

2010 DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS
STRATEGIC PLAN



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE 2010 DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS STRATEGIC PLAN ALLOWS EVERYONE FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS TO RESIDENTS AND BUSINESS LEADERS TO POINT TO ONE VISION AND SAY “THIS IS WHAT WE WANT.”

Downtown’s success is essential to the success of the entire Central Ohio region. While growth continues on the fringes of the metro area, Downtown Columbus remains the center of commerce, government and entertainment. Even in this electronic age that some believe makes place irrelevant, a thriving downtown remains a precondition to the overall competitiveness and attractiveness of a city.

Over the course of the last decade, there has been a significant amount of reinvestment in Downtown Columbus. Residential growth has rebounded for the first time since 1950. In the face of a down economy the office market has stabilized, while absorbing more than one million square feet of office space. Since 2000 there has been nearly \$2 billion in public and private investment downtown.

The resurgence of downtown is due in part to the success of the 2002 Downtown Business Plan that called for, among other things, building more downtown housing, improving the riverfront park system, and attracting and retaining jobs downtown. With this mission largely fulfilled, City leaders recognize that now is the time to capitalize on current success and to plan for the next 10 years and beyond.

The 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan creates an overall vision for downtown that builds on previous planning efforts. Over the past several months, the planning team has conducted an interactive public process, hosting three town hall meetings and gaining input from more than 1,000 comments. The result? **10 Principles, 12 Ideas** and **8 Strategies** that will guide the revitalization of Downtown Columbus.

10 Principles

No plan can gain acceptance without establishing a vision. The **10 Principles** narrate the community’s core values and outline the goals for the future of Downtown Columbus. Some of these principles build upon current momentum, such as increasing the amount and variety of downtown housing, maintaining downtown as the employment center of the region, and continuing to foster public and private partnerships.

Other principles are more aspirational. The City needs to embrace transit as a competitive advantage. Arts and culture should be a prominent and visible part of everyday life downtown. Sustainability should be promoted to transform Downtown Columbus into the green capital of the Midwest. These **10 Principles** provide a critical framework for this Plan, but they also provide a benchmark for judging success.



12 Ideas

Innovation requires ideas. Columbus has a strong track record of challenging conventional wisdom—and succeeding. In 1995, who would have believed that the Ohio Penitentiary would be replaced with both a new arena and a new ballpark? Or that it was possible to build restaurants over a highway? In 2002, who would have imagined that Downtown Columbus would have a completely new riverfront park system and more than 2,000 new residents in just eight years? Even in the face of economic challenges, development downtown has continued, exemplified by the dramatic transformation of City Center Mall into Columbus Commons.

In this context, developing a new Creative Campus between Columbus State, CCAD and the Columbus Museum of Art seems possible. Restoring High Street and Broad Street as the most important commercial and civic streets in the City becomes necessary. Improving transportation alternatives is now mandatory for the long term economic health of the city. Creating a sustainable urban neighborhood on the Scioto Peninsula is an opportunity that must be seized. The costs of reversing decades of environmental damage along our river corridors become surmountable. In short, we have the capacity and capability to achieve these **12 Ideas** and more if we decide as a community that we want to achieve them.

The **12 Ideas** in this Plan are just that—ideas. Without ideas, without inspiration, we cannot move forward. Surely, there are details to be worked out. Proposals need to be analyzed. Partnerships need to be formed. Funding sources need to be identified. It will take hard work and community support to transform these ideas into plans. This process has already begun. Through extensive public comments and input, the community has embraced this common vision for the future of Downtown Columbus.

8 Strategies

Individual projects alone will not be enough to guide the continued revitalization of Downtown Columbus. Improving transportation alternatives, promoting sustainability, and increasing residential density cannot be solved by singular developments. There are no one-off solutions. These complicated urban issues require a holistic approach and numerous public policy changes.

The **8 Strategies** identify the policy areas that need to be addressed in order for Downtown Columbus to fulfill its potential. Specific action items are proposed to guide urban form, support new arts and culture investments, and enhance neighborhood connections. Properly implemented, these strategies will shape all future development in Downtown Columbus and ensure the success of the **12 Ideas** and others that follow.

Together, these **10 Principles, 12 Ideas, and 8 Strategies** reflect the community’s aspirations for the future of Downtown Columbus. But it is more than that. The 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan allows everyone from public officials to residents and business leaders to point to one vision and say “This is what we want.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARYpage 03

INTRODUCTIONpage 07
Previous Planning Efforts..... page 10
Downtown’s Urban Erosion..... page 12

DOWNTOWN TODAYpage 15
Introduction..... page 16
Land Use & Ownership..... page 18
Connectivity..... page 20
Open Space..... page 22
Parking..... page 24
Residential Development & Density..... page 26
Employment..... page 30
Visitors & Attractions..... page 32

10 PRINCIPLESpage 35

12 IDEASpage 39
Introduction..... page 40
Discovery District..... page 42
Idea 01: Southeast Gateway Opportunity..... page 44
Idea 02: Topiary Park Infill..... page 46
Idea 03: Creative Campus..... page 48
High Street Core..... page 52
Idea 04: Redefine Broad Street..... page 54
Idea 05: Restore High Street..... page 56
Idea 06: Develop a Downtown Transit Center..... page 58
Idea 07: 3-C Multi-Modal Station..... page 60
Idea 08: Develop a Downtown Bike Station..... page 61
Idea 09: Develop a Downtown Field House..... page 62
Riverfront..... page 64
Idea 10: Pedestrian Bridge..... page 66
Idea 11: Continue the Development of the Scioto Peninsula..... page 68
Idea 12: Scioto-Olentangy Greenway Corridor..... page 72

8 STRATEGIES.....page 81
Introduction..... page 82
Strategy 01: Urban Form..... page 84
Strategy 02: Transit..... page 86
Strategy 03: Parking..... page 88
Strategy 04: Parks/Open Space..... page 90
Strategy 05: Streetscape/Street Network..... page 92
Strategy 06: Sustainability..... page 94
Strategy 07: Arts and Culture..... page 96
Strategy 08: Connections..... page 98

IMPLEMENTATIONpage 101
Introduction..... page 102
Achieving the Downtown Vision..... page 104



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CITY OF COLUMBUS

Mayor Michael B. Coleman

City Council

Michael C. Mentel, President

Hearcel F. Craig

Andrew J. Ginther

A. Troy Miller

Eileen Y. Paley

Charleta B. Tavares

Priscilla R. Tyson

Downtown Commission

Stephen Whittman, Chair

Otto Beatty, Jr.

Kyle Katz

Robert Loversidge

Mike Lusk

Jana Maniace

Danni Palmore

Boyce Safford III, Director, Development Department

Michael Stevens, Deputy Director, Development Department

Vince Papsidero, AICP, Planning Administrator, Development Department

Daniel Thomas, Manager, Urban Design Section, Development Department

COLUMBUS DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Guy Worley, Chief Executive Officer

Amy Taylor, Chief Operating Officer

Elise Yablonsky, Policy Analyst

PLANNING TEAM

MSI Design

Keith Myers, ASLA, Principal

Chris Hermann, AICP, Director of Planning

Andrew Overbeck, AICP, Urban and Regional Planner

Aron Fraizer, ASLA, Associate

Jeff Pongonis, ASLA, Senior Associate

Darren Meyer, ASLA, Senior Associate

Charles Benick, ASLA, Project Designer

Kelley Design Company

Paul W. Kelley, ASAI

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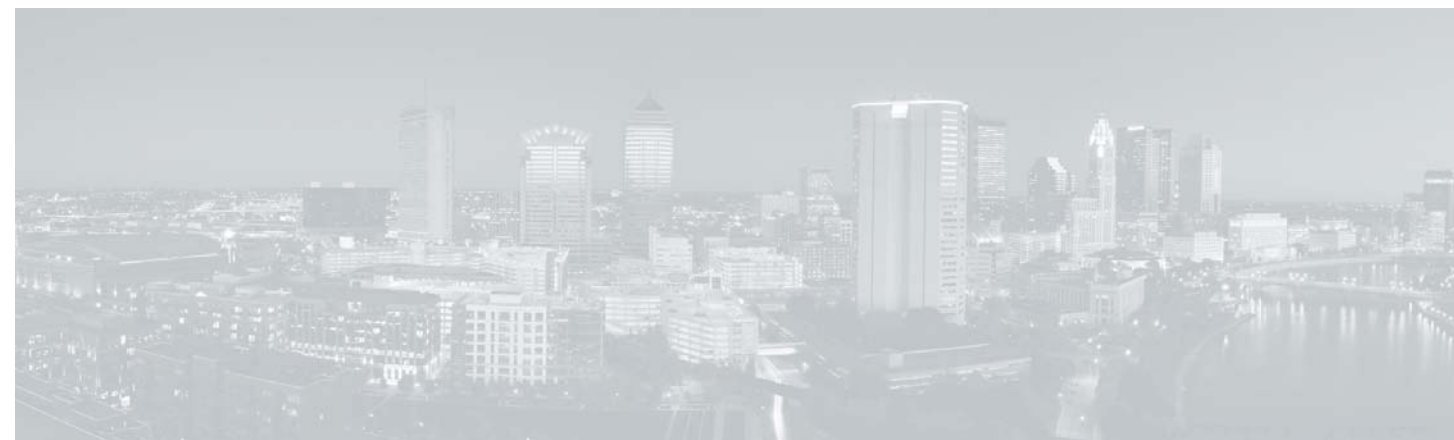
For hosting the public townhall meetings: COSI, Columbus State Community College and CCAD



2010 DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan has three major objectives: 1) To define needs and opportunities, 2) To identify catalytic projects, and 3) To Create policy and strategy recommendations to guide implementation. This section outlines the impetus for the Plan, summarizes the planning process and explains the structure of this report.



INTRODUCTION

Downtown Columbus has experienced a tremendous amount of development activity over the past decade. In 10 short years, the Ohio Penitentiary has been replaced by the Arena District, which has become the City's sports and entertainment destination. Aided by incentives and changes in City policies, the downtown housing market has taken off filling in surface parking lots with new developments and renovating existing buildings. By the City's Bicentennial in 2012, there will be a new riverfront park system along the Scioto Mile, a new park at Columbus Commons, a new Franklin County Courthouse, and two new bridges over the Scioto River. While growth continues to occur throughout Central Ohio, Downtown Columbus remains the hub of government, commercial, and entertainment activity in the region. At the core of this reinvestment is a nationwide trend toward a return to urbanity. This can be seen downtown as it gained residential population for the first time since 1950. In the midst of a housing downturn, this movement remains strong with more than 600 housing units currently under construction in Downtown Columbus.

Plan Objectives

Recognizing that this renewed attention on downtown represents an opportunity to plan for the future, the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation (CDDC) and the City of Columbus engaged MSI Design to update Downtown's 2002 Strategic Business Plan. The 2002 Plan has helped shape the development of Downtown Columbus over the past eight years. It identified several catalytic projects and made key policy recommendations that led to the beginning of Downtown's renaissance. The 2010 Strategic Plan builds off the previous plan's success and takes into account current and planned Downtown projects to create an updated vision for Downtown Columbus. The CDDC and the City wanted to create the 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan in order to:

1. Define needs and opportunities
2. Identify catalytic projects
3. Create policy and strategy recommendations to guide implementation

As a result of this planning process, the planning team has defined **10 Principles**, **12 Ideas**, and **8 Strategies** to guide the future of Downtown Columbus.

Public Process

The planning process began in February 2010, with a press conference held by Mayor Michael B. Coleman. At this meeting, a round table of local leaders and politicians discussed the successes since 2002, and the future aspirations for Downtown Columbus. The planning team from MSI Design added this information to that gathered from more than 50 individual meetings with downtown stakeholders and public officials and prepared for the first public meeting held March 2. At this meeting, existing conditions

MORE THAN 1,000 PUBLIC COMMENTS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED REGARDING AN OVERALL VISION FOR DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS

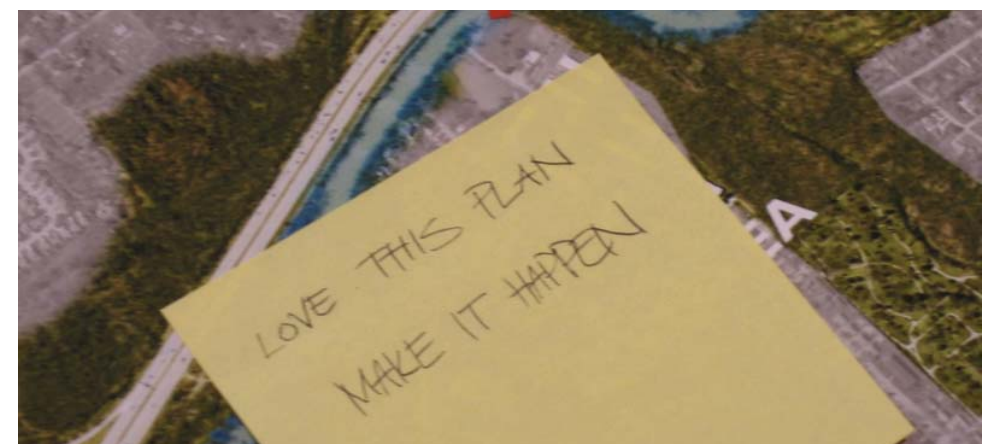
analysis and current issues and constraints were outlined and input for future ideas was received from more than 125 attendees. This conversation continued online, as more than 600 comments were received during this initial stage of the planning process. The planning team took this extensive input and developed **10 Principles** to comprehensively express the community's goals and vision for Downtown Columbus. These principles were then used to inform the **12 Ideas** that were developed to inspire Columbus to think big and identify catalytic projects that take Columbus to the next level.

The **10 Principles** and **12 Ideas** were presented to the public on April 15, and were met with enthusiasm by the more than 150 people in attendance. Almost 500 comments, both at the meeting and online, were received regarding the **12 Ideas**. This input was used to determine the next steps for each of the **12 Ideas** and to develop **8 Strategies** to guide the revitalization of Downtown Columbus. This information was shared with the public in a final public meeting held May 25. Over the course of this process, more than 1,000 total public comments have been received regarding an overall vision for Downtown Columbus for the next 10 years and beyond.

Using the Plan

Following this introduction section, the 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan examines existing conditions in Downtown Today. This baseline information provides a starting point for considering opportunities and potential improvements downtown. As a result of this information gathering and analysis, the planning team developed a set of **10 Principles** to guide the planning process. These principles are applied in the **12 Ideas** section of the Plan which divides downtown into three distinct planning areas in order to shape the future development of each in a cohesive and productive manner. These planning areas, the Discovery District, the High Street Core and the Riverfront are examined in greater detail in individual sections that detail the **12 Ideas**. The **8 Strategies** address Downtown holistically, identifying the needed policy changes and further study needed to guide the revitalization of Downtown Columbus.

The Implementation section begins the process of turning the **12 Ideas** into action. For each idea, the planning team has identified the potential actors and lead responsibility for either studying or implementing the proposed project. Additionally, the **8 Strategies** are summarized. This section provides the necessary methodology for tracking implementation progress.



Multiple public meetings and more than 1,000 public comments helped shape the 2010 Strategic Plan.



Figure 1 - Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan Study Area Diagram

INTRODUCTION

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan is the first comprehensive plan for downtown since 1988. The planning team analyzed each of the major downtown planning initiatives that have taken place in Columbus over the last 100 years. During this time, dozens of plans—large and small—were created for specific individual districts or projects downtown. While some believe that all plans are destined to sit on a shelf, this analysis has shown that every plan from the 1908 Plan of the City of Columbus to the 2002 Strategic Business Plan has had an impact on the city in one way or another.

While these plans represent a snapshot in time and reflect the dominant planning theory of the day, this analysis provides an understanding of the urban condition of Downtown Columbus. A careful reading of each plan reveals that much of what exists in downtown today has a direct connection to a specific plan. It is also interesting to note that there are numerous issues from previous plans, such as adequate parking, effective mass transportation, and increased parkland, which the City and its leaders are still working to address today.

1908 - THE PLAN OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS

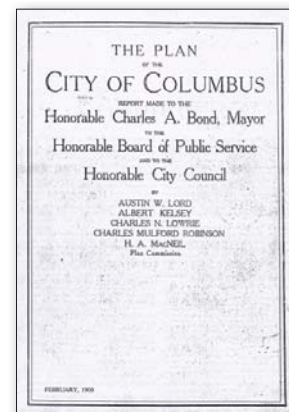
THE 1908 PLAN OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS PROPOSED A CIVIC MALL FROM THE STATE HOUSE TO THE RIVERFRONT.

Big Ideas

- Create a civic mall located from the Statehouse to the riverfront
- Encourage commercial trade downtown by providing easy access to downtown businesses
- Create a comprehensive scheme locating public utility wires in conduits underground
- Build a terminal for the interurban that “is obviously permanent and useful part of the urban ensemble”
- Create a “magnificent approach” to the university and better plan its growth in relation to the City
- Create additional public parkland for the residents of Columbus
- Create non-partisan self perpetuating local commission to ensure that plans are adhered to

Plan Outcomes

- Preservation of the Statehouse Square greenspace
- Purchase of additional parkland outside of downtown
- Construction of some radial boulevards



1955 - A REPORT UPON THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

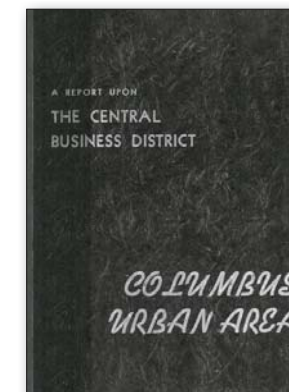
IMPROVING AND EXPANDING ACCESS TO DOWNTOWN VIA URBAN HIGHWAYS WAS ONE OF THE FOCAL POINTS OF THE 1955 REPORT.

Big Ideas

- Downtown needs to be more attractive to compete with outlying shopping centers
- Build proposed innerbelt expressway and encourage wider use of mass transit
- Provide more ramps on proposed innerbelt at Front, High and Spring streets
- Limit turns and consolidate transit lines to increase efficiency of downtown traffic
- Construct several properly located garages and additional surface parking
- Move the Central Market
- Raze the area south of Rich Street along riverfront and give over to public use
- Develop medical center around Grant and St. Francis hospitals with medical office buildings on State and Town streets

Plan Outcomes

- Additional ramps to downtown off what became I-70/71
- Additional traffic controls limit turns; set the stage for widening of streets, creation of more one-way streets
- Led to the removal of Central Market, replaced with bus terminal
- Consolidation of Grant and St. Francis hospitals



1973 - ACTION PROGRAM FOR DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS

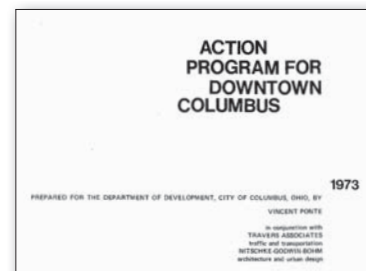
THE 1973 ACTION PROGRAM RESULTED IN THE CLEARANCE OF SLUMS TO MAKE WAY FOR BICENTENNIAL PARK.

Big Ideas

- Improve flow of traffic by creating internal distributor road systems in the downtown
- Provide peripheral parking garages that are linked by pedestrian walkway system
- Create High Street transitway (three phases: 1. Restricted bus lanes, 2. Bus and taxi transitway, 3. Subway under High Street and connection to Port Columbus)
- Create new downtown parks along the riverfront and establish green gateways (portal parks) to the city on all four sides
- Restore the Broad Street median

Plan Outcomes

- Realignment and one-way directionality of several roadways: Marconi/Civic Center and Front streets; Rich Street Connector; Mt. Vernon/Naughten one-way pairs east of High Street; Neill/Goodale Connector; I-71 Connector
- Impetus for Bicentennial Park and Battelle Riverfront Park
- Closure of Pearl Alley around State House Square; Capital Street closed west of High Street for pocket park
- High Street turning restrictions; curb lanes reserved during rush hours for buses
- Construction of additional garages



1988 - DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS STRATEGIC PLAN

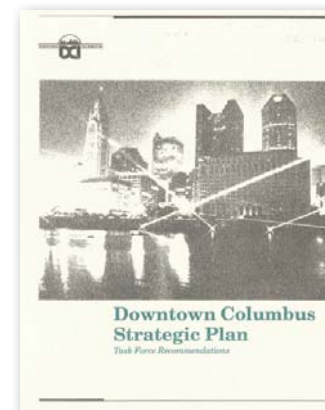
THE 1988 STRATEGIC PLAN MOVED FORWARD THE IDEA TO RENOVATE MANY OF DOWNTOWN'S HISTORIC THEATERS.

Big Ideas

- Redevelop Central High School site
- Expand COSI
- Create satellite parking facilities and provide shuttle service
- Provide a people mover system downtown
- Establish organization to make downtown planning and design decisions
- Eliminate incentives for surface parking lots
- Concentrate arts and entertainment facilities
- Build Civic Center/Sports Arena
- Build Downtown River Amphitheater
- Establish Light Rail system
- "Cap" downtown freeways by using air rights to integrate neighborhoods
- Improve efficiency and look of bus service
- Improve riverfront parks

Plan Outcomes

- Renewed emphasis on planning downtown
- Promoted expansion of COSI
- Promoted the idea of renovating theaters
- Identified need and desire for an arena
- Generated planning and thinking for highway caps, resulted in the I-670 Cap
- Created focus on improving riverfront park system
- Light Rail studied for possible development



2002 - A STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN COLUMBUS

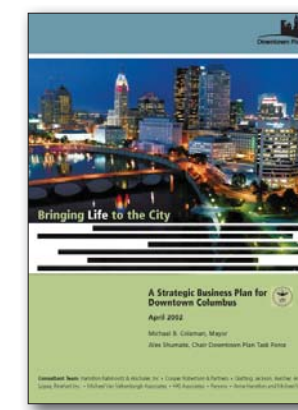
INCREASING THE AMOUNT OF DOWNTOWN HOUSING WAS A MAJOR FOCUS OF THE 2002 STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN.

Big Ideas

- Increase amount of downtown housing by providing incentives
- Construct additional structured parking downtown
- Build a new neighborhood at the southern end of downtown
- Build new riverfront park system downtown, improve existing parks
- Restore two-way directionality to Civic Center, Front, Gay and State Streets
- Build multi-modal transit station at High Street and Nationwide Boulevard

Plan Outcomes

- Residential incentives and tax abatements have caused new housing downtown since 2002 to grow by more than 1,000 units
- New garages are in the planning or construction stages
- RiverSouth plan created, implementation underway
- Scioto Mile plan created and being implemented
- Gay Street improvements complete
- Columbus Commons plan created and being implemented



INTRODUCTION

DOWNTOWN'S URBAN EROSION

Downtown Columbus has evolved dramatically over the course of the past 100 years. It has been shaped by floods, urban renewal, highway construction and the predominance of skyscrapers. These natural and man-made influences have steadily eroded downtown's urban form. The following analysis shows how the dense, low-scale, small block development pattern prevalent in 1921 eventually gave way to the lower density, large scale, superblock development patterns that we are left with today.

1921 to 1951

In 1921 downtown population was 23,000 and most blocks were covered with smaller, low-scale buildings. This resulted in a very dense walkable downtown street grid. Industrial and warehouse uses filled the riverfront and the area south of downtown along the riverfront was characterized by rundown residential uses.

By 1951, downtown population was at its peak of nearly 30,000 residents. Urban renewal had begun to clear the riverfront for parks, government and civic buildings. With redevelopment, block sizes were beginning to increase. The impact of skyscrapers and automobile traffic is beginning to be seen as surface parking lots start to appear along Broad and High streets. At this moment in time, downtown was the retail hub of Central Ohio and 55,000 workers came into downtown each day.



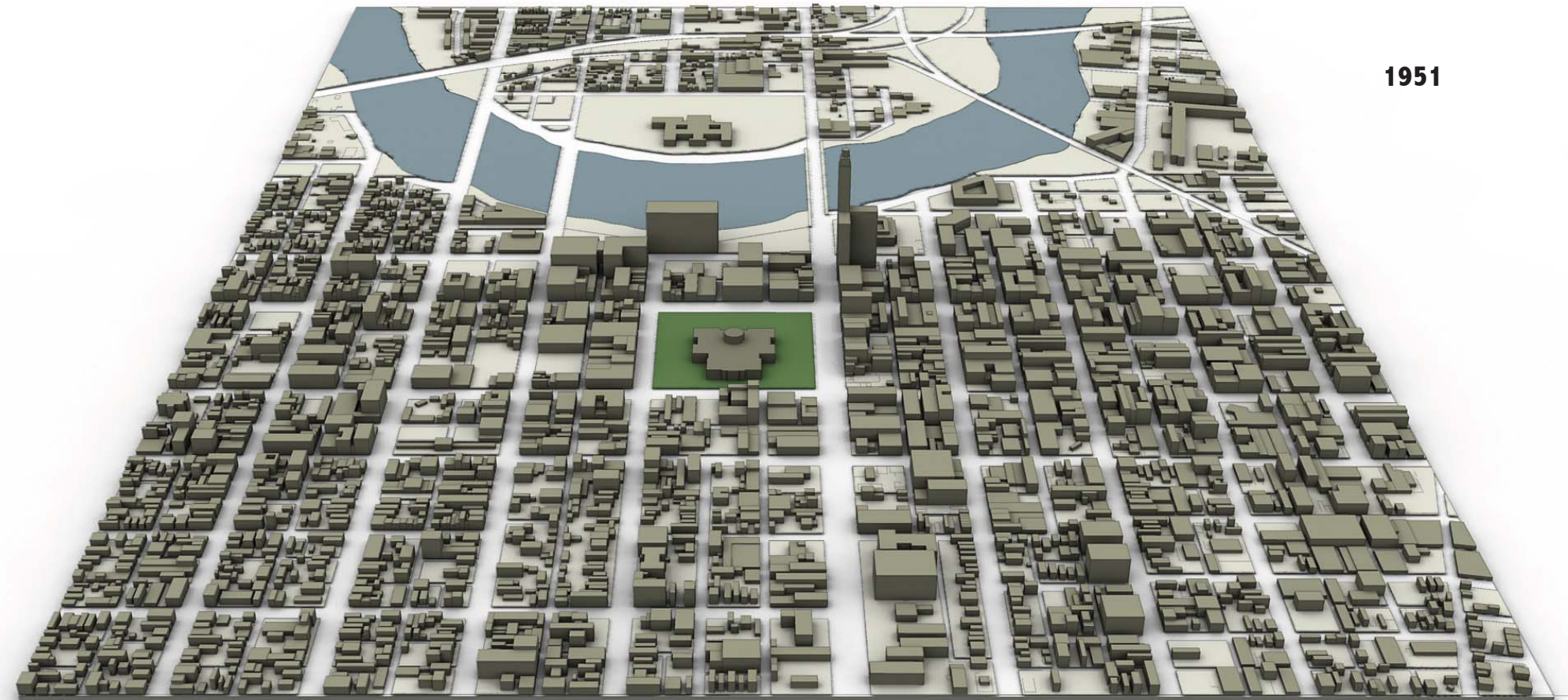
1921



1951

COLUMBUS HAS GROWN DUE TO AN AGGRESSIVE ANNEXATION POLICY, BUT AT THE EXPENSE OF DENSITY. IN 1951 COLUMBUS HAD 9,400 PEOPLE PER SQUARE MILE. TODAY COLUMBUS HAS JUST 3,340 PEOPLE PER SQUARE MILE.

1951



1951 to 2008

During this period, downtown was radically transformed. These changes were primarily driven by annexation policies, urban highways that made it easier to access the expanding suburbs, and the proliferation of skyscrapers and their attendant parking lots.

In 1951 Columbus was the 28th largest city in the United States. Columbus took up 39.9 square miles in land area and had 9,400 people per square mile. With the aggressive annexation program that began soon afterward, Columbus expanded to 213 square miles in land area and is now the 15th largest city in the United States. However, the city's density has suffered as a result. Today Columbus has just 3,340 people per square mile.

The outward expansion of the city boundaries was aided by the advent of urban highways that connected the city center to the suburbs. While this allowed the now more than 100,000 office workers to reach downtown with relative ease, it has had an adverse impact on the downtown environment. To support the parking demands of skyscrapers and other office uses, downtown is now covered with surface parking lots. Residents fled en masse as urban renewal projects or parking lot conversions leveled residential uses. Retail uses also relocated to the suburbs (even with the brief success of City Center Mall), and High Street now has a 40% retail vacancy rate. Downtown residential population fell precipitously decade by decade losing nearly 20,000 residents between 1950 and 1970 before bottoming out in 2000 at less than 3,488 residents. The urban realm has been supremely affected as auto-oriented corridors and large superblocks represent the dominant urban condition.

Since 2002, there have been significant strides to improve downtown. Residential population increased for the first time since 1950 and there are now more than 5,500 residents in downtown. Dozens of residential projects are beginning to fill in surface parking lots with new development and a number of one-way streets are being converted to two way streets. However, this analysis demonstrates how over the course of just a few decades the character of downtown has been eroded. Knowing that Downtown once had nearly 30,000 residents also helps to set a goal for rebuilding downtown into a more livable, mixed use, sustainable urban core that is active from day to night, not just from 9 to 5.

2008

