



Strategic Plan

Vineland Downtown Improvement District/Main Street Vineland

2013-2018

Prepared by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
What is a mission statement?	4
Suggested revised mission statement	4
What is a vision statement?	5
Suggested new vision statement for VDID/MSV	6
Vineland Four Strategic Goals	7
Role of work plans	8
Economic Restructuring –strategic goal and projects	10
Organization—strategic goal and projects	13
Promotion—strategic goal and projects	15
Design –strategic goal and projects	17
Credits	19

Introduction

Historic Downtown Vineland is a regional commercial district catering to shoppers in Vineland NJ and the surrounding communities. The downtown business improvement district management organization has been working for over ten years to enhance the district by planting flowers, placing banners, providing regular street cleaning of the district, and programming events in the downtown for regional visitors and community residents.

For the last decade, the Vineland Downtown Improvement District/Main Street Vineland has been using an organizing method known nationally as the Main Street Four Point Approach™. Landis Avenue is the historic and current heart of Vineland, and the Avenue defines the local identity and reflects the community's history and 'sense of place.' The Main Street Approach™ stresses historic preservation as the underlying design principle for the revitalization effort. Main Street efforts nationwide aim to maximize the economic potential of each historic commercial district while preserving its distinct historic character. For Vineland, the volunteer-led committees are integral to the success of the program and involve stakeholders—be they residents, business owners or property owners—in making decisions about the future of the downtown. These stakeholders participated in all facets of the research leading up to the creation of this new Strategic Plan that represents the next phase in the VDID/MSV's organizational development.

Consulting Services from Main Street New Jersey

As part of Vineland's participation in Main Street New Jersey, the state coordinating program provided staff assistance and consulting services to the Vineland Downtown Improvement District/Main Street Vineland as part of the State's effort to enhance the growth, effectiveness and sustainability of participating MSNJ organizations.

Heritage Consulting Inc., a Philadelphia-based consulting firm with a consulting contract with Main Street New Jersey to provide Organizational Sustainability services to participating MSNJ communities, led the three-phase Strategic Planning effort. Donna Ann Harris of Heritage Consulting Inc. worked collectively with Todd Noon, Executive Director of VDID/MSV, local volunteers, business owners, stakeholders and Board members, to develop this Strategic Plan: The research was conducted over six months and included three distinct activities, which are outlined below.

- 1) SWOT Analysis. Held on June 9, 2012, this three-hour evening meeting received the input from fourteen stakeholders, including Board members, volunteers, Main Street Vineland and City Economic Development staff. During the meeting, we discussed the current conditions of both the downtown shopping district and the VDID/MSV organization. A summary memo was prepared that offered observations and recommendations for solving several specific problems in the short and medium term.

2) Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey conducted for three weeks in September 2012. This survey was an extraordinary success with more than 420 responses. The survey provided critical demographic and market data about the downtown district's current shoppers. A 45-page report and a Fast Facts summary resulted.

3) A Visioning and Strategic Planning Workshop held on Saturday morning February 23, 2013, was three hours long and included sixteen VDID/MSV volunteers, Board members, business owners, a City Council member and Main Street Vineland and City Economic Development staff. Prior to the workshop, all participants received copies of the SWOT analysis and the Online Survey Report. This workshop began with a brief summary of the results of the SWOT analysis and Online Survey. During the workshop, all participated in a visioning exercise to help the assembled group visualize the future of downtown five years from now. Finally, we used the visioning exercise to identify specific strategies to implement projects toward the realization of this long-term vision of downtown.

What is a Strategic Plan?

Board Source[™], a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance the public good by building exceptional nonprofit Boards and inspiring Board service, defines a Strategic Plan as a written document that defines an organization's over-arching strategies and major areas of work for the next three to five years to achieve the organization's mission.

Strategic plans for nonprofit organizations are created through a process that builds on research to accumulate wisdom about the organization, its environment, economic potential and involves stakeholders in the process to assure that the resulting Strategic Plan contains a comprehensive understanding of the preferred future of the organization.

New Mission and Vision Statements

As part of the Visioning and Strategic Planning workshop, we asked participants to review the existing mission and vision statements of the organization to determine if they are still valid, and to note if any changes were necessary. There were many comments made about both statements, so we provided new statements to compliment the overall new direction of the organization as discussed during the workshop.

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement articulates where the organization is now, not at some desired future point. An ideal mission statement states why the organization exists, who benefits, what it does and finally, how it does what it does. A good mission statement conveys how the organization relates to its public and communities; why and how it enhances the well-being of others and improves the quality of life, which benefits because of its work; and, finally, what service it

provides. A mission statement should be easily memorized, as it becomes a part of the “elevator speech” about the organization.

Current VDID/MSV Mission Statement

The Mission of Main Street Vineland is to preserve, protect and enhance the downtown area with its historic and natural assets, while raising the value of downtown properties and its businesses.

New Mission Statement

VDID/MSV promotes, enhances and revitalizes historic Landis Avenue, as a thriving commercial district and community-gathering place for area shoppers, residents and visitors.

What is a vision statement?

A vision statement describes the preferred future of both the organization and downtown after five years of hard work towards fulfilling the dreams of stakeholders. The vision statement should focus on the community impact and the power of the organization to transform downtown. Therefore, a good vision statement is ambitious enough to force people out of comfortable routines, is conceptual but practical and takes advantage of fundamental trends from consumer research. A vision statement should be clear enough to articulate the visual changes in downtown.

Current VDID/MSV vision statement

Downtown Vineland will be a vibrant and desirable place to live, shop, dine and work. It will be an exciting community destination, attracting visitors and residents alike by embracing history, culture and progress through architectural preservation, celebrating our diverse heritage, as well as the arts and theater.

New Vision Statement

Our Vision for Vineland in 2018. By 2018, historic downtown Vineland will be nationally-recognized as a quality destination for shopping and dining for all of South Jersey. The newly expanded and thriving Landis MarketPlace, the beautifully restored Landis Theater and the highly regarded new antique emporium will drive customers to Landis Avenue both day and night, as these three institutions are our downtown’s major anchors. Throughout the week, customers crowd our downtown stores and restaurants or visit with the numerous health care and professional service providers for appointments.

The Vineland Downtown Improvement District/Main Street Vineland works closely with our partners in both the public and private sectors to host major festivals and retail events

throughout the year that keep our sidewalks and street parking full. All downtown Vineland business owners actively participate in the events and co-op advertising sponsored by the VDID/MSV. Year round, the beloved sidewalk cafes, shops and entertainment venues keep the sidewalks of Vineland hopping. We work closely with the merchants to promote a handful of high quality and creative retail events each year that focus on local talent and locally-made products that appeal to the variety of market niches in the area. VDID/MSV maintains a list of interested local and national retailers, to fill any vacancy that may occur. VDID/MSV maintains its close working relationship with the City's Department of Economic Development.

The customer experience downtown is managed by the VDID/MSV. The district is a palette of color due to the lush hanging flower baskets, handsome banners and seasonally planted flowers on the Boulevard and around City Hall. The organization takes responsibility for maintaining and placing the quality way-finding signage, festive Christmas decorations and many street trees. The organization was responsible for new landscaped parking lots, mini parks and new and attractive dumpster carrels. Downtown is sparkling due to regular sweeping, and there is consistent and visible policing, thus assuring that our downtown is safe. The extensive stock of historic buildings along Landis Avenue continues to be well maintained and celebrated. For the last five years, VDID/MSV has worked closely with the City to promote and encourage more middle-income housing upstairs in downtown buildings and in the adjacent neighborhood, which has fostered renewed citizen involvement and community pride.

Downtown Vineland is perceived as business friendly. The VDID/MSV continues its longstanding, productive and cordial working relationships with our elected officials at the City, County, State and Federal levels. The VDID/MSV is a full partner with the City of Vineland on any local planning or capital project in the downtown and hosts ribbon cuttings, contests and other publicity to promote a positive image of downtown.

Over the years, the operating budget for VDID/MSV has increased to more than \$400,000 and the Board manages a staff of three including an executive director, and two part-time events and administrative staff. More than 100 volunteers on the roster provide leadership for and mount the national award-winning festivals and retail events for the community. Historic downtown Vineland is truly an exciting place to shop, live, work and play.

Vision statement--Medium length version

Landis Avenue is the hub of the Vineland community where residents and visitors find a thriving commercial district full of exciting shops and restaurants. Throughout the week, and especially on the weekends, the downtown district is packed as residents and visitors shop Landis MarketPlace and other favorite independent retailers and national chain stores. The district is a palette of color due to the lush hanging flower baskets, handsome banners and seasonally planted flowers on the Boulevard and around City Hall. Volunteers and other partners play an important role in managing the national award-winning seasonal special

events. Year round, the beloved sidewalk cafes, shops and entertainment venues keep the sidewalks of Vineland hopping.

Vision statement--Short version

Landis Avenue is the hub of the Vineland community where residents and visitors find a thriving commercial district full of exciting shops and restaurants.

Strategic Goals

The goal-setting portion of the workshop helped to take the long-term vision and create a specific preferred future direction for the downtown. Committee members formulated these goals. The goals neatly fit within the traditional purview of the Organization, Design, Promotion and Economic Restructuring Committees. Team members prepared a brief statement of the overall goal of their committee in the future. They were asked to be specific about the outcome of five year's work. The following are the future strategic goals for downtown Vineland as prepared by each of the four teams.

2013-2018 Vineland Strategic Goals

1. The downtown will offer exciting consumer opportunities such as unique retail, arts and entertainment and a full menu of delicious dining options for residents and visitors alike.
2. Our historic buildings and streetscape will be well maintained through the leadership of local business owners who collaborate with Main Street Vineland volunteers and the City.
3. We will promote our downtown through a select number of major festivals and retail events that focus on local products, talents and businesses as we continue longstanding partnerships with other community groups and sponsors.
4. By 2018, the annual operating budget of the VDID/MSV will be \$400,000, raised from a diverse number of revenue sources and from endowment. Hundreds of volunteers donate time to our work and we honor them yearly.

Role of the Strategic Goals

The four Strategic Goals serve as the bridge to the new vision for the future of Landis Avenue. All of the short and longer-term projects (individually and collectively) move the organization towards making its vision real by allocating all of its financial and volunteer resources accordingly.

The activities and programs that the Vineland Downtown Improvement District/Main Street Vineland implements in the future, through the combination of Board , staff, committees, partners and individual task volunteers, all must be aligned to achieve at least one (1) of the four (4) Strategic Goals as outlined above. If a project does not *clearly* meet any of the Strategic Goals, the project should neither be staffed nor funded, as there is a finite number of volunteers and financial resources.

Role of Work Plans

Work plans for each project are completed by the volunteer committees/teams and are approved by the Board. The work plan provides detail on how to implement an effective project. Every work plan contains the following elements: Who (person or partner organization.), What, When, How Much Cost, How Much Income, Volunteer Hours, Staff Hours and of course, the Strategic Goal(s) met. Collectively, these work plans become the substance of the materials submitted to the City for support. The Work Plan can be used to sell sponsorships and support, as well as to assertively market the volunteer and collaborative opportunities therein to individuals and groups of current or potential stakeholders.

Staffing and volunteers

This Strategic Plan sets out a very ambitious improvement agenda for the VDID/MSV over the next five (5) years. All of these activities are important and worthy, but the Vineland Board must reach agreement about how it will staff these activities.

While there are already scores of volunteers involved with the organization, there are not enough to implement even a small portion of these activities. The current staff cannot take on any more duties, as it is already significantly overstretched and staff has been reduced in the last few years due to the loss of Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) support.

If the VDID/MSV Board, along with committees and volunteers, is to be responsible for implementing these tasks, then the Board must continue to invest substantially in volunteer infrastructure. New systems will be needed, including more volunteer job descriptions, updated databases, volunteer recruitment drives, volunteer training and continuing the annual recognition event. Leadership for any new volunteer effort must come from the Board itself, primarily in the form of attending meetings, events or other official activities. An effective Board cannot expect volunteers to do things that it appears the Board members are themselves unwilling to do.

Conclusion

This 2013-2018 Strategic Plan for downtown Vineland is a review of the past performance of the organization and a representation of its bright future. This Strategic Plan contains a new mission and vision statements. The four Strategic Goals mentioned above organize the rest of

the document and should be used to guide all of the organization's work in the next five (5) years, which is the useful life of this planning document.

Economic Restructuring Committee

Strategic Goal: The downtown will offer exciting consumer opportunities such as unique retail, arts and entertainment activities and a full menu of delicious dining option for residents and visitors alike.

Responsible Committee: Economic Restructuring

Understand the current market downtown

- Use the Market Analysis and recently completed Consumer and Stakeholder Survey to refine marketing materials for business recruitment and retention purposes in the downtown. Create new materials as needed. Conduct additional workshops as needed with area merchants to help them use this information to expand their product lines or refocus their business to take advantage of downtown customer preferences.
- The Consumer and Stakeholder Survey noted that 40% of the current customers in downtown Vineland are not Vineland residents. Use this information to refine advertising for VDID/MSV, and make existing merchants aware of this information so they can adjust their media buys accordingly.
- Make the Online Survey results and Market Analysis widely available especially to existing restaurants so they understand current downtown shopper preferences. Post both documents on the VDID/MSV website.

Recruit new complimentary businesses

- Landis MarketPlace is the major driver of foot traffic in the downtown in 2013 according to the Survey. Help the market expand by offering assistance to recruit new tenants or help existing tenants expand. Collaborate with the MarketPlace management to host events, support creation of any outdoor cafes, and business directories/maps/kiosks. Create a formal or informal referral program so Landis MarketPlace shoppers are directed to other downtown businesses. Highlight MarketPlace restaurants in any restaurant promotion or event.
- Recruit a private operator to convert a large building in the downtown into an antique emporium or co-op to drive additional foot traffic downtown. Work with the antique emporium management to create retail events to highlight this market niche and bring additional customers into the downtown.
- Expand downtown arts opportunities by converting a building in need of redevelopment in downtown into a multimedia arts center that will offer classes,

exhibits and experiential tours. Collaborate with the Landis Theater and other existing arts organizations to create a vibrant hub for community members.

- The Online Survey noted that current downtown shoppers were seeking slightly more upscale offerings than currently available downtown. Survey results showed there was a need for a full-service restaurant that offers high-quality food with unique entertainment. Use the recent Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey results to identify consumer desires for new restaurants. The immediate focus will be to find new tenants for any vacant restaurant or food service establishment.
- Encourage all property owners to recruit tenants with complete business plans. Provide referrals to the local Small Business Development Center if a potential tenant needs to create a business plan.
- Consider if there is a market to create a regional historic district museum or hall of fame in downtown Vineland.

Retain existing businesses

- Widely disseminate the recent Market Analysis and Online survey information to existing merchants and work with them to alter their product mix to appeal to the current downtown shoppers as noted in these materials.

Provide appropriate educational opportunities for merchants

- Continue to assist local merchants by publishing a quality, quarterly newsletter with information relevant to downtown small business owners.
- Host regular merchant meetings as a forum for discussion and action on special events and retail events that will positively impact their businesses

Monitor the district, and maintain partnerships

- Work with the city's Economic Development Department to identify mutually-supportive efforts towards business retention and new business recruitment along Landis Avenue. Agree on the larger recruitment effort for the downtown, and create assignments for both parties that will fulfill the overall vision for the downtown as identified in the Strategic Plan.
- Work with the city to continue to promote and encourage more middle-income housing upstairs in downtown buildings and adjacent to the downtown through broader citizen involvement in the downtown.

- Increase staff so that the Executive Director can devote a majority of his time to focus on business recruitment activities.

Organization Committee

Strategic Goal: By 2018, the annual operating budget of the VDID/MSV will be \$400,000 raised from a diverse number of revenue sources and from endowment. Hundreds of volunteers donate time to our work and we honor them yearly. Continue our extensive communication efforts to tell people about our work and about our exciting downtown.

Responsible Committee: Organization

Board leadership and membership

- Work with the Mayor, City Council Members and the City Solicitor to determine if a revision to the ordinance creating the VDID/MSV would permit the creation of a nominating committee to appoint interested citizens to be the majority of Board members.
- If revisions to the ordinance are not possible, consider retaining the existing VDID/MSV Board to govern the Special Improvement District (SID) portion of the organization's budget only, and create a self-governing, non-membership nonprofit Board comprised of interested citizens to manage the remaining portion (non-SID funds) of the organization's budget, events and activities. If a separate nonprofit Board is formed to manage the non-SID funds of the organization, encourage overlap of up to three Board members to serve on both Boards to provide continuity.
- Review the yearly fundraising expectations for Board members with every Board candidate, whether appointed by a self-governing nominating committee or City Council. Make it clear that all Board members are expected to make a generous gift to support the operations of the VDID/MSV as part of their Board service to the SID Board or the separate nonprofit if one is formed.
- Revise the VDID/MSV ordinance to require removal of SID Board members if they have two unexcused absences from Board meetings within a twelve-month period.
- Create a standing committee of both the SID Board and the new nonprofit (if formed) dedicated to coordinating the overall fundraising efforts of the organization.

Budget

- By 2018, the operating budget will grow to be \$400,000. Revenue sources will be diverse including government, sponsorship, special events, grants, fundraising events, memberships and Board, individual, major and planned gifts. We will target our fundraising so that by 2018, 80% of our revenue comes from individuals. We will

continue to be successful in seeking grants and major gifts and establish an endowment that will support the operating budget.

- Charge the Board development committee with producing an annual fundraising plan to chart how the Board (s) and staff will make incremental progress towards growing the operating budget to be \$400,000 by 2018. Develop case statements or other documents to help make the argument to individuals for their support.
- Work with City Council to increase the Special Improvement District property tax assessment from the current \$51,700 yearly to more than \$100,000 by 2018 to pay for more services and activities that benefit all downtown property owners.

Volunteers and partners

- Significantly expand our partnership efforts by targeting South Jersey Health Care for their assistance in planning downtown events with a health focus. Target the local Boys and Girls Club to help provide a source of ready youth and adult volunteers. Use the Greater Vineland Chamber of Commerce as a potential source for recruiting new businesses to locate to the downtown. Collaborate with PNC Bank as a resource to help sponsor important community activities and ongoing operations. Identify students and administrators at Cumberland County College as a resource for interns, student projects, in-kind assistance, printing, and as a targeted source of customers for shops, restaurants and entertainment on Landis Avenue.
- Expand our volunteer pool through aggressive recruitment and by collaborating with other organizations in downtown including the Landis Theater.
- Revise the current VINE volunteer recruitment event, to a quarterly informal event to bring in additional volunteers.
- By 2018, our annual volunteer appreciation event has become so large that it cannot be held in a downtown venue.
- Identify volunteers to develop simple volunteer job descriptions for specific volunteer tasks (writer, designer, accountant etc.). In addition, promote these opportunities on the new website, Facebook page and *The Grapevine* newspaper column.
- The Organization Committee will review the current volunteer database and make sure information is complete in each record (name, home phone, cell phone, email, address etc.). Consider whether to centralize the database from each committee, to promote sharing of volunteers between committees.

Communications

- Continue our well-regarded communication efforts to promote our organization and our downtown. Continue our newsletter, update the website, continue our social media effort, continue the Executive Director's column in *The Grapevine* and other advertising and PR efforts.
- Apply for the National Trust Main Street Center's Great American Main Street award.

Promotion Committee

Strategic Goal: We will promote our downtown through a select number of major festivals and retail events that focus on local products, talents and businesses as we continue longstanding partnerships with other community groups and sponsors.

Responsible Committee: Promotion

Special Events

- Combine or rethink the current special events and festivals to refresh them. Host a tomato and wine/grape festival that stresses locally- grown or- produced products. Greatly expand existing festivals so they become a South Jersey draw.
- Create an outdoor antique festival or event/sidewalk sale to reinforce new antique emporium/coop business when it opens.
- Organize additional promotions such as a 5K run to encourage more feet on the street. Work with the Organization Committee on this event as a possible fundraising effort.
- Identify more regional sponsorship opportunities.
- Use the Main Street New Jersey promotional event/activity evaluation matrix in the MSNJ local reporting materials to evaluate all promotional events for their impact on retailers, customers and residents. These evaluations will help the organization focus on their best performing events that meet multiple agendas.

Retail events

- Revive Lunch on Landis and other food promotions to promote outdoor dining and *al fresco* entertainment such as Fridays *Al Fresco*.
- Maintain and build additional retail promotions such as Wedding Weekend or sidewalk promotions that do not close Landis Avenue.
- Work closely with Landis MarketPlace vendors and develop joint promotions such as baby parade or chalk art contests in the downtown.

Image activities

- Build on current “keep it local” activities.

Merchant involvement

- Continue to meet with merchants to better coordinate their efforts and understand their needs. Adjust promotional activities based on this information.
- Provide more reasons for merchants to cooperate with VDID/MSV by offering more co-op advertising, events for merchants and meet ups, and direct assistance to meet retailer needs.

Design Committee

Strategic Goal: Our historic buildings and streetscape will be well maintained through the leadership of local business owners who collaborate with Main Street Vineland volunteers and the City.

Responsible Committee: Design

Maintenance

- Continue to maintain and beautify downtown through planting flowers, hanging baskets, banners, cleaning and policing the downtown, hosting events, and getting more people on the street.
- Use Martin Luther King Day of Service as a means to promote citywide and downtown specific clean ups.

Improvements to downtown

- Work with various City departments and other partners to enhance the mini-parks and revive the fountains in downtown.
- Create signage and a campaign to increase the number of volunteers to help plant the flowerbeds in the mini-parks. Create new plantings around City Hall and in the public parking lots.
- Complete efforts to revitalize the East Gateway into downtown Vineland by renovating the southeastern corner of Landis and East Avenues, and creating other new mixed-use buildings in this area.
- Start a design competition for creation of new, attractive dumpster carrels in the downtown. Offer a prize and funding to build prototypes.
- Create one or more contests for merchants to improve their storefronts, such as spring and fall clean ups, holiday parades, or create awards for best improvements.
- Create area captains or mini mayors for each block; create a workshop to promote positive improvement. Display any physical improvements downtown in the weekly MSV newspaper column in *The Grapevine*.
- Continue to place appropriate parking way finding signage throughout the downtown.

- Work with the City to continue to promote and encourage more middle-income housing upstairs in downtown buildings and adjacent to the downtown through broader citizen involvement in the downtown.
- Work to eliminate the perception that the downtown and adjacent neighborhood as in decline by focusing on broader efforts at neighborhood revitalization, which will eliminate trash, loitering, and promote community pride.
- Work with Mayor and City Council to promote positive improvements in downtown, by hosting ribbon cuttings, contest winners, cleaning and promoting pride in the community.

Provide good design advice

- Continue to provide good advice for any property owner or business owner who wishes to make improvements or restore their historic building.
- With the loss of UEZ funding which once paid for façade improvements, work with owners to identify other funding sources to support restoration and building improvements.

A safe downtown

- Continue to work closely with the Police Officers assigned to downtown to understand current crime trends downtown and continue to counter any negative press about pedestrian safety downtown. Promote any positive change in crime downtown.

Credits

Donna Ann Harris wrote this 2013-2018 Strategic Plan for the Vineland Downtown Improvement District/Main Street Vineland.

Donna Ann Harris is the principal of Heritage Consulting Inc., a Philadelphia-based consulting firm that works nationwide in three practice areas: downtown and commercial district revitalization, historic preservation and nonprofit organizational development. Prior to starting her firm eight years ago, Ms. Harris was state coordinator for the Illinois Main Street program for two years and the manager of the Illinois suburban Main Street program for four years. During her tenure, Ms. Harris served 56 Illinois Main Street communities, led a staff of 12 and managed a budget of over a million dollars. Prior to her Main Street career, Ms. Harris spent 15 years as an executive director of three start-up and two mature preservation organizations, each with its own organizational and fundraising challenges. Prior to her Main Street career, Ms. Harris spent 15 years as an executive director of three start-up and two mature historic preservation organizations in New Jersey, Illinois, Philadelphia and Bryn Mar PA. Since starting her firm, Ms. Harris has worked with state, regional and local Main Street programs in 22 states. She has written five feature articles in The National Trust Main Street Center's monthly journal *Main Street News*, and scholarly articles in the American Association for State and Local History's *History News* and the National Trust's *Forum Journal*.

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