

**HIGHLAND STATION,
RESOURCE TEAM REPORT
(OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN)**

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INTRODUCTION

On October 24 – 27, 2006, a Main Street Oakland County (MSOC) Resource Team visited Highland Station, Oakland County, Michigan, to create a set of comprehensive recommendations to assist the local community in achieving long-term revitalization and management of its downtown commercial district. This resource team consultation is a service provided to Michigan Main Street communities engaged in comprehensive downtown revitalization according to the nationally recognized Main Street Four-Point Approach™, developed by the National Trust Main Street Center (NTMSC).

The Resource Team, comprised four commercial district revitalization professionals and staff members from Main Street Oakland County, evaluated the progress of Highland Station's Main Street Program, presented observations of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the downtown district, and made recommendations for revitalizing the downtown and ensuring the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority (DDA) continues to move forward in building its Main Street program. The team's recommendations for implementing long-term, historic preservation-based revitalization goals for the downtown business district are presented in this report.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE TEAM REPORT

The team's recommendations are based on the conditions of downtown Highland Station during its visit and the capacity of the community at large to respond to those conditions as opportunities for action. Secondly, all recommendations are based on the premise that in order to successfully implement a revitalization effort, a strong partnership must exist among all stakeholders, including Highland Township, the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority (HTDDA)/Main Street Program, downtown property owners and merchants, volunteers, and other significant community members. The Resource Team bases its observations and recommendations on years of field experience with many different communities, but the citizens of Highland Township know their community best. Therefore, the selection of local revitalization projects and activities should be based on community priorities and on what can be accomplished with available resources.

The resource team report should be distributed to all downtown stakeholders, including the boards of the Downtown Development Authority and to the members of the Highland Township Board of Trustees and other appropriate Township staff. Relevant sections should be distributed to each of the Main Street committees, other volunteers, and to all interviewees as deemed appropriate. It is strongly recommended that all Highland Township DDA board members and Main Street committee volunteers read the report, discuss the recommendations, and develop or adjust their annual and long-term work plans accordingly. At minimum, Main Street staff and the board president should fully review this document and use it to guide committee actions and assess the community's progress in developing its Main Street program.

Finally, it is important to note that Main Street Oakland County and NTMSC assistance does not end with this report. The Resource Team strongly encourages the Highland Township DDA board of directors, Main Street committee members, and staff to contact MSOC and the NTMSC, to discuss the contents of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Resource Team assembled by the National Trust Main Street Center, in partnership with Main Street Oakland County visited downtown Highland Station from October 24 – 27, 2006. The team, comprising of four commercial district revitalization professionals, recorded their observations and recommendations in order to formulate appropriate and comprehensive, historic preservation-based downtown revitalization strategies. The following are the key recommendations presented to the Howell community during the on-site visit; succeeding sections of this report expand on these recommendations and related issues in further detail.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Integrating the Main Street Four-Point Approach in DDA operations.** The Highland Township Downtown Development Authority has made substantial progress in the past year in forming its Main Street committees, recruiting volunteers, and developing and implementing its first work plan. In fact, the Highland Township community has done well in establishing a firm foundation for future success with its Main Street program. However, much work still remains in integrating the Main Street methodology into all aspects of DDA operations including budget and work plan development, volunteer management and in relations with the Highland Charter Township. In addition, the DDA board of directors and the Organization Committee will need to engage the community at large and develop strong partnerships with other stakeholders in order to implement successfully its long-term vision for the downtown district. Additional initiatives in public relations and external communication will be needed to educate the community on the roles the DDA is taking in the development of Highland Station and the opportunities for the community to participate.
- **Building an effective Highland Station promotion program.** In the past year, the Highland Township DDA Promotion Committee has been quite active in undertaking various work plan activities including the production of special events and marketing and image-building activities. Undertaking a comprehensive approach to developing a downtown promotion program will need to include all forms of promotions as well some creativity that will promote a positive and unified image of Highland Station. In terms of overall promotion strategy, for the near-term, the HTDDA's marketing, promotion and image enhancement efforts should continue to emphasize and nurture a strong sense of the Highland Station downtown area as the center for community activity, culture, entertainment and commerce. As Highland Station revitalizes and develops in the years to come, long-term marketing and promotion efforts should incorporate a stronger retail promotion component to support and capitalize upon existing and evolving clusters of retail and service businesses. All promotion activities should highlight and capitalize upon character-defining features, historic resources and community assets that help to identify Highland Station as a special place in Oakland County.
- **Conducting effective business development activities.** In the short-term, Highland Station's most important short-term economic restructuring challenge is to encourage the reuse of its remaining historic commercial buildings, to improve the competitiveness of existing downtown businesses, and to promote the attraction of new business enterprises. In order to meet this challenge, the Economic Restructuring Committee will have to develop specific initiatives in business recruitment and retention and real estate development. Some aspects of a comprehensive retail market analysis will also have to be conducted so the HTDDA can make the most appropriate decision on the types of business that could be recruited or how existing ones can be repositioned to capture additional market share. Since Highland Station is a compact business district with relatively few commercial buildings, undertaking these activities should be strategic and straightforward. In other words, the Economic Restructuring Committee should be able to work closely with each downtown property and business owner to implement the most appropriate business development strategy that will achieve long-lasting positive economic impact in the downtown.

- **Planning effectively for Highland Station's future.** Preserving Highland Station's unique sense of place and developing an effective plan for its future evolution should be a high priority for the HTDDA and the greater Highland Township community. Creating a master plan for Highland Station will not be an easy task but the rewards of undertaking and effective planning process will have many benefits including the development of design ideals that build upon Highland Station's unique character and breathing life into the community's vision of Highland Station by using tools that sharpen the understanding of what could be possible in the future. To accomplish this, the Highland Township community and the HTDDA will have to think in new ways about what could be possible and develop an effective planning process that engages community stakeholders. It is the development and implementation of this plan that can help Highland Station become the true social, economic and cultural center of the Township.