

**Visioning Session Summary Report  
Ferndale, Oakland County, Michigan  
May 6, 2002**

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## Introduction

On May 6, 2002, Main Street Oakland County and the National Main Street Center (NMSC), a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, conducted a visioning session in downtown Ferndale. The purpose of the session was to solicit and gather community ideas and opinions regarding the desired future for downtown Ferndale and to then craft a comprehensive vision statement. The following report provides a summary and interpretation of participant responses from the visioning session and includes a preliminary vision statement. The preliminary vision statement will serve as a starting point for the Ferndale DDA to develop a definitive and comprehensive vision statement which will be used as a foundation and guide for the DDA's annual and long-term strategic planning.

## Visioning Methodology

The visioning session, conducted during the evening of Monday, May 6, 2002, was held at Como's of Ferndale and was open to all residents of the community. The session was approximately two hours in duration and was well attended.

Participants in the visioning session were asked to write and then respond orally to questions posed by session facilitators from a written five-page questionnaire. The questionnaire required participants to visualize physical, social and economic conditions for downtown Ferndale ten years into the future. The facilitators then recorded the responses. Main Street Oakland County and the NMSC then summarized and interpreted session results for the drafting of a preliminary vision statement.

The preliminary vision statement is based on key words that MSOC and the NMSC believed were important to describing the consensus amongst session participants regarding issues raised in the questionnaire on the physical, social, and economic environment of the future Downtown Ferndale. The preliminary vision statement should serve as a starting point to deciding on how to reconcile any vision gaps that may exist and thus develop a final statement that can then guide the strategic planning efforts for the Ferndale DDA. It is important to note that some slight vision gaps between participants did emerge regarding vision scenarios. A vision gap, is a difference between a desired vision scenario and the revitalization methods used to achieve that scenario. For example, one community may envision their commercial district having upscale retail businesses but the existing businesses really want low-end promotions as the key revitalization strategy. In respect to the vision gaps summarized in this report, the NMSC is recommending that steps be taken by the Ferndale DDA to reconcile gaps so that a stronger community consensus can be developed.

The visioning questionnaire was divided into four principal questions with one extra that requested from participants to list key words on describing the future downtown Ferndale. Under each question below is a summary of all written responses by the participants; a number in parentheses signifies the number of times the particular response was written. All effort was made to guarantee the accuracy of the written responses.

## Session Summary: Visions for Downtown Ferndale

### A. How has the physical environment of Downtown Ferndale changed in ten years? (buildings, streetscape, open space)

#### *Observations*

- Strong consensus emerged that downtown Ferndale's future physical environment should include nicely rehabilitated and attractive storefronts and facades; access to public transit; a greener streetscape with more trees, flowers and parks; public art and sculptures; adequate parking facilities; and slightly more density with mixed-use developments in perhaps an expanded downtown north and south along Woodward Avenue and east and west along Nine Mile Road.
- The high number of responses regarding the need for more parking or better parking facilities should be weighed against how many retailers and merchants participated in the session. Generally, retailers and property owners will usually regard parking, or the lack of parking, as a critical issue.
- Though not receiving a large number of mentions, there were several general statements regarding slower traffic and more pedestrian improvements around Woodward Avenue.
- Some key words: *façade improvements; landscaping; trees; parks; parking; storefronts; public art; mixed-use building; density; pedestrian environment; expanded downtown boundaries.*

#### *Participant Responses*

- More trees, landscaping, streetscaping downtown/Woodward Avenue (17)
- Façade improvements (16)
- Light rail/mass transit system/access to transit (15)
- Parking structures (11)
- Clean and nice storefronts and displays (9)
- Expanded downtown boundaries/along Woodward and Nine Mile (9)
- Pocket parks, new park, open space, kid's park (8)
- Public artwork and sculpture (7)
- Parking facilities are adequate (6)
- Mixed uses with shops below and residents and professionals above (5)
- Higher density buildings/two/three story buildings (5)
- No vacant buildings (5)
- No litter/street and public spaces maintained (3)
- Bike path through downtown (3)
- Flowers/greener Nine-Mile Road (3)
- People to be able to cross Nine-Mile Road safely/one signal (3)
- Upper-story lofts (3)
- Benches/places to sit (3)
- Attractive banners (2)
- Wider downtown crosswalks (2)
- Compatible infill development (2)

- Consistent building look (2)
- Pedestrian orientation (2)
- Dog park (2)
- Place for gathering/park for special events (2)
- Outdoor building murals (2)
- Showcasing unique architecture (2)
- Pedestrian bridge over Woodward Avenue (2)
- Bike racks (2)

*Other statements*

- Building interiors improved
- Worst of old buildings razed/best preserved
- Local materials used and preserved
- Parking behind buildings
- Underground parking
- Shuttle bus up and down Nine Mile Road
- Warm and inviting downtown
- Shuttle along Woodward Avenue and downtown Detroit
- Downtown wayfinding signs
- Better looking business signs
- Road improvements
- Slower Woodward Avenue traffic
- No bike or skateboard riding
- Building alley sides are improved and attractive
- Good storefront awnings
- No vacant lot between Woodward and Marshall
- Expanded pedestrian zone east and west of Woodward
- Pedestrian tunnel under Woodward Avenue
- Welcome center
- Entrance signs to downtown
- Improved infrastructure

**B. How has the business environment of Downtown Ferndale changed in ten years? (retail and non-retail businesses)**

*Observations*

- A majority of participants listed a better quality of restaurants and shops; more outdoor cafes and dining opportunities; and more white collar/office jobs and other uses as a desired future downtown Ferndale business environment. Specialty shops (8), the better quality of restaurants and shops (15), and better mix of businesses (5) could be considered one and the same category.
- Despite the major categories of responses, there is wide diversity of replies when it comes to the types of businesses people would like to see come downtown, from galleries, movie theaters, and shoe stores to homefurnishings and even a high-end tobacco store.

- Only a few responses centered on the need to lessen the amount of bars and entertainment uses; several more, however, saw a need to diversify the types of entertainment and bars that currently exist in the downtown.
- There seems to be an event split between those who want national chain stores in downtown to those who do not want them. Interesting enough that only one national retailer was named in the responses.
- Key words: *quality; more stores and restaurants; outdoor dining, specialty shops; mixed-use; office uses; residential.*

### ***Participant Responses***

- Better quality of restaurants and shops (15)
- Outdoor cafes and dining (10)
- More white collar workers/office space/regional corporate employer (9)
- Specialty shops (8)
- Movie theater/performing arts (7)
- Better mix of businesses (5)
- Galleries (5)
- Bakery (5)
- Hip and trendy clothing and other boutiques (5)
- Mix of office, retail and residential (5)
- Bigger entertainment cluster, bars, clubs, blues, jazz, sports bars (5)
- Fashion stores contemporary to traditional (4)
- Second story lofts/loft artist spaces (4)
- Full service grocery (3)
- Book store (3)
- Shoe stores (3)
- Office supply store (3)
- Reduction or no nail salons (3)
- Small non-retail or minority/women owned businesses (2)
- Consistent store hours (2)
- Children-age stores (2)
- ATM/bank location (2)
- Less resale or low-end shops (2)
- Less focus on bars (2)
- Clubs and bars for mature patrons (2)
- Motown bar or club (2)
- No chain stores and restaurants (3)
- Gym/health club stores (2)
- Hotel (2)
- Pushcart vendors and produce stands (2)
- Toy store (2)
- One or two national chain stores (2)
- Card store (2)

### ***Other statements***

- Location-neutral non-retail businesses
- Mix of national regional and local retailers
- Professional engineers, architects and others allowed
- Rental rates are affordable
- High building occupancy
- Help to entrepreneurs
- Sporting good store
- Arts and crafts store
- Homefurnishings stores
- Wide range of businesses but serve 18 to 40 year-olds primarily
- More breakfast venues
- Organic food market
- Panera Bread
- Home décor renovation store
- Garden supply store
- High-end tobacconist/pipe shop
- Individually owned stores
- Less service-oriented businesses
- Women's clothing store
- Little big town?
- Businesses geared to middle and high-incomes
- Internet/cyber café
- Copy place
- Children's store
- Hardware store
- Camera/store/photo finishing store
- Businesses operate efficiently and with latest technology
- Tourist destination spot
- Wine shop
- Ethnic food stores
- Number of bars and clubs have stabilized
- Leather store
- Butcher store
- Independent video store
- Antique store
- Arts and crafts stores
- Fewer fly-by-night stores
- Gift stores
- Stores for mature/older patrons
- Old Navy will open its doors
- Active business recruitment and expansion activities by DDA
- Harmony between businesses and nearby homeowners
- No "rent to own" merchandisers
- Fewer specialty stores/more everyday goods stores

**C. What new activities and cultural events mark a new vitality for Downtown Ferndale in ten years? (promotions, special events, cultural**

## activities, marketing projects, neighborhood spirit)

### *Observations*

- Again, like above, there was a wide diversity of responses when it comes to the types of events and activities session participants would like to see in the downtown ten years in the future. However, a majority of responses focused on music festivals ranging from the existing blues festivals to new jazz events and concerts for kids.
- Other responses centered on the need to have events that celebrate the community's diversity, others that highlight art, and to focus energy on improving the Taste of Ferndale.
- Key words: *music; art fairs; Taste of Ferndale; street fairs; children's' events; ethnic festivals; social interaction.*

### *Participant Responses*

- Music festivals (10)
- Bigger and better Taste of Ferndale (8)
- Bigger art fair/arts shows/galleries working together (6)
- Street fairs for artwork, antiques and crafts (6)
- Children's festival/youth festival/concerts/Kids Day (5)
- Outdoor movie festivals (4)
- Sidewalk sales events (4)
- Ethnic festivals/Irish/Latin (4)
- More social interaction/neighborhood/community pride (4)
- Good downtown marketing projects (3)
- Christmas fairs/holiday events (3)
- Jazz on Main/festival (3)
- Family Fun Weekends/events (3)
- Bigger and better Pridefest (3)
- Block parties (3)
- Christmas/after hour events/evening retail promotion (3)
- Multicultural holiday events (2)
- Event celebrating diversity (2)
- Store-to-store trick or treating (2)
- High level of community spirit (2)
- More of city residents enjoy and use downtown (2)
- Business owners work together/on events (2)
- Ferndale residents support/shop and dine downtown (2)
- Garden/flower show or home tours (2)

### *Other statements*

- Blues festival
- Street dances
- Labor day and Fourth of July parades

- Winter festival/ice sculptures
- Outdoor artists
- “Swines on Nine Mile”
- Harvest festival
- Oktoberfest
- Banner-making contest
- Ombudsman on the street
- Silent Auction fundraiser
- Midnight Madness sales
- New park space to hold downtown events
- Transit center area to hold events
- More retail promotions
- High involvement of all stakeholders
- Person in charge of downtown marketing
- Festivals have grown and increased in-store sales because of events
- Downtown revitalization spirit
- More better events, less ineffective ones
- Historic building tours
- Business crawl event
- Health-o-Ramas
- Schools-oriented events
- Progressive dinners
- Dream Cruise is brought under control
- DDA sponsored fireworks Martin Road Park
- Community with a touch of class
- Metro Detroit storytelling festival
- Sand sculpture competition in the beach at Nine Mile Road
- Topiary trimming events
- Mardi Gras
- St. Patrick’s Day
- Events that honor community organizations

**D. What strengths define Downtown Ferndale currently and ten years in the future? (physical, economic, social and institutional assets).**

***Observations***

- Again, a wide array of responses from participants point to much possible future strengths for downtown Ferndale. The largest number of responses went to a variety of eating and retail establishments (13); a safe downtown environment, its ethnic and cultural diversity; and its location. Somewhat ironically, these are many of downtown Ferndale’s current strengths.
- Key words: *variety; safe; ethnic and cultural diversity; location; friendly; preservation; vitality; working together; festivals and events; walkable, compact; strong DDA; streetscape improvements; unique; pride.*

### *Participant Responses*

- Variety of retail and eating establishments (13)
- Safe, low crime with good police protection (7)
- Ethnic and cultural diversity (6)
- Ferndale location in southeast Michigan/freeways/Woodward Avenue (6)
- Friendly and courteous business owners and residents/customer service (4)
- Streetscape improvements (4)
- Vintage architecture preserved (4)
- Business owners working together (3)
- Vitality and liveliness (3)
- DDA is strong and vital/ongoing downtown management (3)
- Festivals and events (3)
- Walkable and compact downtown (3)
- Love for the downtown by businesses and residents/pride (3)
- Unique identity (2)
- Outdoor beauty and flowers (2)
- New park (2)
- Strong marketing activities (2)
- Increased tax revenues to the City (2)
- Plenty of parking (2)
- Access to parking but not a sea of parking (2)
- Clean (2)
- Great niche/base of retailing (2)
- Upgraded entertainment clusters (2)
- Small town in big city (2)

### *Other statements*

- Pedestrian friendly
- Planter program
- More public art.
- Design a bench contest
- Businesses open on Sunday
- Reputable food markets
- Sense of history
- “Artsy”, “trendy” image
- Good image in the region
- Charming downtown
- High level of community participation
- Downtown is busy with people (1)
- Variety of people patronize downtown
- Mix of office, professional, retail and residential uses
- Urban sophistication
- Woodward Avenue is no longer a detriment/barrier
- Downtown’s historic value
- Lots of community events
- Diverse experience

- Diverse and liberal/tolerant
- Long-term businesses
- Age of residents
- Music hub or region
- No corporate takeover of real estate
- Strong special events
- Strong gay community
- Blue Nile and Assaggi are around and successful
- Ferndale Center Building is beautiful
- Dedicated business owners
- Fun things to do
- Old Navy as anchor
- Upgraded city and library facilities
- Improved infrastructure
- Increased budgets for special events
- Affordable
- Classy storefronts and buildings
- Young and successful families
- Strong Ferndale Historical Society
- High employment rate
- Strong educational system
- Mixed-use
- Children artwork displays
- Unity among city officials

## **E. Ten Descriptive Words**

Following the four questions above, each participant was asked to list ten separate words to describe the future downtown Ferndale. Since this was conducted at the very end of the session when people started to leave, it is estimated the only less than a quarter of the session participants had actually written down ten words. This portion of the visioning session was meant to see which words confirm what was mentioned in the previous questions.

- Accommodating
- Accessible (2)
- Active
- Appeal (2)
- Artistic
- Attractive
- Bakery
- Beautiful
- Busy
- Community (2)
- Cultural (2)
- Dense
- Destination
- Diverse (business and cultural) (9)

- Earthy
- Eclectic
- Eco-friendly/green (4)
- Excellence
- Fun
- Family-oriented (2)
- Focused
- Friendly (4)
- Good neighbors
- Happening
- Historical
- Honest
- Independent stores
- Individualistic (2)
- Identity
- Jazz
- Loft housing
- Luscious
- Mixed-use
- No chain stores
- Parking
- Parks
- Place
- Progressive
- Real
- Rich
- Small town charm
- State of mind
- Technology
- Theater/movies
- Safe and clean (4)
- Setting the standard
- Strong
- Specialty (2)
- Tolerance
- Unique
- Variety
- Welcoming

## **Reconciling Vision Gaps**

### ***Observations***

- Upon analyzing the responses, there are only slight vision gaps: one between those who want some national chains stores in downtown Ferndale and those who do not; second between those who want more density in downtown to those who want more green space. Fortunately, most vision gaps are not mutually exclusive concerns so they can be successfully reconciled. In other words, the Ferndale community could consider a balance between national chains and independents and devote time to

conduct serious land use planning to see where new mixed-use development and parking structures, as well as a new park and other green space could be suitably located

## Preliminary Vision Statement

With workshop participant responses and the selection of key words, the NMSC has crafted a preliminary vision statement. This statement is intended to be the starting point for the community to deliberate and determine the final version. The statement is as follows (words in bold are key words):

*In the year 2012, downtown Ferndale will be a vibrant business district with an attractive and pleasing environment and a diverse and vital economy that services its community residents and beyond.*

*Aesthetically, downtown Ferndale distinguishing architecture will be maintained, **enhanced**, and rehabilitated for current and new uses. **Storefronts and facades** will also be rehabilitated with designs that reflect the **diversity** and quality of the businesses. New uses will not just be confined to the storefront level but to the upper stories where residential and office uses will be encouraged. There will be additional open space, or a public plaza or gathering space, with pedestrian links into the surrounding neighborhoods and accessible **mass transit facilities**; and an enhanced **streetscape**, with new landscaping, additional **trees** and lighting, street furniture, and public amenities that will attract pedestrians and neighborhood activities to the district. The public realm will also be routinely maintained and shoppers will feel secure with low crime. Pedestrian and traffic improvements will be made to Woodward Avenue so as to encourage pedestrians to visit both ends of Nine Mile Road. There will be opportunities for new commercial and mixed-use developments in and around downtown Ferndale occurring at sites that will strengthen the pedestrian orientation of the district and will be designed within the context of the existing architecture. **Parking** will be **accessible** and perhaps structured or decked parking facilities will be constructed.*

*Downtown Ferndale will support a mixture of uses from small independent **specialty stores, restaurants, expanded entertainment venues, upper-story offices and residences** to enterprises that reflect the ethnic and cultural **diversity** of the community. There will be a comprehensive program of promotions and social activities that enhance the quality of life for all people, whether **children** or adults, in downtown Ferndale. Undertaking promotion and social activity efforts will be achieved by a strong partnership between the **retailers**, property owners, the **Ferndale DDA** and other community organizations and entities. Promotions will take the range of regular traffic-building **events** and special **festivals, including the Taste of Ferndale**, that celebrate music, the holidays, and the community's ethnic, cultural and lifestyle **diversity**.*

*Downtown Ferndale has a vast number of strengths and assets in the year 2012. These strengths will translate into specific values that the Ferndale community will hold as important for guiding principles in future revitalization and development. The residents value the **uniqueness** and **diversity** in downtown Ferndale's existing **architecture, uses, stores and festivals**; the strong and active community institutions such as the **Ferndale Downtown Development Authority**; and the tremendous **commitment** on part of all stakeholders and neighborhood residents to better shape Ferndale's future. Ferndale will also support its Main Street program with a large number of volunteers participating from all segments of the neighborhood and Chicago. The program manager, assisted by appropriate staff support, will help direct and manage the program. The Main Street program will have developed strong partnerships with the City of Chicago, Ferndale Chamber of Commerce and other community-based organizations to accomplish the revitalization of Downtown Ferndale."*

## Next Steps

- # **Reconcile gaps in vision.** Ferndale DDA should decide in what ways the gaps in vision should be reconciled. Once reconciliation is complete, decide on a final vision statement.
- # **Formally adopt and publicize.** The DDA board and Main Street committees should formally adopt the statement. The statement should then formally announced and promoted through local media, work plan documents and other marketing documents.

And the process should not stop there! The vision can be annually reviewed, during annual work planning sessions, to gauge and measure its appropriateness to changing conditions and circumstances.