



DOWNTOWN **BETHANY**

VISION PLAN



2010



Downtown Bethany Vision Plan Liberty Township, Butler County, Ohio

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Special thanks to the staff at Bethany United Methodist Church for hosting the public open house meeting on September 17, 2009.



Executive Summary

Bethany has been historically considered the “downtown” of Liberty Township, but has seen a gradual decline over the past four decades. This has occurred in contrast to the subdivisions and new commercial development which has sprung up around Bethany during this same time period. The aim of the Downtown Bethany Area Plan is to produce a clear plan document which outlines achievable goals for the revitalization of Downtown Bethany into a thriving, community oriented gathering spot. When put into action, the plan will result in a vibrant and sustainable downtown, consistent in design, sensitive to surrounding uses, and reflecting the community’s desires, which will lend positively to the identity of Downtown Bethany and Liberty Township.

This plan is conceived as an addendum to the Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan for the purpose of further defining the Township’s goals and objectives relating to development in the area known as “Downtown Bethany”. The Downtown Bethany Vision Plan is meant to be a statement outlining a consensus idea of what the Bethany area should become, and steps that might be taken to bring that idea to fruition.

The Plan takes a look at the current conditions within the plan study area. Specifically, the plan analyzes residential and business demographics within a two and five mile market area, the current state of traffic and transportation network, utilities, property size and properties identified as historical in the Comprehensive Plan, current zoning regulations, and applicable statements in the Comprehensive Plan. From this analysis, goals and specific plan objectives were drafted to guide the formation of the Concept Vision Plan and specific implementation strategies.

Plan Goals

- Establish an identity for Downtown Bethany and promote that identity through a cohesive vision or aesthetic.
- Provide for proper transition between the commercial corridor and adjacent residential uses.
- Create a connected and walkable Downtown Bethany.
- Find ways to promote businesses in the Downtown Bethany area.

Plan Objectives

- Establish a Bethany Business Association / Business Incubator
- Evaluate existing zoning regulations and zoning district boundaries
- Develop a decision making framework for handling historic properties – what measures to take to protect certain properties, and under which situations to enact these measures
- Investigate avenues, both public and privately driven, to accomplish the desired vision for Downtown Bethany
- Create a Mission Statement for the Downtown Bethany Area Plan



- Provide a strategy to complete and improve pedestrian infrastructure in Bethany
- Evaluate including a community gathering space and amenities, possibly in the form of a park, civic building, streetscape, etc.
- Evaluate the required residential mass needed to support the commercial corridor, and how residential use might be incorporated into the vision for Downtown Bethany
- Provide a strategy to provide the necessary parking to service the area in a functional and attractive way
- Evaluate the prospect of relocating or burying above ground utilities
- Evaluate options and possible locations for planned access drives



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Introduction

Bethany, located along Cincinnati-Dayton Road, south of Princeton Road, has historically been considered the “downtown” of Liberty Township. The twentieth century saw a gradual decline, as Bethany slowly lost most of its businesses, and both the town hall and post office. While other areas have recently blossomed into the Township’s commerce centers, Bethany still retains some very important social institutions, such as Bethany United Methodist Church, Wellspring Community Church, and both Lakota East High School and Freshman School. With all of these community institutions still in Bethany, a resurgence of commercial activity and the restoration of Bethany as the identified “downtown” of Liberty Township is certainly possible

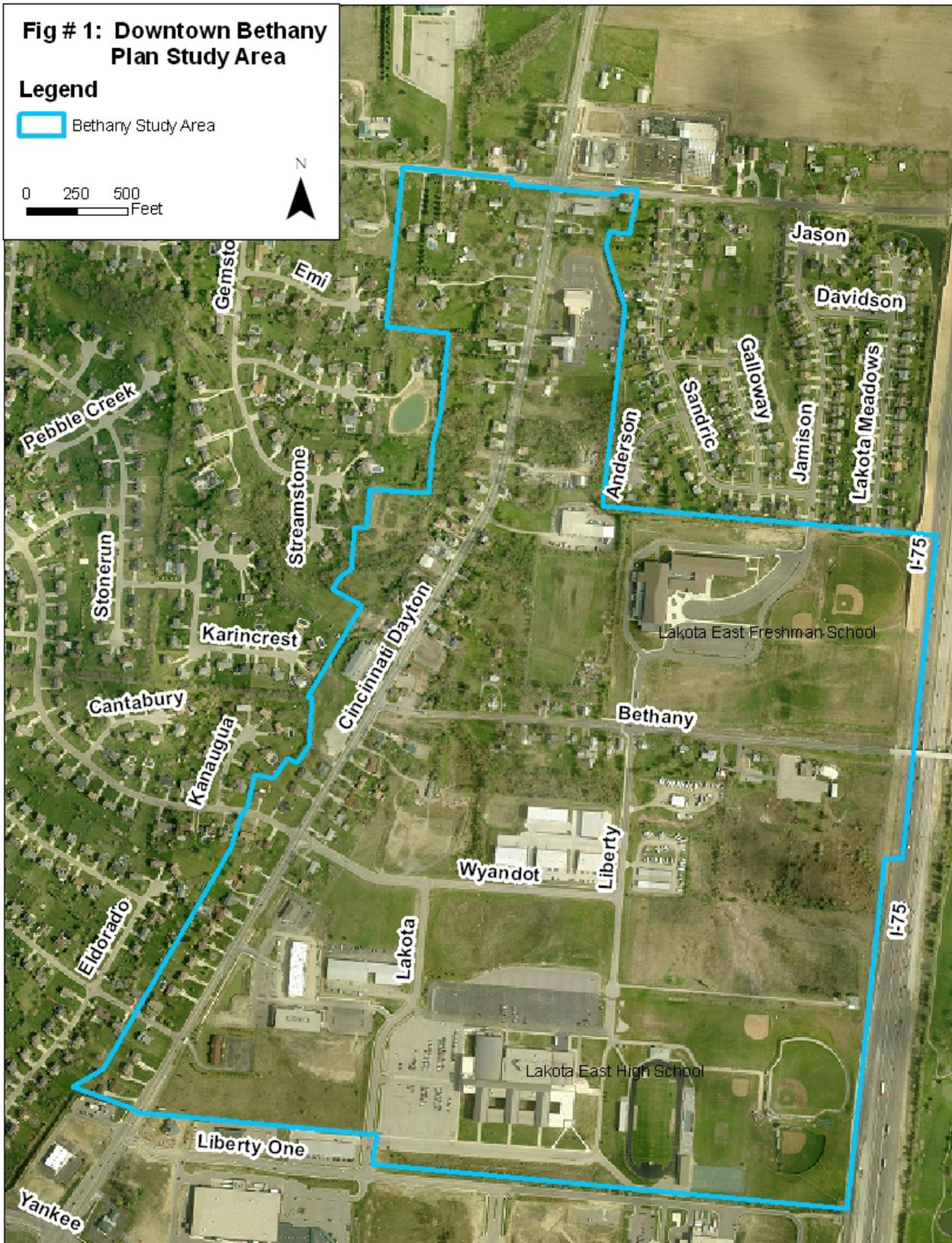


Bethany United Methodist Church, established in 1809. The original building shown above was built in 1875.

In 1797, John Beatty settled in the location where Bethany would later be, and soon after started the first business in the township – the Beatty Tavern. The town was platted in 1822, and quickly grew due to the Great Miami Turnpike (the original name for Cincinnati-Dayton Road). Home to blacksmiths, wagon-makers, butchers, and supply stores, Bethany served all of Liberty Township as well as portions of the surrounding area. Being a center for commerce and local tradesmen for the surrounding rural settlements, its role as downtown for the local community was solidified when the post office was moved there from nearby Huntsville in June of 1844. Following the construction of Bethany United Methodist Church (the sanctuary pictured above) in 1849, the original wooden church was used as Town Hall. The growing town reached its peak in the 1880’s when entrepreneurs like J.O. Wyle ran multiple businesses in Bethany and the soaring bell tower of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church stood as the town’s most impressive landmark.



The intersection of Bethany Road and Cincinnati-Dayton Road.





Following a century of gradual evolution and decline, Bethany is now a mixed area of single and two family houses, with scattered commercial properties of various types. One element that has remained is a concentration of social / community institutions with Bethany United Methodist Church, Lakota East High School and Freshman School, and Wellspring Community Church.

Re-development in Downtown Bethany is challenged mainly by the small lot sizes and existing building stock prevalent in much of the area of study. Seemingly, the lack of shovel ready building sites and the number of properties needed to assemble a viable commercial or mixed-use development has caused the most recent wave of new development to leap-frog Downtown Bethany. New storm water requirements have made development of small lots for commercial especially difficult. Traffic volumes and speed along Cincinnati-Dayton Rd., along with an incomplete system of sidewalks impedes pedestrian access in Downtown Bethany. It is apparent to the Township that a strategy to address these hurdles is needed to make quality redevelopment of Downtown Bethany viable. Bethany is still home to Lakota East High School and Freshman School, along with two important churches. These institutions provide an important anchor or presence within the local community which could be an important asset to build on.

Current Conditions

This section of the Downtown Bethany Vision Plan looks at the current conditions of the plan study area. The specific areas being investigated are: demographics, both population and economic, transportation, utilities, properties, including a look at properties with historical significance, current zoning regulations, and a look at specific directives of the 2006 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan as they relate to the Bethany area. Through this information, specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities will present themselves, and serve to guide the objectives and strategies outlined in this vision plan.

Demographics

The purpose of investigating the business and residential demographics of the area in and around Bethany is to uncover information about the projected market. For this study we looked at both the two mile and five mile radii. Although, different businesses draw from different sized market areas, the market radii used should provide useful information to business and property interests as well. All of the data for this analysis has been provided by Decision Data Resources in February 2009, through the Butler County Department of Development.

The data shows that within the two mile radius, there are 13,789 residents, living in 4,225 households, for an average household size of 3.26. In the five mile radius, there are 106,225 residents living in 34,894 households, for an average household size of 3.04. This gives a population density of 1,098 persons per square mile for the two mile, and 1,353 persons per square mile for the five mile. For reference, Butler County has an overall population density of 713 persons per square mile, and 281 persons per square mile for the State of Ohio. Also average HH size for the study area is above the average for Butler County (2.60) and the state (2.48). These numbers suggest a mostly developed area of predominantly single-family detached housing occupied by a high number of families with children.

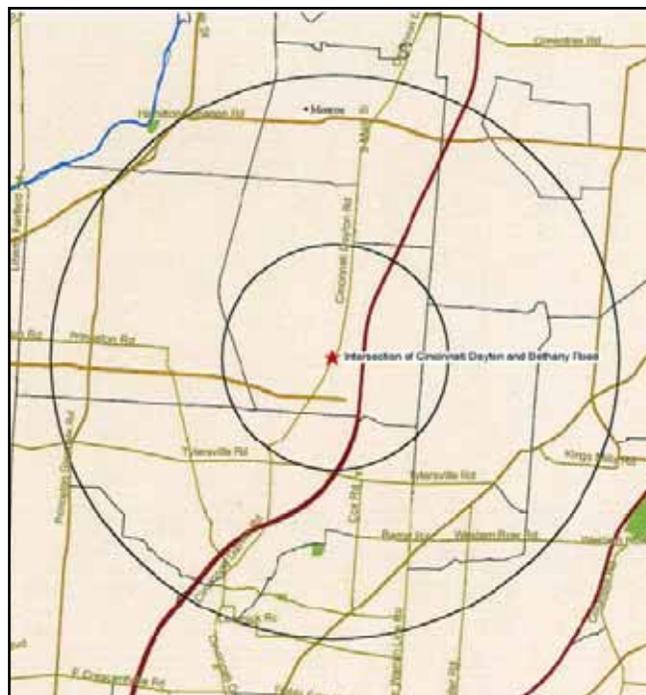


Fig #2: Demographics Radii, 2 and 5 mile

Median household income is \$93,466 for the two mile radius and \$90,379 for the five mile radius, both figures are significantly above the



county (\$53,335) and state figures (\$46,645). The figures point to a demographic which is relatively affluent, with significant disposable income.

The housing within the study area is primarily owner occupied at 77% within the five mile radius. This supports the observation that the area is mostly single family detached homes.

The business statistics show that within the two mile radius there are 333 businesses which employ 4,430. The five mile radius is shown to contain 2,886 businesses which employ 38,243. These numbers point to a thriving local business community which has the needs and ability to support additional service businesses like restaurants (both lunch and dinner), copy service, shipping outlets, and business supplies and services. The average size of businesses in this study area is 13 employees. This shows that small businesses are currently thriving in this market.

The above population density figures dispel any lingering notions that Liberty Township, as a whole, is a rural area. In fact, these numbers show a significant population density, which could support many more businesses than are currently in the local area. This population, based on average household income data, likely possesses a significant amount of disposable income and would provide a market for premium goods and services. Based on the above, there appears to be a market for additional commercial development in Bethany to serve the local population.

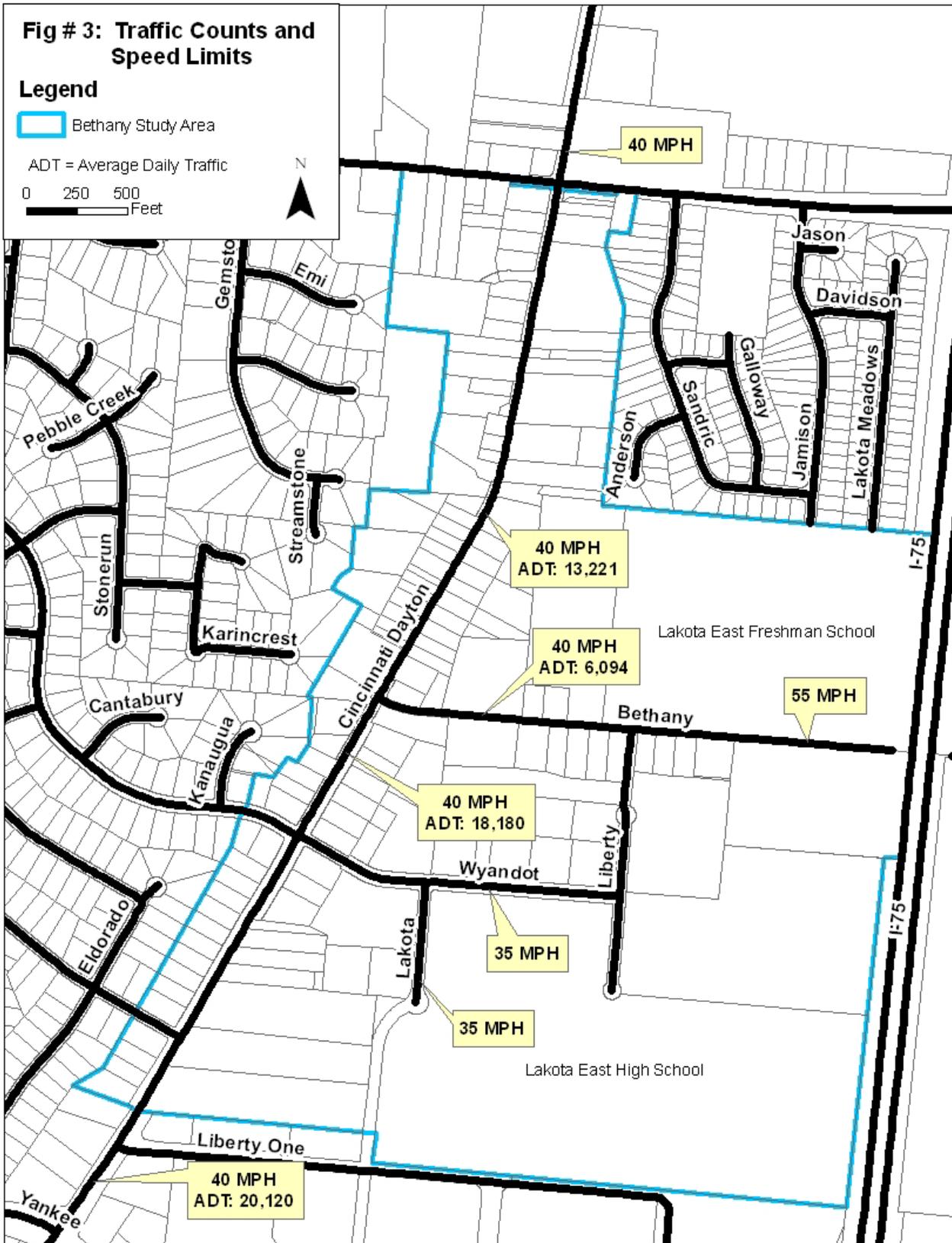
The full content of the demographics data sheets can be found in Appendix A of this document.

Transportation

There are significant traffic peaks during the morning and evening rush hour, as Cincinnati-Dayton Road is the main arterial leading to Lakota East High School, SR 129, and I-75. The posted speed limit on Cincinnati-Dayton Road is 40 MPH, yet due to wide travel lanes and infrequent traffic signals, traffic often moves significantly faster. Traffic volumes between Bethany Road and Liberty Way are such that backups occur frequently during rush hour (southbound in the AM, northbound in the PM).

To alleviate the congestion, Butler County Plans on extending a second northbound lane on Cincinnati-Dayton Road from Liberty One Drive to Bethany Road to alleviate the backups seen at the Yankee Road intersection. This additional lane, planned for 2010, should provide the needed capacity to reduce north bound P.M. traffic backups south of the Bethany study area. Other recent road projects have improved traffic flow and connectivity in the area. These projects include:

- Yankee Road extension to Liberty One Drive (in front of Children's Hospital)
- Liberty One Drive widening
- Lakota Lane extension to Liberty One Drive
- Liberty Ct. extension to Bethany Road





In 2007, Butler County adopted its latest update of the County Thoroughfare Plan. This plan establishes a “short range, mid-range, and long-range approach to our future roadway needs.” The Plan is a guide to planners, engineers, officials, and developers, so future projects may be coordinated to provide needed improvements to the roadway network, for the public benefit.

Below is the portion of the County Thoroughfare Plan in the area around Bethany. There are some new connectors proposed in the area, most notably, the Cox Road Extension on the east side of I-75.

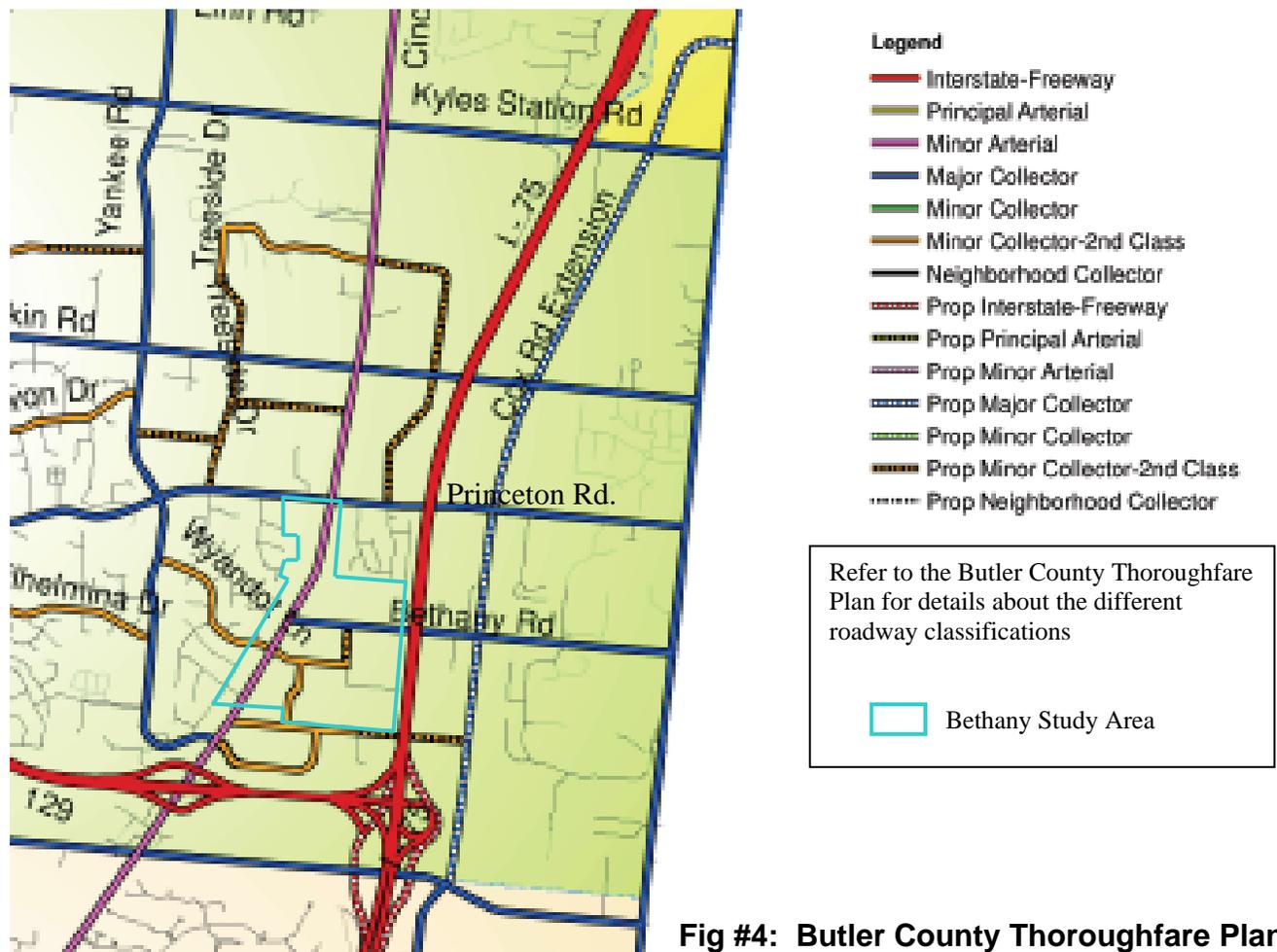


Fig #4: Butler County Thoroughfare Plan

Future roadway improvements recommended by the Butler County Thoroughfare Plan, relative to our study area, which occur in the 0-5 year time frame have already been completed. These projects were the Cox Road Extension north to the golf course and the widening of the Bethany Road Bridge over I-75 to three lanes with a bike lane. However, a project not listed in the plan, adding an additional northbound lane to Cincinnati-Dayton Road between Liberty One Drive and Bethany Road, is expected to proceed in the summer of 2010. Future projects proposed in the

study area occur on the 5-10 year time-frame, which are the completion of the Cox Road Extension and adding one lane to Bethany Road.

In the longer term, the Butler County Engineer's Office indicates a future need for dual lanes in both the northbound and southbound direction on Cincinnati-Dayton Road. This, along with potential roundabouts or improved intersections at Princeton and Bethany Roads would pose big changes in Downtown Bethany. The potential future right-of-way would be 80 feet (40 foot half from current centerline) and would include 12 foot interior travel lanes, 11 foot curb travel lanes / parking lanes, a 2.5 foot gutter and curb, and 14.5 foot sidewalk / utility easement. When development occurs in this section of Cincinnati-Dayton Road, allowances for this future right-of-way would need to be taken into account.

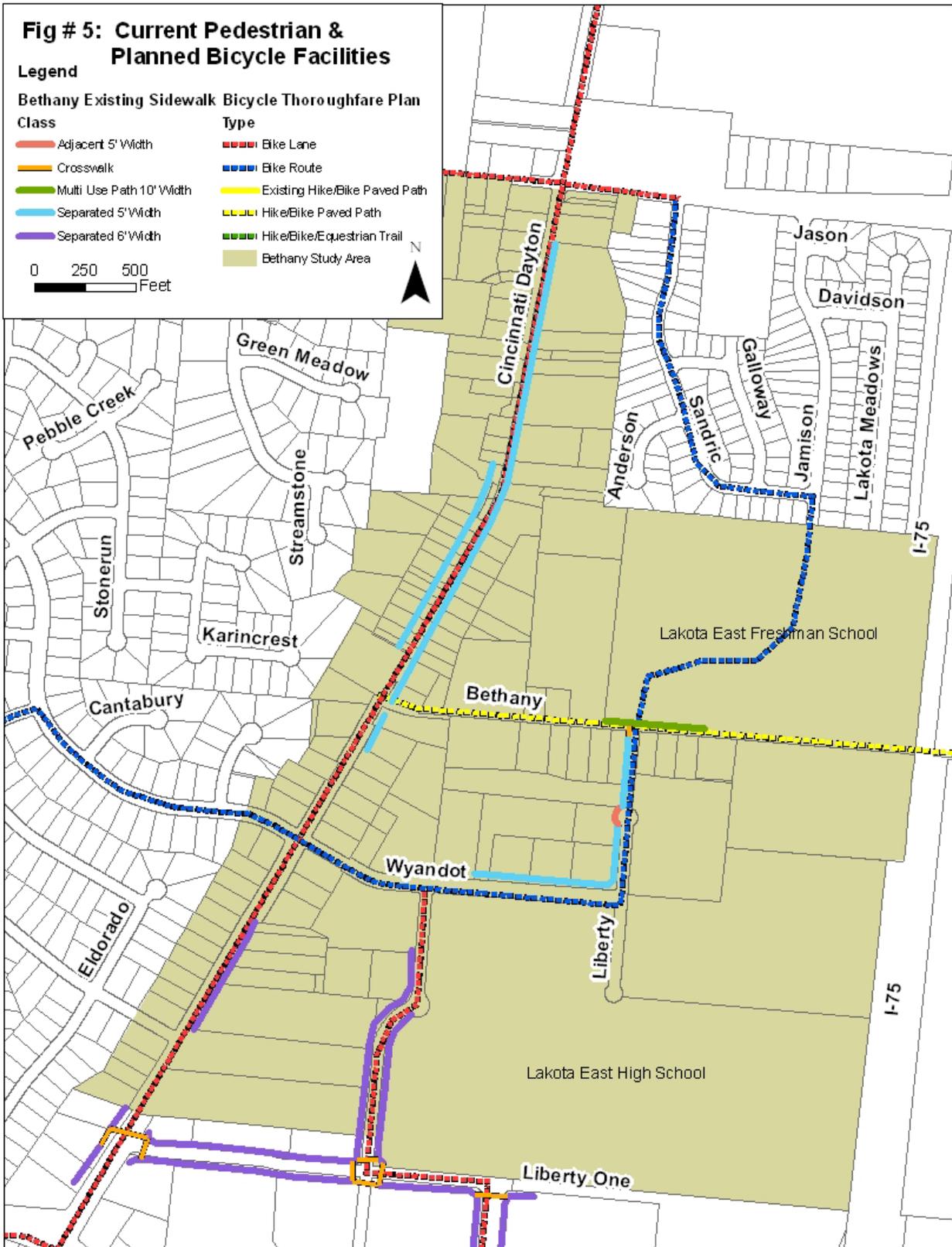
Pedestrian Accessibility

Pedestrian accessibility needs to be improved in the Downtown Bethany area. There are sections of sidewalk present along the Cincinnati Dayton Road corridor; however, these segments do not provide any useful connectivity within, or outside of the area. Also, with existing sidewalk segments being narrow, perforated by driveways, with a lack of lighting and benches, pedestrian comfort is also an issue. The following list outlines specific items to be addressed regarding pedestrian infrastructure:

- Lack of connected sidewalks
- Existing sidewalks are narrow
- Traffic volumes
- Speed of traffic
- Limited crossings / crosswalks
- Lack of lighting
- Lack of benches



The map on the following page shows both the existing sidewalk segments within the study area, as well as planned bicycle facilities as shown in the 2006 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan. The aim is to fill in the necessary infrastructure to provide adequate pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between Downtown Bethany and the surrounding community.



Utilities

Above ground electricity, cable and telephone are mounted on poles in the right of way on the east and portions of the west sides of Cincinnati-Dayton Road, the north side of Bethany road, the south side of Wyandot. All utilities around the High School are underground. Above ground utilities, along with the poles they are mounted to, pose visual clutter in the Bethany area. The poles are located in the road right-of-way, and could be struck by a vehicle. The location of these utilities above ground increases the likelihood of power outages. Also, when roadway widening is necessary, the utilities must be relocated.



Above ground utilities along Cincinnati-Dayton Road at Bethany Road. Above ground utilities pose visual clutter along Cincinnati-Dayton Road.

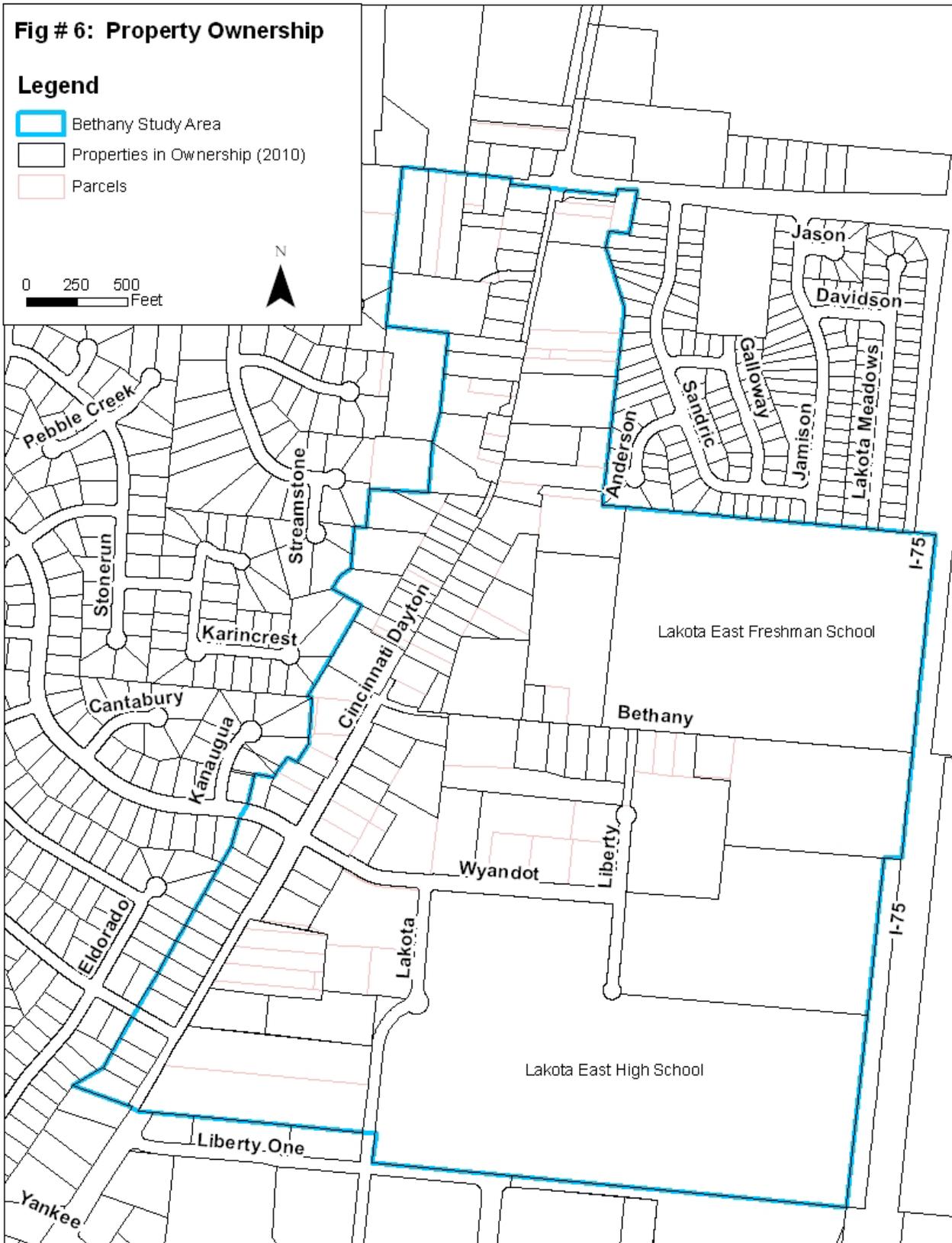
Storm water management is expected to be the most challenging aspect of providing utilities within Downtown Bethany. Current EPA regulations require treatment for water quality, which, in most cases, involves some surface storm water feature. In an area with many small lots, where space is at a premium, dedicating a significant portion of a lot to meet storm water requirements may prove to be a very high hurdle for developers to overcome.

Every property in the study area has access to both water and sanitary sewer. These are not expected to be any issue or hindrance to future development / redevelopment.

Properties

Currently, Bethany is home to a diverse conglomeration of original 19th century homes and buildings, run-down infill commercial buildings, non-descript single and multi-family homes, and new commercial construction. The properties in Bethany represent widely varying degrees of upkeep and repair. While some property owners do a good job of keeping their property up, others seem content to let their properties go untended and fall further into disrepair. Derelict properties within Bethany damage the overall look of the area, degrade the value of neighboring properties, and discourage meaningful private investment in Bethany.

The map on the following page shows the distinct properties in the study area, as opposed to the parcels. Property lines shown in black form groups of parcels that are in common ownership. Even looking at the area from this perspective, there are portions of the study area in which the individual parcels are quite small and not already consolidated under common ownership – a situation that makes redevelopment difficult.



Historical Properties

There are several properties in Bethany which have been identified in the Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan as being properties of historic significance. The map on the next page indicates the location of these properties. These properties are a connection to the community's past. They also provide a unique and authentic character to the area that cannot be fully replicated in new construction.

A survey of the properties indicated on the map on the following page was conducted in order to collect basic information about these properties. As of April 2010, none of these properties have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The numbers on the map correspond to detailed descriptions of each property found in the Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan. The following observations on the properties were made:

- Known historic significance
- Age of house or structure
- Floor area
- Current building setbacks
- Lot access
- Building condition
- List or potential uses

Specific data sheets on each of the designated properties can be found in Appendix B of this document.







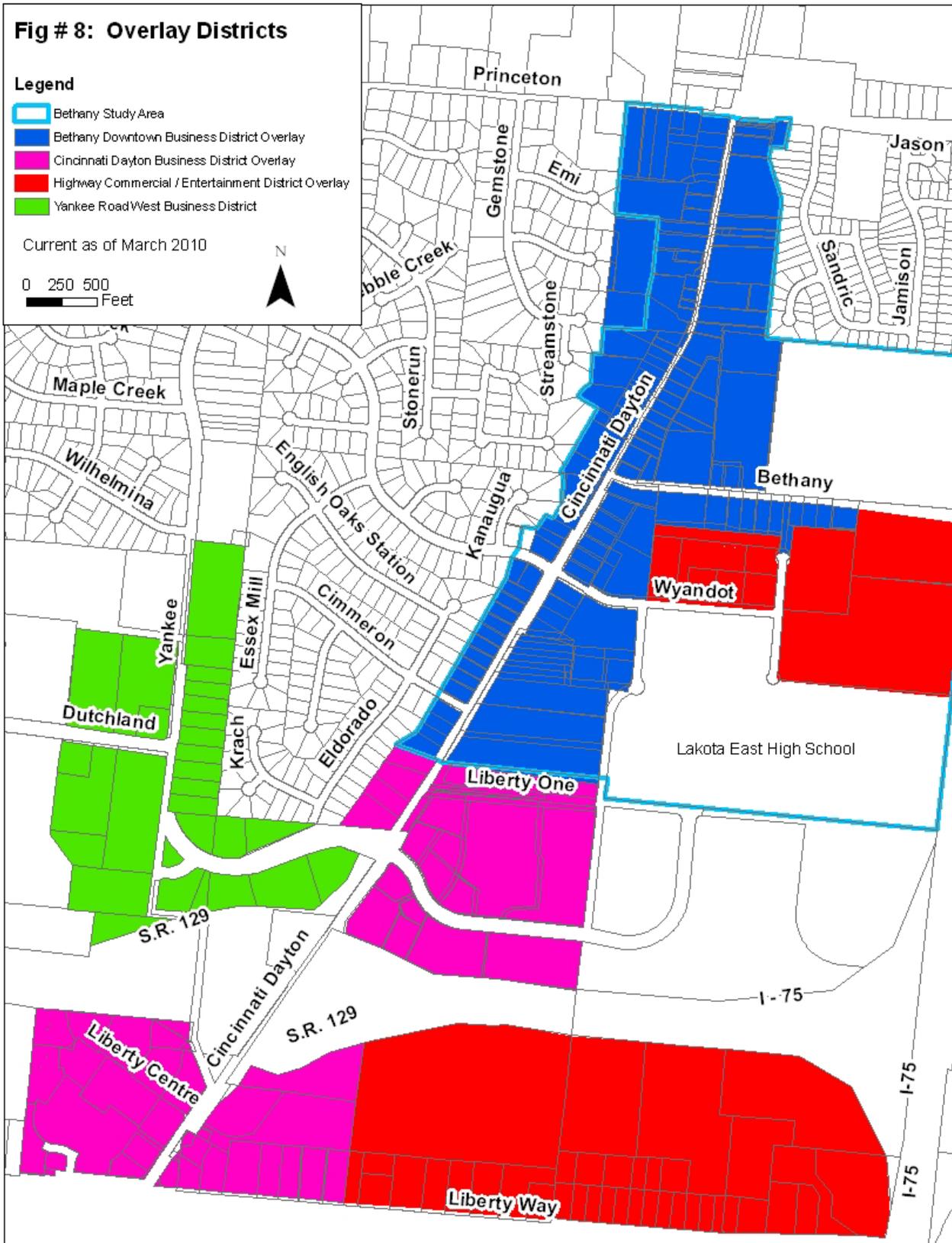
Current Zoning Regulations

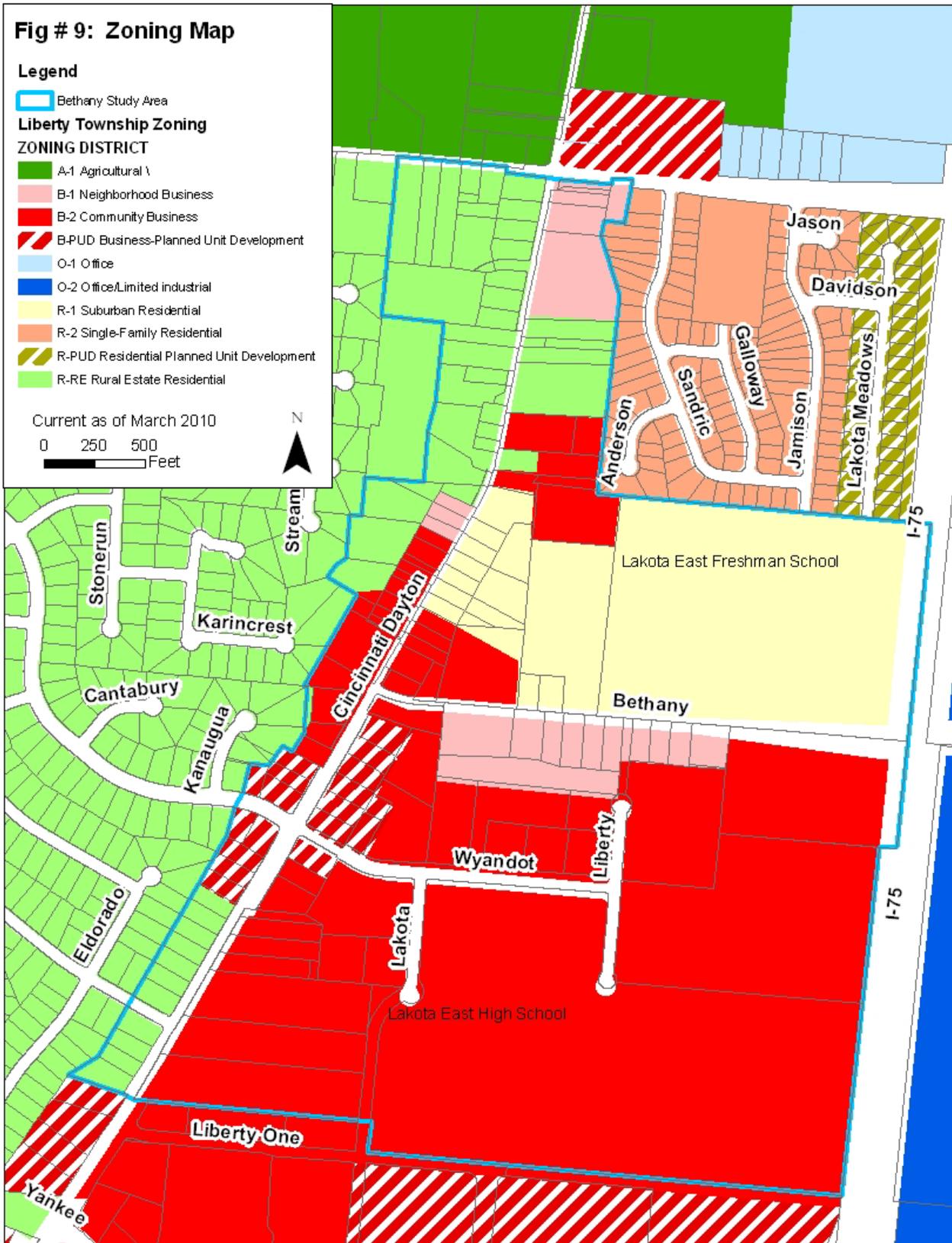
In 2007, Liberty Township enacted overlay zoning districts on the commercially zoned properties along the Cincinnati-Dayton Road corridor, in the southeast corner of the Township. The overlay districts are intended to steer the development and redevelopment of commercially zoned properties located within the Cincinnati Dayton Road corridor. These regulations will be used by Liberty Township to review proposals for construction within the boundaries of the district. These regulations are written for the benefit of property owners within and adjacent to the overlay district by requiring architectural and landscaping features which enhance the character of these properties, provides for the long-term sustainability of the business district, as well as the character of the Cincinnati Dayton Road Corridor area as a whole.

The design regulations are written with the primary goal of guiding appropriate change that will enhance the character and business climate of the corridor. The regulations grew from the recommendation of the Comprehensive Plan to move forward with the preparation of an overlay district and development master plan of the Cincinnati Dayton Road corridor in the area in and around the Bethany Neighborhood. Promoting redevelopment along the Cincinnati Dayton Road corridor for arts, entertainment and business as well as allowing for mixed use development through new urbanism concepts which encourage pedestrian friendly, shared limited access, shared parking and unified streetscape design. For the purpose of this district, the Board of Liberty Township Trustees establishes that the Liberty Township Zoning Commission shall serve as the Architecture Review Board as provided in ORC 519.071. The current zoning map in the area of Bethany is shown on the following page.

The overlay districts modify or impose additional zoning regulations on commercially zoned property located within the overlay district boundaries. Items which are addressed in the overlay district regulations include buffering commercial uses that are adjacent to residential properties, building height, permitted uses, architectural design / screening of service entrances and mechanical equipment, site landscaping, signage, lighting, and even streetscaping.

The majority of the regulations in the Bethany Downtown Business District Overlay have been derived from regulations which apply in the other overlay districts as well. These other overlay districts are dominated by larger scale, stand alone commercial developments. Bethany differs from these other areas in both the typical size of commercial properties, and the close proximity to neighboring properties. Also, the Comprehensive Plan calls for Bethany to redevelop in a manner reminiscent of a traditional small town. Unfortunately, some of the current overlay district regulations which apply to Bethany make it difficult to develop the smaller lots, including those with building setbacks of 30 feet, required 50 foot buffers between adjacent residential, parking lot setback requirements, and ground signage standards which are impractical for these small lots to meet. For this reason, it seems inevitable that the regulations of the Bethany Downtown Business District Overlay be adjusted to meet the resulting vision of this plan.







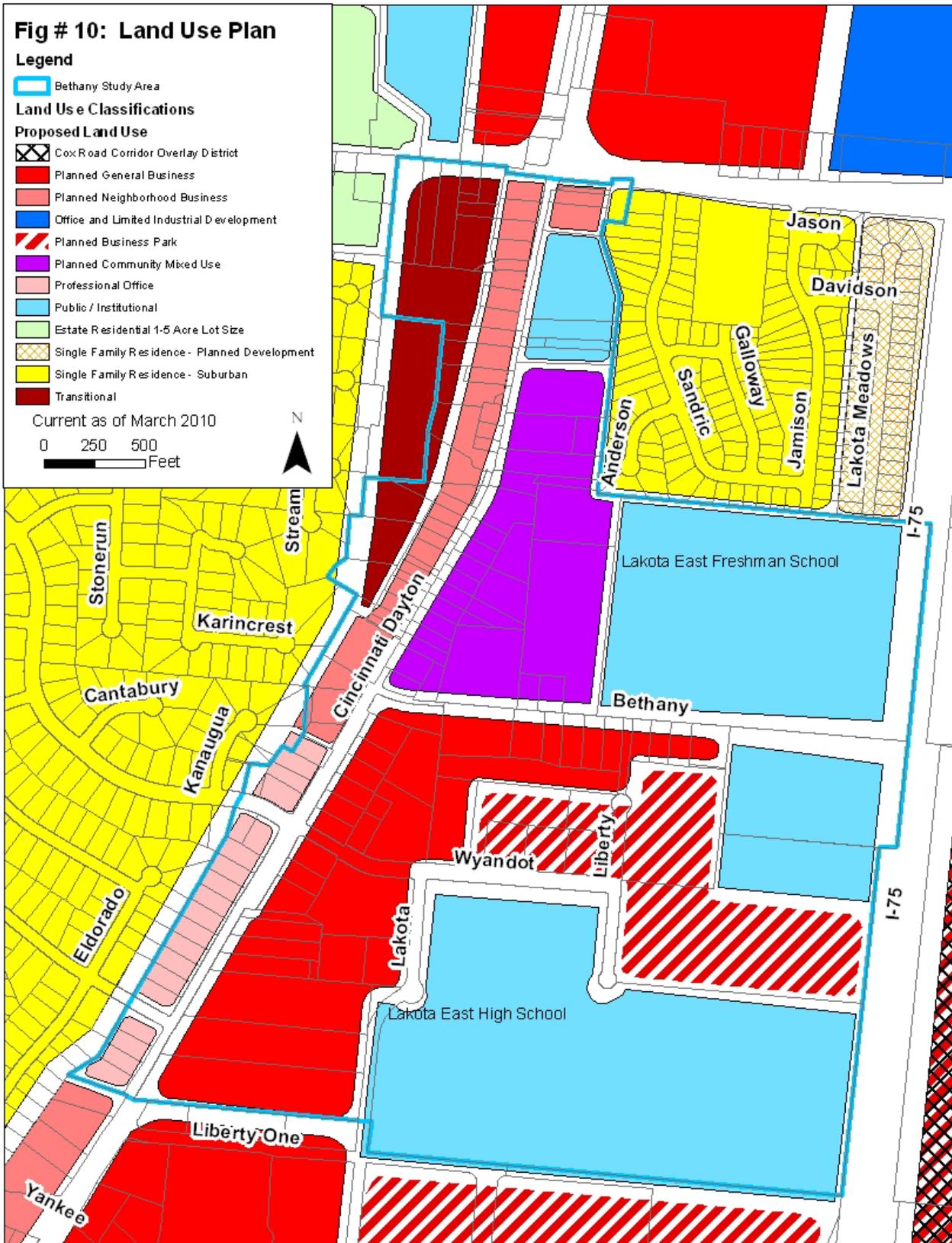
Comprehensive Plan

In 2006, Liberty Township adopted its most recent Comprehensive Plan. One of the main recommendations of this plan was to “move forward with preparation of overlay district and development master plan of Cincinnati-Dayton Road corridor in Bethany.”

In the Comprehensive Plan, both the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis and public input survey highlighted the need for community identity, a center or downtown for the community, and increased pedestrian access between residences and commercial areas.

In response, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee set as a high priority the establishment of an identified downtown and center for the community. These identified priorities also include the encouragement of mixed use development, pedestrian connections, the identification and protection of historic sites, and the establishment of architectural standards. These priorities were meant to establish an image and identity for Liberty Township. This enhanced image is expected to increase the Township’s reputation in the region and to attract additional businesses to the area.

Specifically, in regards to Liberty Commerce Center – the neighborhood concept area which includes the Downtown Bethany area – the Comprehensive Plan calls for the promotion of redevelopment of Bethany along Cincinnati-Dayton Road for arts, entertainment, and business district. To accomplish this, the plan calls for an overlay zoning district to allow for mixed use, new urbanism concepts encouraging pedestrian friendly, shared limited access, shared parking, and streetscape. Please refer to the Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan for more details.





Plan Purpose

The Downtown Bethany Vision Plan is meant to be a statement outlining a consensus idea of what the Bethany area should become, and steps that might be taken to bring that idea to fruition. This plan should be seen as a template, against which later development decisions should be held. This does not mean that this plan should be seen as “written in stone”. Deviations from the plan may be considered as situations dictate. Furthermore, this vision plan should be periodically re-examined as a whole to ensure that the plan remains true to the needs and desires of the community.

This plan is conceived as an addendum to the Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan for the purpose of further defining the Township’s goals and objectives relating to development in the area known as “Downtown Bethany”.

Mission Statement

The aim of the Downtown Bethany Area Plan is to produce a clear plan document which outlines achievable goals for the revitalization of Downtown Bethany into a thriving, community oriented gathering spot. When put into action, the plan will result in a vibrant and sustainable downtown, consistent in design, sensitive to surrounding uses, and reflecting the community’s desires, which will lend positively to the identity of Downtown Bethany and Liberty Township.

Plan Goals

- Establish an identity for Downtown Bethany and promote that identity through a cohesive vision or aesthetic.
- Provide for proper transition between the commercial corridor and adjacent residential uses.
- Create a connected and walkable Downtown Bethany.
- Find ways to promote businesses in the Downtown Bethany area.

Plan Objectives

The plan will define specific objectives which will be accomplished through the creation and implementation of the plan. The following objectives are given as a sample of what the final objective might be. The plan Steering Committee decided what the plan objectives would be at their first meeting.

- Establish a Bethany Business Association / Business Incubator
- Evaluate existing zoning regulations and zoning district boundaries
- Develop a decision making framework for handling historic properties – what measures to take to protect certain properties, and under which situations to enact these measures



- Investigate avenues, both public and privately driven, to accomplish the desired vision for Downtown Bethany
- Create a Mission Statement for the Downtown Bethany Area Plan
- Provide a strategy to complete and improve pedestrian infrastructure in Bethany
- Evaluate including a community gathering space and amenities, possibly in the form of a park, civic building, streetscape, etc.
- Evaluate the required residential mass needed to support the commercial corridor, and how residential use might be incorporated into the vision for Downtown Bethany
- Provide a strategy to provide the necessary parking to service the area in a functional and attractive way
- Evaluate the prospect of relocating or burying above ground utilities
- Evaluate options and possible locations for planned access drives



Concept Plan Details

The map on the preceding page represents the geographic composition of elements of the Downtown Bethany Vision Plan. Those elements of the plan which are depicted by the map are identified in detail in the following pages. The Concept Areas denote a style and density of development in the designated area with particular attention to how the buildings and parking relate to the sidewalks and streets. The New Connectors denote the size or class of new access drives and how they relate to parking. Other symbols on the map represent current or future traffic signals, identified properties of historical significance, possible locations for future public gathering spaces, and designated nodes, which are areas of special importance or focus.

Downtown Center



Downtown Center is defined from the area surrounding the Bethany intersection, north to Bethany United Methodist Church, on both sides of Cincinnati-Dayton Road. This area is targeted for dense development of small scale buildings on the primarily small lots. Pedestrian infrastructure should be emphasized, creating a pleasant, walkable downtown district. Mixed-use development should be encouraged in the Downtown Center area, creating a “round the clock” presence of businesses and residents.

The Downtown Center area is also populated with the majority of the identified historical properties in the Downtown Bethany study area. Therefore, it is important that new construction be designed to complement adjacent historical structures.



Transitional to Residential

This designation is intended to serve as a transition between the more intense uses of the commercial corridor and the adjacent residential subdivisions. The uses permitted in this area should be restricted to low intensity commercial and office uses which do not operate late hours. Furthermore, the design of buildings in this area should be no more than two stories in height and incorporate pitched roofs and windows typically found in residential structures in order to lessen any visual impact on adjacent properties. In addition, a minimum 50 foot wide buffer consisting of a six foot high landscaped mound with an eight foot tall stained wood board on board privacy fence or brick wall, or any combination to create an initial 14 foot high screen. On the residential side of the mound, a staggered row of evergreen trees shall be planted to provide a minimum of 75% opacity at 75% growth along the entire length of the buffer. The commercial side of the buffer shall be landscaped with a variety of plantings to break up the long sections of fencing or walls.



Transition Mid to Downtown Center

Lot sizes in this designation are larger than in the Downtown Center, which allows for a bit larger developments. In addition to transitioning the scale of potential developments, a transition between the large setbacks of larger scale development to the minimal setback of the Downtown Center. To accomplish this, there should be set both a minimum and maximum building setback. While the scale of developments in this area would be larger than in the Downtown Center, architectural features should be used to break up long stretches of facades.





Transition Large to Mid Scale

Transition Large to Mid Scale development is typified by a large multi-tenant use, fronted by smaller single user outlots with designed walkways and plazas connecting the differing elements of the development. This area is meant to begin the transition from the large shopping center (Liberty Commons) and campus style development (Lakota East High School and Children's Medical Center) found south of Liberty One Drive.



Large Scale

Large Scale development would be planned campus or office park style development which would take advantage of large tracts of land with terrific visibility from I-75.



Access management is important to the success of Downtown Bethany because it will provide a more safe and comfortable pedestrian environment, while allowing Cincinnati-Dayton and Bethany Roads to carry added traffic more efficiently without adding more lanes. Access management will be accomplished through parallel access drives which will provide access to properties along Cincinnati-Dayton and Bethany Roads. There are three levels of these access drives: Neighborhood Collector, which will be a public street, built to the Butler County Engineer’s Office specifications for a Neighborhood Collector, as stated in the Butler County Thoroughfare Plan. The other two levels, New Access Drive and New Drive Aisle, will not be dedicated public streets, and while not needing to be built to public road standards, the BCEO will be consulted regarding intersection locations and proper traffic control.

New Neighborhood Collector

A new neighborhood collector would serve to funnel local traffic in Bethany off of Cincinnati-Dayton Road. This new collector would also provide one access point per property to adjacent properties, resulting in the elimination of driveway access directly to Cincinnati-Dayton Road. This will improve traffic flow throughout the entire area, result in a safer, more predictable flow of traffic on Cincinnati-Dayton road, and greatly increase the comfort and safety of pedestrians in Bethany. The

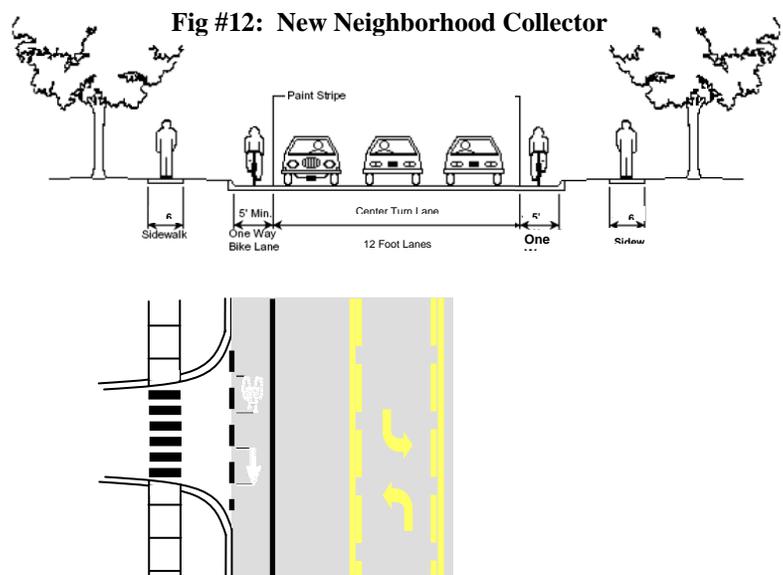
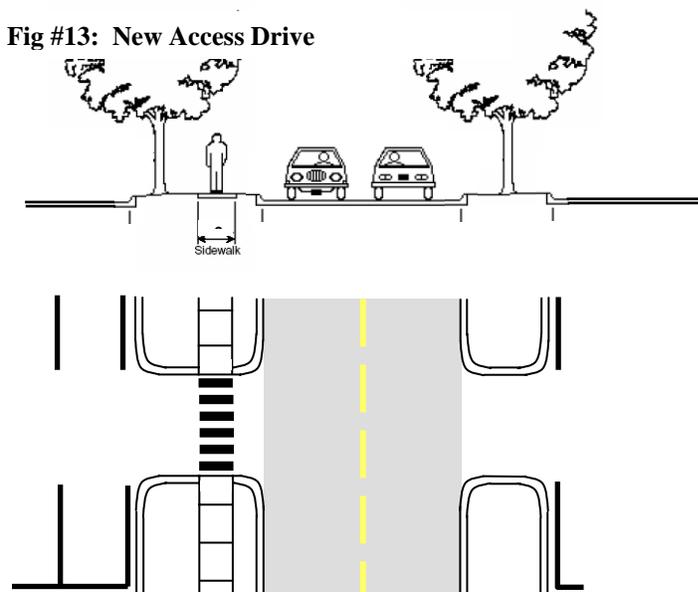


Fig #13: New Access Drive



proposed new collector would feature 12 foot wide lanes, possibly include a center turn lane and/or designated bicycle lanes (depending on traffic requirements and trails plan), and allow one access point per adjacent property. Please refer to the Butler County Thoroughfare Plan for more details.

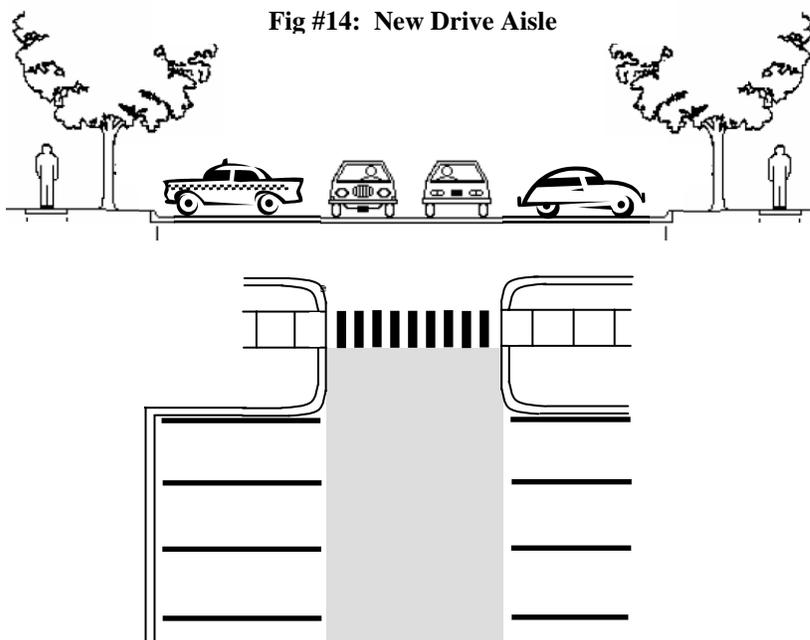
New Access Drive

A new access drive serves to collect traffic from multiple properties and

funnels it to a consolidated access point. Doing this creates a hierarchy of roadways which allows local traffic (turning in and out of businesses) to use separate, less congested access drives. The higher volumes of through traffic are then able to travel Cincinnati-Dayton Road without being slowed by cars turning in and out of driveways.

New Drive Aisle

Drive aisles indicate where connections should be provided from the parking lot on one property to or through the parking lot on adjacent properties.



Nodes

Nodes are locations of special prominence or significance, usually occurring at the main intersections of a transportation network. They are often either gateways or landmarks, and often become places where people congregate. Nodes are typically marked by prominent buildings, public squares, special streetscape and signage, and important uses. Nodes in Bethany should be marked by buildings which incorporate distinctive architectural features, gateway signage / elements and special streetscape elements.

Buffer

With the inclusion of more businesses in the Bethany area, it will be important to continue to provide adequate buffering to surrounding residential subdivisions. Currently, where commercial property is developed abutting a residential subdivision, a fifty foot wide buffer, where no paving or parking area is permitted, is required. Within this buffer, a six foot mound

topped with an eight foot tall wood board-on-board privacy fence, brick wall, or combination thereof, is to be provided. Both sides of the mound is to be landscaped; the residential side with a staggered row of six foot tall nursery grade evergreen trees, the commercial side is to be landscaped with a variety of landscape plantings. This type of buffer has been installed in the township for the past few years, and if properly maintained, works well to achieve an adequate level of separation. This buffer will be required at the locations indicated on the Concept Plan in conjunction with commercial development.

There is also a concern about the impact of planned future access drives on the west side of Cincinnati-Dayton Road feeding traffic onto Cimmeron and Wyandot. There needs to be a visual aesthetic break between the planned development along Cincinnati-Dayton Road and the subdivision entrances beyond. The solution is to provide a clear subdivision entry within the required buffer area, flanking both Cimmeron and Wyandot. These entrances shall feature brick walls and landscaping beds on both sides of the street to clearly communicate the entrance into the subdivision. This entrance may include lighting if details regarding service and maintenance can be worked out with the subdivision.



Fig #15: Buffer and Subdivision Entry Configuration.



Streetscape

Currently, the Zoning Resolution places the responsibility for required streetscape elements on the business owner/developer. These required streetscape elements include six foot wide concrete sidewalks, gaslight replica streetlights, and street trees spaced at regular intervals. These improvements are required by zoning when an individual property develops or changes to a commercial use. The estimated cost at the drafting of this document, of the sidewalk and streetscape improvements currently required by zoning is \$75 per lineal foot of frontage.

There are several challenges to accomplish streetscape improvements, including:

- Disconnected sidewalks;
- Coordination of access management;
- Incomplete streetscape improvements; and
- Future Cincinnati-Dayton Road and Bethany Road widening projects.

Streetscape improvements would enhance Downtown Bethany. These improvements are aimed at creating an attractive, pedestrian friendly environment, in which people would like to spend time strolling, shopping, dining, and meeting neighbors. These improvements will benefit Bethany residents, businesses, and landholders by helping to usher in an attractive and vibrant Downtown Bethany. These improvements also represent a significant benefit for the entire Liberty Township community.

The following streetscape improvements have been discussed for inclusion in Downtown Bethany.

- Sidewalks (12 foot width, curb to building with tree boxes along Cin-Day Rd. in Downtown Bethany, 6 foot width elsewhere)
- Decorative street lights
- Street trees
- Relocated utilities
- On street parking
- Expanded sitting / gathering areas at corners or key nodes
- Landscaping
- Benches
- Trash receptacles
- Gateway features / signage / banners

Several options could be investigated by the township to determine if they could work with the streetscape improvement challenges.

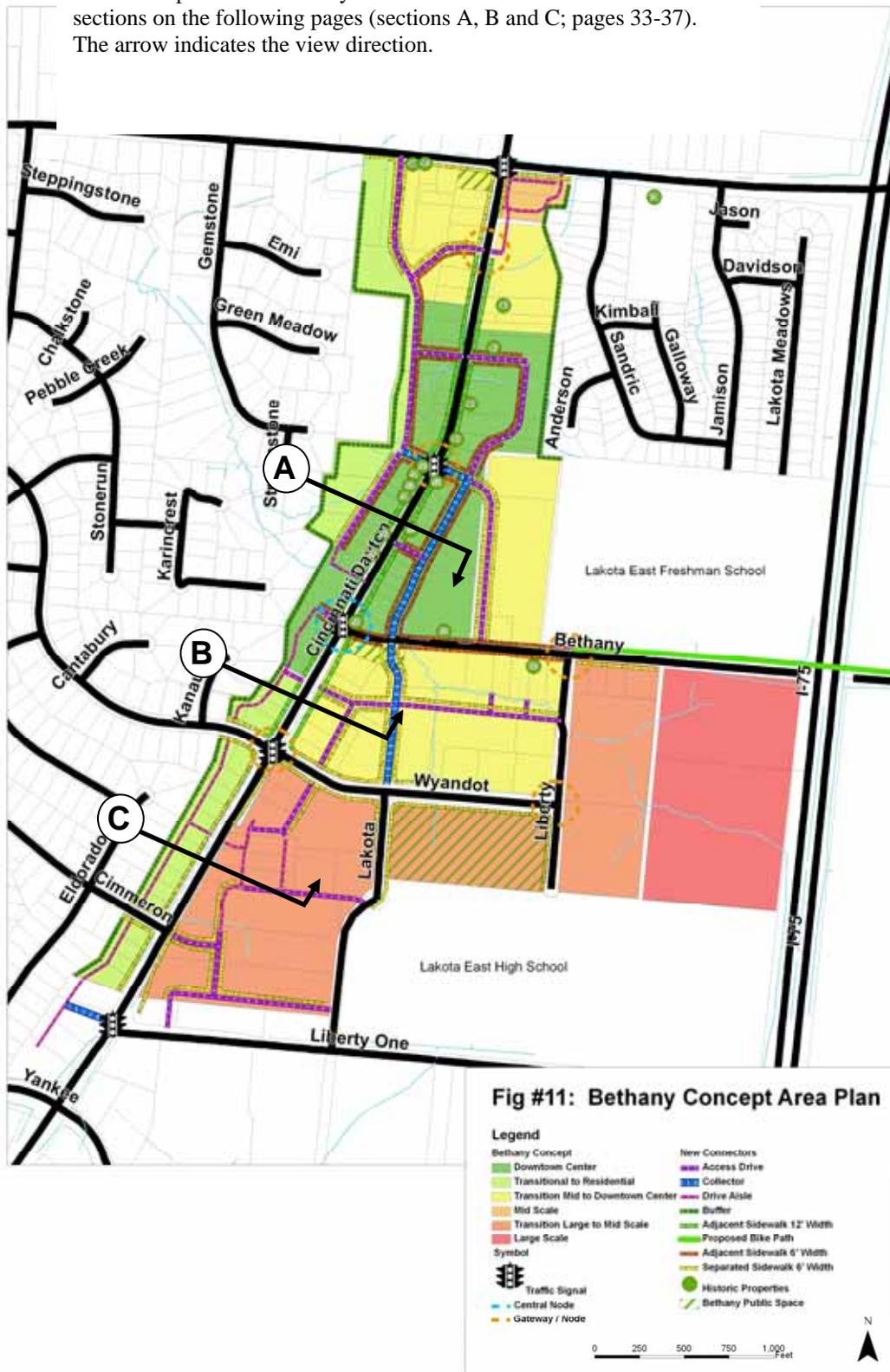
- ***A Coordinated Approach.*** It is preferred by the Steering Committee that the proposed streetscape improvements be installed in a coordinated effort across an entire block or more at one time. This will prevent the gaps in the streetscape caused by the current development by development approach. This coordinated approach will also allow the



streetscape improvements to be optimally timed with other infrastructure improvements, such as road widening, utility relocation, and access drives.

- ***Research Whether the Township May Establish a Fund in Lieu of Improvements.*** This fund could be a mechanism to financially achieve a coordinated approach described above. The Township could research whether a fund could be established which would allow developers to contribute money in lieu of providing streetscape improvements required by zoning. If allowed, this fund could possibly be used by the Township to leverage additional grant funding, thus multiplying the affect of this fund.
- ***Leverage Grant Funding.*** There currently are several grant programs and strategies that could assist in funding streetscape improvements.
 - The most widely used today are Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds, which are Federal Highway funds specifically set aside for non-capacity building projects such as pedestrian / bicycle facilities, or streetscape. Utility relocation, as part of streetscape improvements are also covered under the TE program. The TE money is managed locally by OKI, and requires a 20% local match. In addition to the local match, planning and design costs are not covered by TE funds.
 - Another funding source that is currently available is the Community Development Block Grant and the Community Development Action Grant.
 - The sale of commemorative bricks and plaques on benches is another funding strategy.
 - Safe Routes to School is a is another funding source, however, the improvements must serve a K-8 school. There are no K-8 schools in the Downtown Bethany study area. The nearest one is Independence Elementary on the northwest corner of Cincinnati-Dayton Road and Princeton Road.
 - Heritage Ohio Main Street Program is another source discussed in more detail on Page 41.

Use the map below to identify the location of the rendered street sections on the following pages (sections A, B and C; pages 33-37).
 The arrow indicates the view direction.





Noteworthy
architecture at
nodes or
intersections

Wide sidewalks
with trees,
decorative lighting
with banners

Removed or
relocated pole
mounted utilities

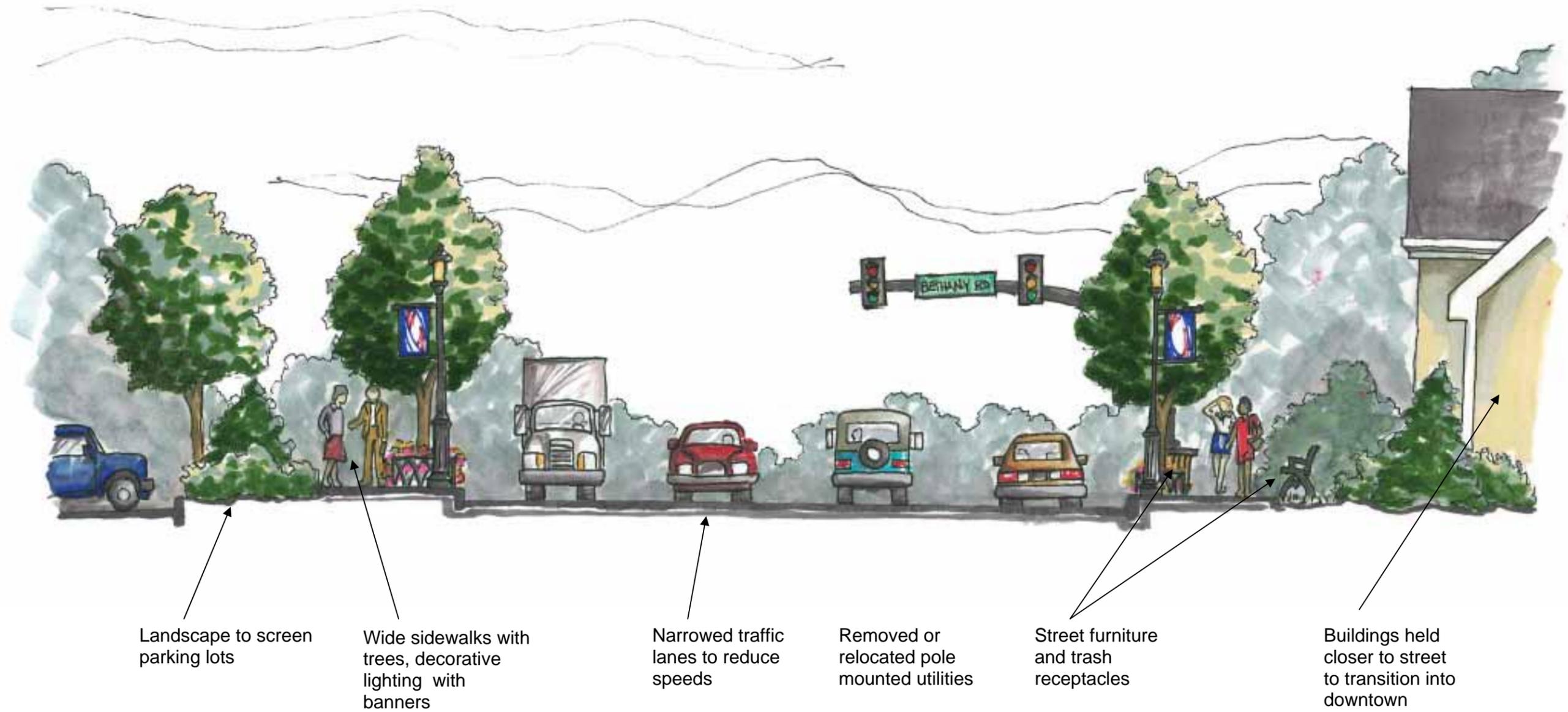
Narrowed traffic
lanes to reduce
speeds

Flashing pedestrian
alerts at mid-block
crosswalk

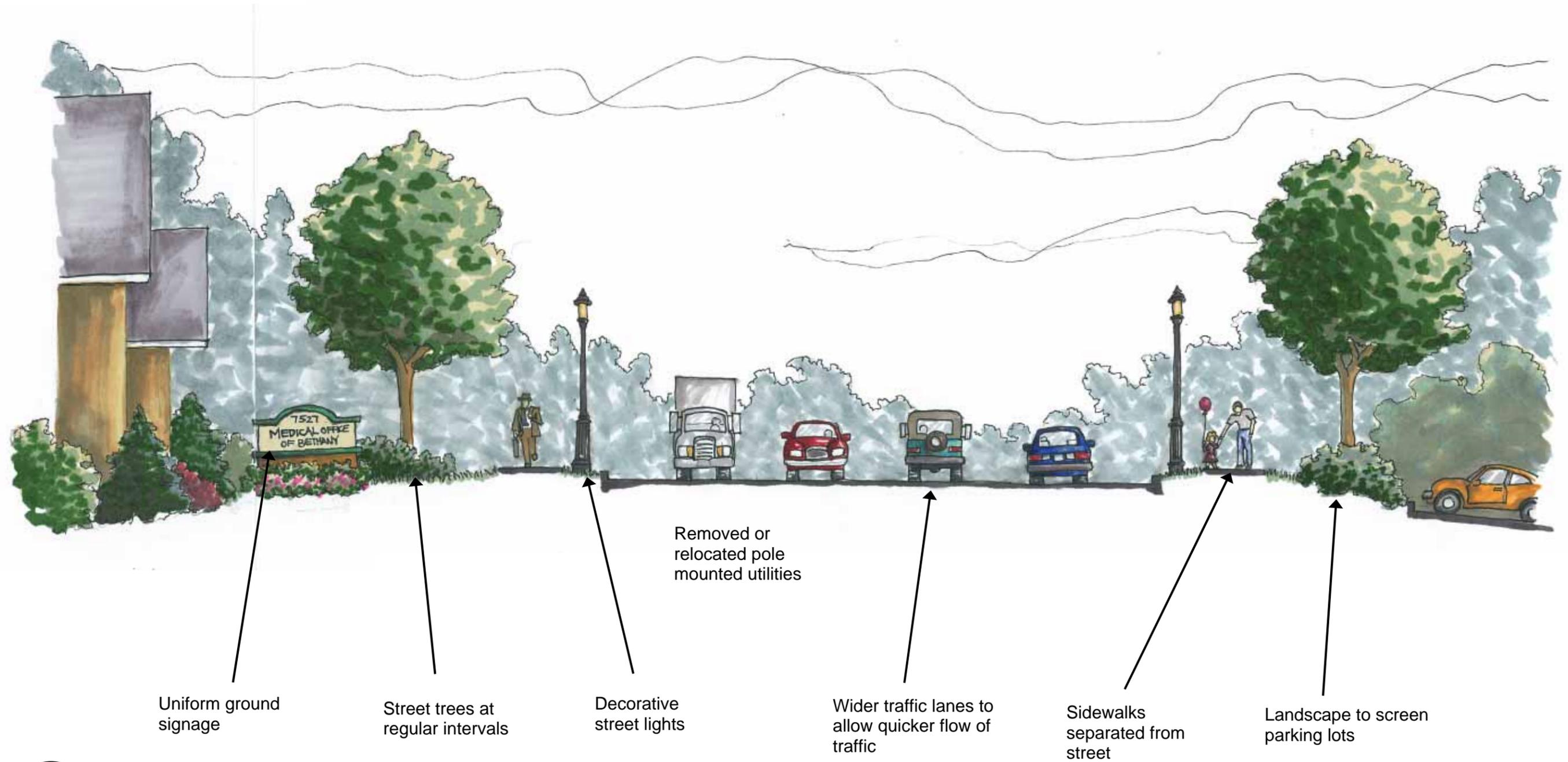
On-street
parking

Outdoor dining
adjacent to
sidewalk

A Fig #16: Downtown
Streetscape Section



B Fig #17: Transition Streetscape Section



C Fig #18: Large Scale Streetscape Section

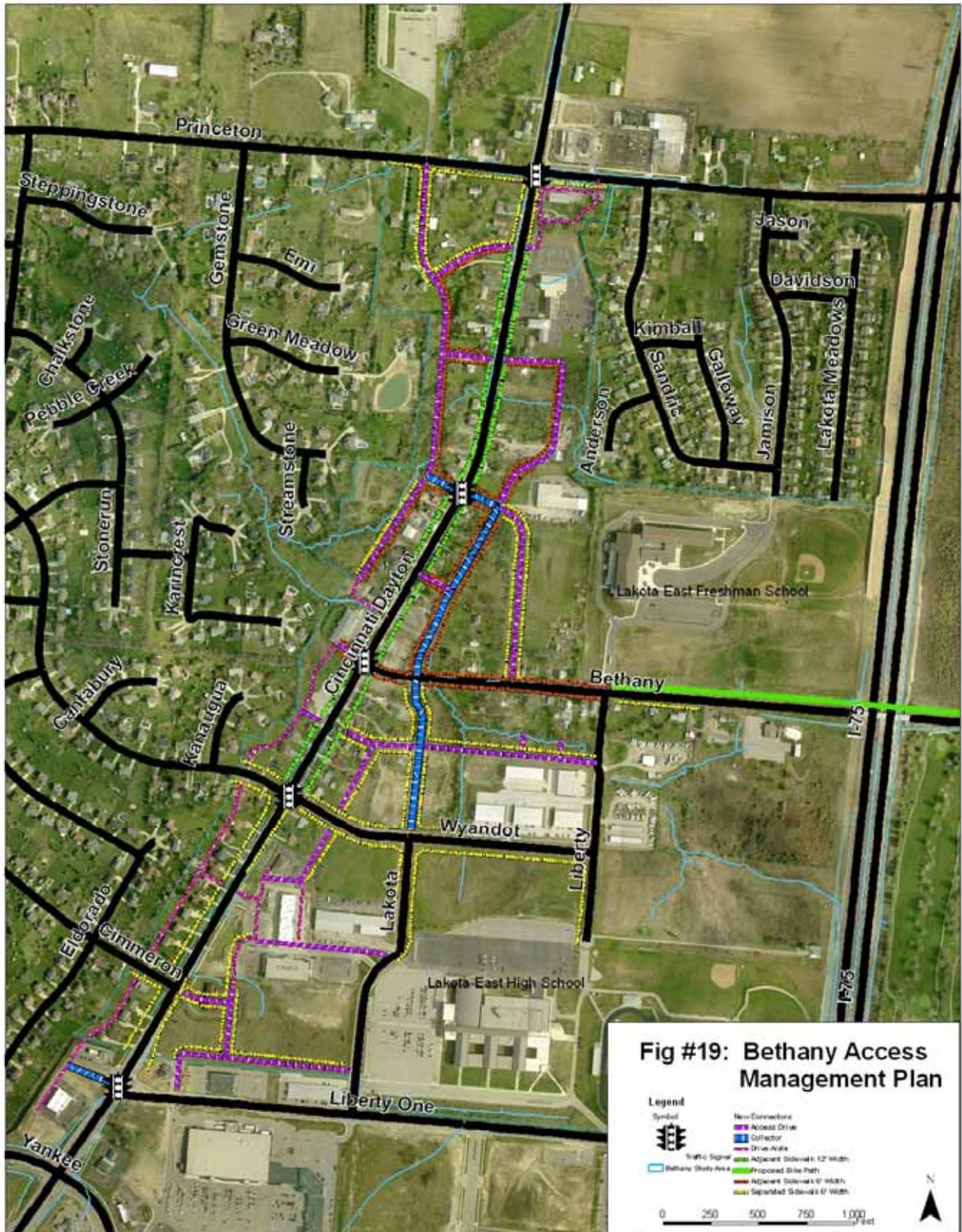


Access Management / Access Road Network

The Concept Area Plan for Downtown Bethany proposes a network of access drives, cross access easements and collectors to facilitate improved access to each property in the Downtown Bethany area, while limiting direct driveway access to Cincinnati-Dayton Road and Bethany Road. This would improve the traffic flow along these main thoroughfares without adding additional lanes, potentially reduce the number of traffic accidents by reducing the number of potential conflict points, and also have a positive effect on bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Once access controls have been established along Cincinnati-Dayton Road and Bethany Road, center turn lanes could be reduced to dedicated left turn lanes at key access points in accordance with Butler County Access Management Regulations. These remaining areas not used for turn lanes could then be turned into landscaped islands, or the road could be reconfigured for additional travel lanes, on street parking, or bicycle lanes.

Proposed new access drives and collectors need to be coordinated as new development occurs. An overall access management strategy, developed with the cooperation of all the affected property owners, could be carried out in advance of development. This method might prove more effective at encouraging private investment in Downtown Bethany. As is the current practice, new developments will be required to provide easements and drives where the Concept Plan indicates in the near term, or coordinated ahead of the development if possible. The locations of the proposed drives on the Concept Plan are approximate and the exact locations may be determined at the time of site plan review for the proposed developments. Public-Private partnerships may be used to accomplish this network as needed with the overall goal being a thriving, walk-able downtown district. The Butler County Engineers Office will work with the Township to establish specific standards which will ensure a safe and efficient transportation network.



Parking

For Downtown Bethany to reach its full potential, enough parking must be provided in the area. Bethany contains many small lots which are expected to pose difficulties in accommodating enough parking spaces for a typical commercial or mixed use development. Shared parking will be a key measure to alleviate the parking crunch. The same lots that serve day time uses such as office, can be used in the evening by patrons of restaurants. The locations of parking lots will be coordinated among required setbacks required in different sections of the Downtown, allowing for various parking arrangements to meet the needs of any use.

On-street parking could be provided along Cincinnati-Dayton Road, between Bethany Road and Bridge #BUT 7.007, just north of the curve in Cincinnati-Dayton Road. Not only would on-street parking contribute to the downtown character of Bethany, but it would also be an effective measure to slow travel speeds through the corridor, creating a much more comfortable and safer pedestrian environment. Should it still be evident that additional parking is needed, partnerships may work to add one or more shared lots in the area. Any on-street parking and shared lots should use parking meters to encourage turnover which should boost activity in Bethany and benefit the businesses there.

Public Spaces

Public spaces are very important components of any vibrant downtown. They allow people to comfortably gather in a place, or to just relax. When the Steering Committee was discussing who the intended visitors to Downtown Bethany would be, it was put forth that Downtown Bethany should be first and foremost, the local residents. The local area of Liberty



Pocket park in Mansfield, OH

Township is a family oriented community which could use a gathering place in the community to use in conjunction with youth and family events, school and community events, or farmer's markets. Other welcome uses might be a pocket park with benches, landscaping, perhaps even a small playground or bandstand. The Downtown Bethany Steering Committee, Township Parks and Events Committees, and the general public will contribute and define the final uses included in the defined public spaces within Downtown Bethany.



The following sites should be considered as possible locations of defined public spaces in Downtown Bethany:

- South side of Wyandot, between Lakota Ln. and Liberty Ct.
- Southeast corner of Cincinnati-Dayton Rd. and Bethany Rd.
- Southwest corner of Cincinnati-Dayton Rd. and Princeton Rd.
- Any other parcel that becomes apparent that the highest and best use be as public space

Key nodes should be accentuated in the Downtown. This can be accomplished in a number of ways: with buildings featuring prominent architectural features, special signage or entry features, clock tower / bell tower, or landscaping with benches. The following locations are considered as key nodes:

- Cincinnati-Dayton Rd. and Wyandot Dr. intersection
- Cincinnati-Dayton Road and Bethany Road intersection
- Bethany Road and Liberty Ct.
- Curve in Cincinnati-Dayton Road north of Bethany Rd.
- South of Cincinnati-Dayton Rd. and Princeton Rd.

Storm Water Management

In the Current Conditions section of this plan, storm water management was identified as a significant challenge faced in the redevelopment of properties in Bethany. With property size, type of development and topography all being factors affecting storm water, it is difficult to arrive at a “one size fits all” solution. The Butler County Engineer’s Office will be involved with each development as they work to meet the storm water management requirements.

One strategy put forth to ease the burdens faced by particularly small development lots north of Bethany Road, in meeting storm water requirements is to organize a shared storm water detention or retention basin. The process of facilitating the provision of this shared basin, and linking it to the served properties would be a very complex undertaking. However, the payoff would increase the density with which development could be built in the Downtown Center portion of the Bethany area, increasing the ability to provide more parking (which is expected to be at a premium), thus increasing potential property values in the area.

Architectural Review / Zoning

The Liberty Township Zoning Commission is assigned the duties of Architectural Review Board for development in the overlay districts as outlined in the Zoning Resolution. The area identified as Downtown Bethany is located in the BDBD-O and HCED-O overlay districts whose regulations apply to any commercial development in the designated areas of the overlay. The purpose of the overlay districts is to provide supplemental zoning regulations targeted to a specific area, that result in a more desirable pattern and quality of development, thereby protecting the values of properties within and nearby the overlays.



The current overlay district regulations will need to be revised to align with the objectives and design criteria established in this plan. Furthermore, the continued use of some properties for single family residential use is compatible with the objectives of this plan, and not discouraged. However, these properties need to maintain consistency with the rest of the area, and should be held subject to certain design criteria of the overlay district. Also, mixed-use development is very much encouraged in the area, so long as incompatible uses not be allowed adjacent to existing residential subdivisions. Staff will work with the Trustees, Zoning Commission, relevant regulatory agencies outside of the township, and the interested public in revising the overlay district regulations to meet the goals and objectives of this plan.

Historical Properties

As stated in the survey of current conditions at the beginning of this document, these historically significant properties are a connection to the community's past. They also provide a unique and authentic character to the area that cannot be fully replicated in new construction. This being said, not every identified historic property offers a viable and valuable asset to Downtown Bethany. Collectively, these properties offer a connection to the past and an authenticity, which if lost, cannot be recaptured in new construction.

A survey of identified historic properties was undertaken and is included as part of this plan in Appendix B. In considering what level of protection should be afforded to a particular identified historical property, three things must be considered. First of these is the property's historical significance. Second is the condition of the property, including how well the property can be integrated into the desired aesthetic for the entire area. Finally, the property must be able to reasonably accommodate a desired use and prove desirable for an end user.

The Liberty Township Zoning Commission in its role as Architectural Review Board will address the viability of identified historical properties on a case by case basis, as part of the zoning process.

Business Development

Business development is expected to play a large role in the success of Downtown Bethany. With smaller lots to develop, it is reasonably certain that the majority of businesses which will be attracted to and locate in Bethany will be small businesses. Small businesses require more outside resources and support in order to succeed. There are many local, statewide, and national resources targeted to the support of small businesses. At the local level, the West Chester / Liberty Chamber Alliance is a very active group supporting businesses in southeast Butler County. BizTech is a local business incubator for Butler County, while Access Business Development and Finance, Inc. provides financing and technical resources to small businesses. We have included a list of applicable small business resources in Appendix C of this plan.



Downtown Bethany Business Association

Business attraction and retention is a very important element to the success of Downtown Bethany. The formation of a Downtown Bethany Business Association should be encouraged to offer support to individual member businesses, allow partnering among the members, as well as with outside players for mutual gain, a body to handle common issues and produce collective decisions, and to help market the area for investment by demonstrating strong and active participation in stewardship of Downtown Bethany.

Main Street Program

The Main Street Program is a nation wide effort by the National Trust For Historic Preservation. Each state maintains a chapter, and in Ohio, the program is operated by Heritage Ohio. There are currently 32 Ohio communities which participate in the program. The focus of the program is the preservation of historic downtowns through economic development. The Main Street Program offers training, support, and some loans and grants to the local organization.

The Main Street Program requires the local participant (either a local government, or registered non-profit organization) to hire a full or part-time Main Street Coordinator. The Main Street Program then provides a free training program for the Main Street Coordinator. In Ohio, most of the participating communities are small to medium size cities, typically the county seats of rural counties. Further evaluation would need to be done to determine if this program is a good fit for achieving the goals and objectives for Downtown Bethany.

Community Improvement Corporation

A community improvement corporation is an organization founded by a government entity for the purpose of actively participating in the redevelopment of a designated area. CIC's typically are organized as non-profit, and are able to leverage grant money to help fund deals and improvements.

A CIC would develop properties which are considered too problematic, risky, or otherwise not attractive investments for the private development community. CIC's are not meant to compete with, or undercut private development interests. Rather, they are meant to take on projects that otherwise would not get off the ground.

The 2006 Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan called for the creation of an Economic Development Committee, in part, tasked with creating a CIC. In Downtown Bethany, a CIC would be helpful to facilitate the consolidation of small parcels, the redevelopment of unattractive or problematic properties, and the preservation of historical properties. The Township should consider the formation of a CIC as a tool to kick-start active redevelopment in Downtown Bethany.



Objective	Implementation Strategy	Participants	Timing / Coordination /
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Business Association / Incubator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form Downtown Bethany Business Assoc. (DBBA) Encourage new businesses to access existing business development resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown Bethany businesses, Economic Development Committee Chamber, Access, BizTech, Liberty Township Staff, Newly created DBBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When there are enough businesses to support assoc. Immediately
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate Existing Zoning Regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee to draft text amendment to Zoning Resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustees, Committees, Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create Decision Making Framework for Dealing With Historical Properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate review into Zoning Resolution amendment / zoning review procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustees, Zoning Commission, Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and improve pedestrian infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement access management along Cin-Day Rd. Streetscape improvements, including wider sidewalks and pedestrian amenities Bury or relocate above ground utilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCEO, Township, Property owners, Developers, Duke, BCWS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated in phases, look to start first phase 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include community gathering spaces / parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific locations have been identified in this plan Work with property owners to develop gathering spaces / parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCEO / Community Development, Lakota Schools, Parks Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior to, or in coordination with streetscape
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Access Management along Cin-Day and Bethany Roads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop system of access drives to provide access to individual properties Eliminate direct driveway access to Cin-Day and Bethany Roads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCEO, Property owners / developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lakota Lane extension in next 5 years Access drive connections installed as development occurs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide adequate parking in Bethany 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximize shared parking Provide on-street parking along Cin-Day Rd. where feasible Provide shared parking lot if needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bethany businesses / developers, BCEO, DBBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediately In coordination with future road widening If necessary



Appendices

Appendix A: Demographics Tables

Appendix B: Historical Properties Data Sheets

Appendix C: Small Business Resources