!!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing (by our experts) this list of most important or feasible use for the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the old middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination category- we have hotels that hold events regularly- monthly- no &quot;City&quot; attraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior housing- not only does this meet needs of our residents, but if opens housing for new residents to enter our community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of opportunities that currently exist!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think a way to bring household to downtown like senior housing or mixed age housing and amenities. Also try to get medical building destination in downtown. Pass ordinances that require building renovations and offer incentives for that Downtown connection to the metroparks; a gateway to the metroparks through Independence. Business improvement areas, established in downtown and get federal funding, provide business owners &quot;condo&quot; office space that promotes ownership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2. Group prompt reactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any opportunities we missed? If so, what?</th>
<th>If successful redevelopment of downtown includes the following, would you be supportive?</th>
<th>Should the city invest in additional amenities that can be utilized by the local business community?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>legal/ Law firms</td>
<td>Improved walkability- not needed</td>
<td>Walking paths and pocket parks to eat lunch along Rockside Rd. Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare- Ancillary support services- Medical mart</td>
<td>Enhanced public realm</td>
<td>Shuttle service loop on Rockside Rd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity corridor- Governor Kasich- 490 to university- what roles can Indy take on this as an asset? But could be greater than 10 year down the road too.</td>
<td>Higher housing density</td>
<td>Allow business use of civic center meeting rooms on slow days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail in town- need people though, book store needed</td>
<td>More destination venues</td>
<td>Rec facilities (a pool, gym, etc.) meeting space, new public or open space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized school to use old middle school- say music conservatory school for example. Computer school would be a great asset for this to provide workers for businesses already in Indy.</td>
<td>Group is torn on if the downtown area actually needs to be redeveloped. Additional info is needed from the business district regarding why 10% feel the downtown area is important.</td>
<td>Meeting space- why must tax payers invest in it? No need we see- we have civic center field house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music would bring culture to the square; we have a theatrical community. Middle school could be updated with IT, lots reasons, free parking. Must make handicap accessible.</td>
<td>Is successful redevelopment of downtown includes would it be supportive of: improve walkability, enhanced public realm- buildings fronts, higher density housing, and more destination venues.</td>
<td>Rec Center for businesses- we need more information before saying yes or no. I suggest taking a survey of businesses- how many employees of businesses would be interested in a full or partial membership. City could create a fee structure, say company pays membership fee to have access then employees of said company pay a monthly fee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market school’s land lab as a destination and partner with national park develop this gradually; bring other schools in- clean educational. Put in visitors center at educational facility of land lab. Restrictions on traffic etc. to keep everyone happy land lab.</td>
<td>High density housing is not something the town has wanted or will accept. We believe that for this high density housing you need to put in housing stock comparable prices to what we now have. No section 8 housing! We would prefer to have a situation similar to Hudson, OH- Shop center but have high end apartments on 2nd floor.</td>
<td>Rec center- attracts a commercial fitness center- Bally’s for example, then channel people into this commercial facility. Rockside Woods by AAA putting in infrastructure there and maybe have a facility located there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockside rd.- restaurants accessibility to make it walkable. 1. Monorail installed; all infrastructures there. 2. Overhead system (bridge walkway) over Rockside Rd. 3. Go under Rockside - what about money? Too costly. Side note: Metro on 77 median stop so can go downtown (no to what see in D.C)</td>
<td>Agree- blend without destroying the past historical locations</td>
<td>Agree- city services offered to local businesses, increase revenue- wellness services (gym/pool), rental of facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towpath- Selig and national park- put in amenities downtown to capture money and people- Hemlock Trail to link with national park access</td>
<td>mixed use housing and retail- multigenerational v. senior housing</td>
<td>Private rec services- ice rink indoor, gyms. Include within office complexes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior housing is needed</td>
<td>Business improvement districts should be set up downtown. Sketch needed of 100 ways to change downtown.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional retail trade: need to be better developed</td>
<td>Education- need to grow and make use of opportunities currently here. Housing opportunities needed for students in these colleges- we are missing this opportunity!! These youngsters may stay and play here but need place to work and play. Reasonable housing and multifamily housing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem: 91% of stakeholders lease- building leaking/ not maintained/ older buildings need to retrofit buildings to attract them. We get income tax from people. Need to maintain what we have then move on!</td>
<td>Rec facilities, meeting space, new public or open space- no this is something for future focus on education- attract them downtown. Then transitional area needed from condos/ to starter homes to ... also cluster homes in all sizes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to keep / expand our opportunities we have currently. More state of art and cutting edge= upkeep of our amenities. Can we get building department to pass ordinance that requires higher standards? Better trim, doors, etc. Incentive to do it- in state programs to encourage. This may be difficult to achieve and scare away businesses.</td>
<td>Need to focus on housing and attract youth / seniors too.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps concentrate on attracting healthcare</td>
<td>Use middle school as business incubator. i.e., medical mart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make buildings more attractive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown- need to develop it! Ideas: middle school. Pair up with metroparks and make an image issue bonds, incentives to businesses. Focus: Gateway to metro parks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If successful redevelopment of downtown includes the following, would you be supportive of? Improved walkability enhanced public realm, higher density housing, more destination venues- full support. Get federal funding, historical grants/ loans, stay true to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific ideas opportunities for downtown development- what would work? Other community successes? Apartments/ condos/ cluster homes multi-generation v. senior housing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed use housing + Retail- retail down/ housing up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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MEMORANDUM
November 6, 2013

TO: Mr. Jeremy Rowan  
   Economic Development Director  
   City of Independence, OH

FROM: Randy Gross

SUBJECT: Target Marketing Outreach

This memorandum summarizes findings from some limited direct marketing outreach conducted on behalf of the City of Independence to professionals in the site selection industry and specific business or organizational interests. The purpose of this outreach was to test several assumptions regarding the City’s competitiveness for key industries, to identify key considerations for marketing within the target industry sectors, and to share information on Independence’s strategic advantages with potential partners or business investors. Findings from several of the more relevant interviews are summarized below.

Information Services / IT

Independence was shown to have competitive advantages as a location for the information services and IT sectors. The Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) recommended target marketing and business recruitment within this sector, through efforts to strengthen the City’s position. Outreach was conducted to site selection firms and individuals that specialize in the IT sector to test the City’s relative positioning and confirm key considerations for marketing. The following information was garnered through discussions with site selection specialists at Ginovus and Greyhill Advisors.

Type of Activity

Site selection specialists are primarily seeing activity within the “data center” arm of the IT sector. Data centers are large facilities typically designed to store data and accommodate computer operations, processing activities, and other telecommunications uses. Data centers tend to be more capital intensive and have lower labor densities, which is not as appropriate for growing Independence’s income tax-dependent fiscal base. The site selection specialists
do handle a variety of other IT companies, but data centers are among their larger clients at present.

Location Factors

IT businesses (other than data centers) are very dependent on such location factors as available talent and quality of life. IT companies need to be able to access engineers, programmers, and other highly-skilled professionals. These are “sophisticated” companies that require a high-quality labor force. This factor has become a serious challenge for many communities in the Midwest, especially in the “Rust Belt,” where perceptions are that the traditional manufacturing-based economy produces and retains a dearth of highly-skilled and educated engineering talent. An effort by Independence to engage with a university (as recommended in the EDSP) will be very important for supporting the City’s ability to attract and retain talent in the IT sector as well as in other industries. Quality of life factors relate to the type of community where qualified workers want to live, with a mix of housing opportunities and amenities.

Evolving Real Estate Requirements

The site specialists agreed that IT companies and other office-based clients are looking for “newer” space or build-to-suit space that meets the needs of modern cost-conscious business. Open plan, energy efficiency, flexibility – these are key factors in site selection for office-based IT and other businesses. Developers are now building more flexible spaces that can adapt easily as business and the economy shifts to the needs of different types of users. Thus, development is shifting away from the traditional office building in a suburban office park and towards more flexible products in a more urban environment.

Incentives

IT (especially data center uses) is looking for tax exemptions on high-value equipment and capital investments. This type of incentive is clearly less important now in Ohio, where the personal property tax has been eliminated. Highlighting Ohio’s freedom from equipment taxes can be very helpful in marketing to computer-oriented businesses that have significant investment in equipment for processing, data entry, and telecommunications. Many of Independence's businesses may have such capital investments.

While the site selection specialists were not aware of many labor-related incentives, they did state that many cities work with universities and state governments to ensure that recent graduates remain local as part of the talent pool. So, working with institutions through scholarships and post-graduate continuing education, internships and business collaborations is helpful.
University / Engineering & Technical Services

The EDSP identified engineering and technical services as a primary target for business recruitment and retention in Independence. There was also the recommendation that Independence pursue a “branch” or function of a university (e.g., engineering or computer sciences departments) to help strengthen the City’s reputation, build its homegrown talent pool, and increase collaborations with businesses. Related recommendations include the concept of a technology incubator that might be created in collaboration with an area university and established in less-competitive office space in the Rockside Road area. Another concept recommended the creation of an Independence Technology Council to move forward the City’s positioning for retaining and attracting IT companies. Again, a university could participate as an important driver or collaborator in such efforts.

Outreach was conducted to Case Western Reserve University, one of the premier institutions of higher education, to initiate a university relationship with the City of Independence and to help identify strategic collaborative concepts for further discussion. Initial discussions with the Office of Government and Community Relations suggest that the university’s representatives would be very open and excited by the prospect of building a relationship with the City and exploring various options for collaboration. It would be too early to discuss any specific commitments on behalf of the university to locate programs or facilities within Independence, or even to define a specific relationship. However, the university has expressed an interest in discussions to further these concepts, so it is in the City’s best interests to pursue these discussions and build on this initial outreach.

Food Production and Distribution

Food production was the only manufacturing industry recommended as a potential recruitment target for Independence. Certain food industries continue to expand, despite the overall decrease in manufacturing employment nationwide and within northeast Ohio. Independence is well-positioned for catering, distribution and food production to serve a regional market base. There are also opportunities to attract food production to the City’s two industrial areas, which are well-located near major interstate interchanges, providing regional transportation access. Outreach was conducted to Foodpro International, a food industry and site selection consulting firm, to discuss the various types of companies engaged in site selection and the key criteria for their search.
Type of Activity

Many of the larger companies engaged in site selection are fresh fruit and vegetable processing companies. These companies are typically locating on large-green field sites situated outside of municipal boundaries. The companies require cheap land, cheap water, good transportation access, and waste disposal systems (typically package plants designed for on-site use). More companies today are looking again at rail-related sites rather than depending solely on highway transportation. Independence is not competitive for these types of processing companies. However, the City can attract smaller companies engaged in packaging of snack foods and specialty merchandise, along with catered and prepared foods for regional distribution.

Location Factors

As noted previously, the larger processing plants are typically locating on large, green field sites away from municipal boundaries. In such locations, the companies can avoid issues with traffic congestion and waste disposal. But the types of food businesses appropriate for Independence are more dependent on regional market and labor force accessibility. Urban locations are also more attractive to smaller entrepreneurs and artisanal food businesses that serve the local and regional market. Sacramento, California has established a small food industry park that focuses on attracting smaller entrepreneurs developing local products like humus made from chick peas produced by small farms in the area.

Real Estate Requirements

The smaller companies can locate in older warehouses and industrial buildings or in new, multi-tenant spaces in an industrial park. Key requirements are lower costs, access to the transportation network, waste and water. There may be opportunities to encourage development of multi-tenant flex buildings within the two industrial areas in Independence, to help attract these entrepreneurial uses in a similar way that the City could encourage more office condominiums to attract ownership among smaller office tenants.

Incentives

The types of cash incentives that are typically showered on large manufacturing plants in green field sites are not as relevant to an urban or suburban location like Independence. Here, the same package of small business incentives may be appropriate for recruiting small food companies, along with assistance in branding and promotion of Independence-made products.