

Introduction

The work that follows represents a beginning, not an end. It is driven by a vision developed with the input and work of over 400 concerned residents and stakeholders through survey, focus groups, and work groups conducted in 2010 to propose a new direction that will define the future of Sharon and its role in the greater Shenango Valley.

Sharon will achieve its vision of becoming a great place to live, work, and grow by embarking on a strategic journey of intellectual growth defined by new insights, new energy, and new community partnerships. Although our city faces daunting challenges, our visioning process has revealed characteristics of remarkable character and resilience. The focus will be on the development of a collaborative framework that allows for implementation of strategies, rather than simply defining random solutions that may or may not materialize. This framework will allow these groups of community partners to be more strategic about their work and identify the issues and projects that will help raise expectations and transmit healthy patterns of communication and cooperation beyond their immediate surroundings.

The success of any planning document relies on the ability to implement appropriate actions to bring about the desired outcome. Like many smaller cities that suffered the loss of a major or sole industrial base, the years of decline since pose even greater challenges. This plan must first be able to overcome the following identified barriers (or threats) to a revitalization plan:

- 1) Lack of civic engagement and institutions
- 2) Inadequate Governing Capacity
- 3) Chronically negative collective mindset

Realizing these fundamental obstacles early in our planning efforts allows for greater emphasis on the development and support of a network of volunteer-driven programs that will work collaboratively and expand the effectiveness of the municipality's largely-tapped resource base. The collaboration among volunteer groups and the municipality to achieve even the smallest successes will work to inspire greater community participation and ultimately begin to reverse the negative mindset.

This visioning process not only has defined the words that comprise the Vision Statement, its Five Quality Pillars and the ten Guiding Principles, the process has inspired citizens to become actively involved in numerous revitalization efforts. Just a few of the notable successes include the First Annual Sharon Blues Festival, two major neighborhood cleanup efforts, and a downtown Lunchtime Concert Series. These events represent only a portion of the tangible benefits, as the greater benefit is reflected that the individual participants are effectively organizing and planning additional events, continually building off the prior successes. In addition, groups such as the Beautification Commission and the Neighborhood Revitalization Committee are already beginning to communicate on how best to work together to achieve a shared vision.

Next Steps

To facilitate the ongoing development and progress of this initiative, the Sharon Economic and Community Development Commission will appoint a steering committee of 7 to carry out the following priorities:

- 1) Provide ongoing education and promotion of the plan to the greater community
- 2) Ongoing recruitment, support, and development of "Community Partners", the groups that effectively align to bring about desired change under the 10 Guiding Principles.
- 3) Provide timely and ongoing revisions and updates to plan
- 4) Develop and maintain mechanisms for ongoing communication of the plan to City Manager, Council, and Greater Community
- 5) Assist city leaders in adopting performance driven evaluation tools that objectively measure performance of staff, committees, and departments based adopted goals

In addition to these core functions, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee will have representation on the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission's Shenango Valley Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to serve as liaisons to developing opportunities to collaborate effectively on a regional level as defined in Guiding Principle 10.

Finally, The City of Sharon is indebted to the many people who have contributed to this plan. Included are citizens and stakeholders who participated in the survey and public work sessions, as well as the individuals who freely offered their time and expertise serving as unpaid consultants to help organize the strategic planning document.

Thanks also to:

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- The Shenango Foundation for providing funding to support a student intern to work on implementation steps stemming from this strategic planning process
- Sam Perry for graphic design work to promote community wide participation
- The Greater Sharon Associates for funding printed materials to support the initiative

No consultants were paid to create this plan.

What follows are the initial ideas that will take shape as the Community Partners continue their efforts and work collaboratively, positioned to make the most of any opportunity.

SUMMARY OF SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Local community based nonprofits, community colleges universities and hospitals -Sharon is a repository of local history and infrastructure -Affordable housing to allow for Sharon to be a portal community for newcomers -Proximity to Youngstown, Cleveland and Pittsburgh and rural places like Allegheny National Forest and regional reservoirs, lakes and parks. -Walkable downtown and neighborhoods -Easy access to elected officials -Layout and infrastructure-Shenango River runs through center of downtown. -Architecture historic mills, homes and churches -Small colleges and branch universities nearby -Diversity-immigrants, entrepreneurship, niche markets, unique labor pool -Identity-fierce loyalty among old timers, willingness to volunteer -Affordability-Competitive housing and labor opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of civic engagement and institutions with disorganized and thinly spread resources -A diminished variety of local employers and institutions -Parochialism -Inadequate governing capacity due to limited financial resources -Diminished employment and residential tax base coupled with shrinking federal and state subsidies for redevelopment has caused the City to struggle to provide basic resources -Chronic negative collective mindset beginning in the 1980's -High unemployment -Declining housing stock -Potential for severe economic segregation
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase use/revival of industrial fields -Utilize "assets" for marketing purposes - Niche marketing – "brand" the community- -Develop Riverfront Historic Downtown Center -Recreational Development (shopping, dining, hiking/biking trails, entertainment) -Expand upon core businesses with current reputation for drawing tourism (Reyer's, Winner, Quaker Steak & Lube, Daffin's) -Integrate and Develop Educational Institutions (Penn State Shenango, Sharon School District, Laurel Technical Institute) -Affordable Access to Housing and Commercial Properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Neighborhoods Declining -Rising Crime activity -Apathy / Prevailing Negative Attitudes -Lack of Leadership / Shared Vision -Complacency -Declining or decaying infrastructure

City of Sharon: A Great Place to Live Work and Grow

VISION

Pillars

<i>Strong Economy</i>	<i>Vital Neighborhoods</i>	<i>Cultural Vitality</i>	<i>Vibrant Downtown</i>	<i>Efficient Government</i>
Celebrate diverse industry, innovation, opportunity, and sustainability.	Comfortable well maintained neighborhood providing desirable havens for residents to live.	Environment that promotes personal and organizational growth and development through educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities.	Revitalize and maintain downtown as a vibrant center of commercial and retail business and professional services.	Promote exemplary, credible and ethical leadership. Provide efficient safety services and infrastructure to meet community needs.

Guiding Principles

1. The cultural and historical center of the Shenango Valley.
2. A renewal of Sharon's pride, community, and religious spirit where citizens and groups are committed to supporting and participating in social, recreational, and personal growth activities.
3. A center for educational excellence, workforce training and entrepreneurial development.
4. An economically sustainable city providing ample and quality jobs that capitalizes on Sharon's strength in the industrial trades and focused on developing future applications and opportunities for these skills.
5. A vibrant, aesthetic, and environmentally conscious downtown center that is a focal point for recreation, entertainment, fine dining, specialty shopping, and family activities convenient to the "river walk".
6. A city committed to the health and welfare of citizens in all age groups through designated facilities for walking, green spaces, trails, activities, and transportation.
7. Traditional, safe, and clean neighborhoods with desirable and affordable housing.
8. Streamlined, efficient, and attractive gateways and corridors into the City facilitating Sharon's new image as a "destination".
9. A fiscally responsible, effective, efficient, and transparent government emphasizing quality services and coordinated planning.
10. A coordinated, efficient, and effective system for governmental agencies, commissions, and groups to plan, promote, revitalize, and economically develop the City and its infrastructure.

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Guiding Principle #1:

The cultural and historical center of the Shenango Valley.

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	A heritage preservation society exists to promote and preserve the historical significance of the city
	1. Volunteer group facilitates a digital archive of historical photographs, documents, and recorded accounts that allows for safe and efficient use
	2. Retail Shops and Public locations house exhibitions of art and historic displays to promote historical awareness and promote foot traffic through the downtown
	3. Compose a list of significant historical sites within neighborhoods
	4. Volunteer Group serves as a resource to research the historical significance of residential and commercial properties to add layers of interest to property developers
	Expand cultural offerings by expanding on opportunities for artists and the public to work with one another in making art, sustaining the arts locally, and addressing community needs.
	1. Create a forum for communication of cultural and art events
	2. Establish dance and theatre groups and festivals
	3. Establish music festivals

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Guiding Principle #2:

A renewal of Sharon's pride, community, and religious spirit where citizens and groups are committed to supporting and participating in social, recreational, and personal growth activities.

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Align community coalitions under a single vision to promote Sharon's revitalization
	1. Define a committee to recruit and define "community partner" groups both within the city, valley, and region to align goals and build on programmatic and organizational strengths through dynamic relationships with the partnerships, sustaining what is working, and adding new value to existing program initiatives
	2. Get student input into government through schools, organizations, etc. (e.g. Student leaders/Student Council)
	Create a way to efficiently and organize and support volunteer efforts in the community
	1. Create a City news letter
	Develop Communication Plan that supports effective multi-media information sharing to empower the new community activism model
	Create a model to develop, support, and grow recreational and cultural redeeming events that include diverse groups to fill an annual calendar of events throughout Sharon
	1. Cultures FEST - clubs, Slovenia, Russian, etc. Learn from success of Blues Fest on how to partner with City

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Guiding Principle #3:

A center for educational excellence, workforce training and entrepreneurial development.

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Assist post secondary education providers (PSE's) such as Penn State Shenango and Laurel Technical Institute to provide training to meet local economic drivers' needs
	Assist post secondary education providers (PSE's) such as Penn State Shenango and Laurel Technical Institute to attract students to meet goals
	Partner with Sharon City Schools - promote, market quality and collaborate

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Guiding Principle #4:

An economically sustainable city providing ample and quality jobs that capitalize's on Sharon's strength in the industrial trades and focused on developing future applications and opportunities for these skills.

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Assist local economic drivers to maintain and expand services
	Attract new and diverse economic drivers including manufacturing, industrial, business to business services (warehousing and distribution), advanced technology firms, retail and tourism based businesses.
	Establish shovel ready sites for light and heavy industrial business prospects.
	Construction or rehabilitation of commercial or industrial buildings that will result in employment opportunities.
	1. Development of Sharon Growth Fund: Private capital to invest in City of Sharon
	Attract start-up business and entrepreneurial opportunities.
	1. Establish niche incubators to foster start-up businesses
	2. Partner with existing local incubators to attract firms leaving incubators to locate in Sharon.
	3. Utilize low cost loan funds provided by regional sources for business development and expansion (Shared Goal: See Principle 10).
	4. Create an infrastructure to attract business prospects
	Create business friendly culture to attract prospective businesses including tax exemptions, adequate and affordable energy availability, good highway accessibility, affordable occupancy and construction costs, state and local incentives, land and building availability, expedited permitting, workable environmental regulations, rail service, technical assistance from local universities, raw material availability, inventory of skilled and unskilled workers, enhanced telecommunication services, long term financing availability, proximity to suppliers, availability of transportation and roads

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Guiding Principle #5:

A vibrant, aesthetic, and environmentally conscious downtown center that is a focal point for recreation, entertainment, fine dining, specialty shopping, and family activities convenient to the "river walk".

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Re-energize Greater Sharon Associates (GSA) or like organization or coalition to promote and facilitate public and private partnership for targeted business sector's initiatives.
1.	Expand board membership of GSA to include representation by private business, arts & cultural organizations, and Sharon Economic and Community Development Commission
2.	Create events to attract membership
3.	Align goals of GSA to support downtown revitalization as well as overall vision of Sharon
4.	GSA to be Public Relations Center for downtown activities including event calendar
	Adopt and utilize State's best practices and resources to grow and expand downtown.
1.	Sharon utilizes resources made available through membership in PA Downtown Center, a statewide nonprofit dedicated solely to the revitalization of the commonwealth's core communities.
2.	GSA leadership, aligned with municipal leadership, and the support of community coalitions, commits to the Main Street comprehensive, community-based, four point approach to revitalizing downtowns and central business districts
3.	GSA leadership to seek designation of a Main Street Community through DCED allowing for 5 year funding to appoint a full-time downtown manager to coordinate downtown revitalization initiatives
4.	City map to identify current use, future plans, and business inventory
	Attract new landlords, real estate developers with emphasis on owner occupants to purchase and upgrade vacant buildings.
1.	Encourage seasonal businesses for farmer's markets, prom season, retailers
	Charge Redevelopment Authority to take control of vacant/tax delinquent properties to convert to better use.
	Utilize Shenango River as an asset for business development and community use.
1.	Expand or improve farmer's market
	Complete riverwalk.
1.	Create entrepreneurial opportunities for potential businesses including art galleries, micro breweries, bakeries, antique shops, multi-cultural specialty cuisine restaurants, WIFI dome, whole food markets, deli's, coffee shops, jazz & blues bars
	Capitalize downtown's strength as an easy to navigate pedestrian friendly alternative to mall shopping.
1.	Create art gallery district
	Create centralized area for cultural events and festivals
1.	Partner with QS&L to promote and expand bike events
	Provide attractive landscaping and lighting to enhance appearance of downtown district.
	Maximize opportunities for logistically efficient, affordable and safe parking facilities.
	Improve street signage.
	Promote downtown as low cost occupancy site for low traffic office use
	Explore opportunities to options for future use of Columbia Theater
	Expand loft apartment opportunities
	Bike racks

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Guiding Principle #6:

A city committed to the health and welfare of citizens in all age groups through designated facilities for walking, green spaces, trails, activities, and transportation.

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Designate facilities for walking, parks, trails activities and transportation.
	1. Partner with Shenango River Watchers and Mercer County Trails Association to align goals to support use of dormant resources that may become valuable recreational assets, such as Shenango River and rail lines. (urban bike trail)
	Designate a detailed, comprehensive parking plan including street and deck parking to meet city needs
	Inventory recreation in Shenango Valley to identify potential unmet needs and explore development opportunities
	1. Buhl Club, concrete areas for basketball/ tennis (Old Wengler School) Skate Park?

City of Sharon: A Great Place to Live Work and Grow

Guiding Principle #7:

Traditional, safe, and clean neighborhoods with desirable and affordable housing...

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Significantly reduce the number of foreclosed properties that have a blighting influence on Sharon neighborhoods.
	1. Implement recognition for business/residents who improve their property
	2. Formalize a beautification system (Irvine and Meek Street) to support future efforts (one year) Clean Block Coordinated Plan (A Kit)
	Stabilize property values in neighborhoods experiencing distress.
	1. Energize landlords to maintain rental properties by establishing a landlord association
	2. Target investment funding to stabilize neighborhoods
	3. Provide neighborhood volunteer teams to counsel and educate low to moderate income population for home owner maintenance issues
	Assist low income households to secure homeownership and affordable housing.
	1. Obtain suitable lots for new affordable homes to attract affluent, middle income and low to moderate income population
	2. Collaborate with Mercer County Housing Authority and Community Action Agency to meet neighborhood objectives
	3. Increase the supply of entry-level affordable housing units, encourage a variety of housing types, provide owner and renter occupied housing assistance, provide first-time homebuyer assistance.
	4. Increase additional quality affordable multi-family housing units.
	5. Update Sharon's Consolidated Plan as required by HUD/CDGB to address the City's low to moderate income housing needs.
	6. Refer suitable county wide emergency shelter, counseling, job training, transitional housing and permanent housing for families and individuals that are homeless.
	Attract real estate developers and landlords to provide quality and rental housing.
	1. Utilize Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency's low income tax credit program to attract capital to construct affordable new housing projects and increase tax rolls
	Enhance resources to promote consistent and effective code enforcement (shared goal: listed in Principle 8).
	1. Investigate ways to support the effort of the code officer (volunteers, interns, clerical support, support systems)
	2. Adopt a "top ten" code violations list that would assist residents to fix violations. Communicate, then assist with list.
	Upgrade residential housing stock to compete with nearby newer housing.
	1. Provide neighborhood volunteer teams to counsel and educate low to moderate income population for home owner maintenance issues
	2. Remove unstable or dilapidated housing and other structures to improve neighborhood quality and aid in achievement of item 6 above.
	3. Provide additional housing in downtown above stores.
	Cultivate neighborhood pride, identity and leadership particularly in more mature neighborhoods.
	1. Partner with community organizations, churches, school districts to enlist and to instill community pride
	2. Develop and implement urban garden program
	3. Create names for various areas and corridors to create area identities to promote positive images of City ("Holy Toledo" Artist Gallery, Church Corner, Sacred Ground)
	4. Provide opportunities for increased utilization of youth centers and recreational facilities.
	5. Provide senior centers for recreational, education and social needs.
	6. Provide transportation services to get residents to needed services and employment

City of Sharon: A Great Place to Live Work and Grow

Guiding Principle #8:

Streamlined, efficient, and attractive gateways and corridors into the City facilitating Sharon's new image as a "destination"

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Enhance resources to promote consistent and effective code enforcement (shared goal: listed in Principle 7).
	1. Investigate ways to support the effort of the code officer (volunteers, interns, clerical support, support systems)
	2. Adopt a "top ten" code violations list that would assist residents to fix violations. Communicate and assist.
	Prioritize infrastructure projects that relate to gateway and corridor improvements
	1. Promote improved aesthetics and community pride through establishment of "Adopt a Site/Block Program"
	2. Install effective/attractive signage on gateways and corridors
	3. Focus code enforcement on the key-ways to the City

City of Sharon: A Great Place to Live, Work, and Grow

Guiding Principle #9:

A fiscally responsible, effective, efficient, and transparent government emphasizing quality services and coordinated planning.

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Adopt comprehensive vision model for City as proposed.
	1. City council adopts proposed Strategic Plan for the City of Sharon and commits to implementation with the support of committed Innovative Revitalization Coalitions
	2. Once adopted by council, present plan to Mercer County Regional Planning Commission for incorporation in the Shenango Valley Comprehensive Plan
	3. Appoint a committee consisting of 7 community representatives to oversee implementation of the plan and continually report on progress and requirements to update and amend the working framework to city council, the community, and other engaged parties
	Establish annual "lean" balanced budget with sufficient reserves in all funds.
	Establish measurable standards of excellence to meet community expectation for delivery of basic services.
	1. Create a comprehensive and continuing "customer service training program" that fosters an environment of creative problem solving at all staff levels and ensures the staff is responsive, knowledgeable, courteous and friendly at every level.
	2. Provide an integrated system that allows customer input on service performance.
	3. Initiate training for department heads to recruit, retain and develop the most qualified for all City departments.
	Encourage volunteerism and community leadership. Re-activate dormant commissions and authorities with talented participants who provide guidance and community input.
	Utilize best practices of other municipalities to provide fire and police services.
	Establish effective community development department to track needs and avail City of public resources from Federal and State sources.
	Charge Planning Commission to update zoning model to manage land use and regulate business, residential and institutional concentrations.
	Establish rigid and effective code enforcement initiatives.
	Adopt, update and implement feasible recommendations of Early Intervention Study as may be appropriate.

City of Sharon: A Great Place to Live Work and Grow

Guiding Principle #10:

A coordinated, efficient, and effective system for governmental agencies, commissions, and groups to plan, promote, revitalize, and economically develop the City and its infrastructure.

Goals

<i>Target Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
	Initiate opportunities for shared services that minimize costs and maintain desired service quality.
	Solicit on-going input from DCED to more efficiently administer City government.
	Optimize opportunities to secure funding for infrastructure improvements that will support the achievement of the Sharon's vision
	1. Target the completed projects (e.g. Dock Street, 62 Bridge) for additional funding to keep project moving and successful
	Lead the effort for inter-governmental opportunities to deliver basic municipal services.
	Simplify the process to encourage and support economic development such as the multitude of committees, commissions and authorities.