1. Introduction

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Project Purpose:
To provide a Strategic Development Plan for the City of Columbus' Downtown that establishes a framework and direction for creating an active and vibrant Downtown that is able to support significant development investment.

Planning Context

Within the county and regionally, Downtown Columbus is an economic engine and cultural center. It is a hub for community events, arts, business, and professional/governmental services. Downtown activities include an extensive schedule of seasonal festivals, community and arts programs, an expanding kidscommons, the Bartholomew County Public Library, and other events.

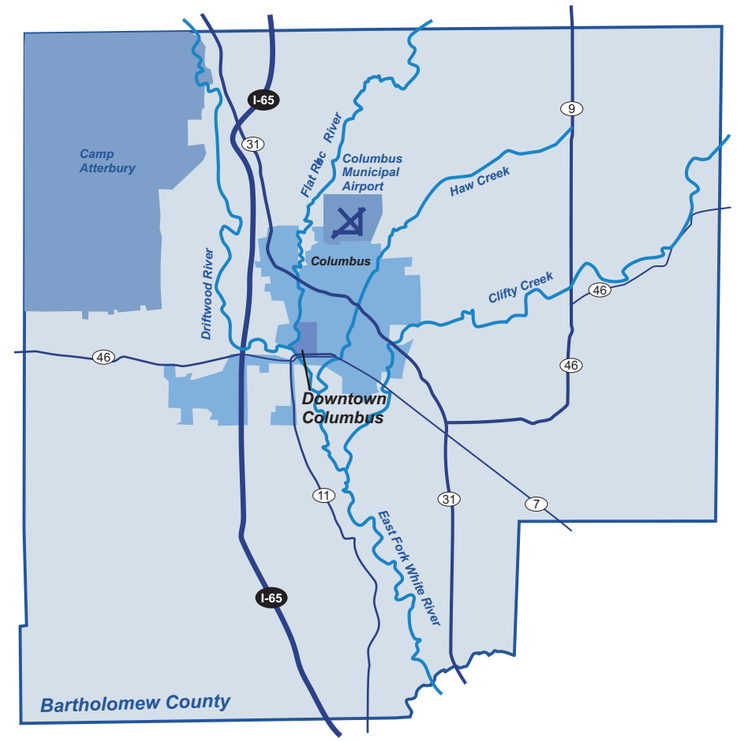
In a community that has always taken pride in its excellence, Downtown Columbus has historically taken charge of its own destiny by actively shaping its physical environment. Backed by a tradition of community involvement and stewardship, it has achieved world renowned distinction for design and urban innovation. Recently proposed initiatives sharing this tradition include further development of the riverfront, restoration of the Crump Theater, and building a parking deck, a new adult center, and a new middle school.

At the heart of the community are the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown that are still conveniently connected to schools, parks, the library, churches, employment centers, and the Washington Street retail corridor. Still, key daily goods and services, i.e grocery and drug stores, desired by Downtown residents and workers, have moved to outlying commercial strips. As with many communities, housing quality in the historic core is not consistent with restored single-family homes mixed with sub-divided rentals.

While several retail businesses have a strong customer base, Downtown's retail character is not managed comprehensively. Downtown's share of the retail goods market has declined while the US 31 corridor and I-65 interchanges continue to grow. In addition, persistent issues centered on parking and vehicular versus pedestrian management still restrain the Downtown's image as a convenient and accessible place for employees, residents, and visitors.

Like many Midwest communities of similar size, market forces are creating change within Columbus. The global economy has shifted Columbus' economic base away from industry and towards more service. In turn, loss of manufacturing jobs has led to a redefinition of the job market and changing area economic dynamics. These changes directly affect Downtown development patterns and economic growth within the community. These evolutionary changes challenge the community to utilize its extensive resources, heritage, and pro-active spirit to redefine the role of Downtown within a local, regional, and national framework.

In response, significant additional capacity to activate and energize downtown is offered by the recently established Redevelopment Commission. This public resource is complemented by the ongoing interest of downtown property owners and the community. Redevelopment is aided by the availability of underutilized spaces throughout downtown. The *Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan* identifies the redevelopment potential and offers an implementation strategy guided by an overall vision for downtown and supported by current development trends.



The City of Columbus resides in south central Indiana along the East Fork of the White River in Bartholomew County. Columbus is located minutes from Interstate 65 and is in close proximity to several major metropolitan areas. It is approximately 40 miles southeast of Indianapolis Indiana, 70 miles west of Cincinnati Ohio, and 70 miles northwest of Louisville Kentucky. The area surrounding Columbus includes several small, rural communities and is largely comprised of agricultural land. Immediately northwest of Columbus is Camp Atterbury. The 33,484 acre Indiana National Guard and US Army Reserve Forces Training Facility is open year round to serve the training requirements of all branches of military forces, as well as Federal and local law enforcement and other agencies. Approximately 13 miles southwest of Columbus is the Hoosier National Forest. The Hoosier National Forest is known for its rolling hills, back-country trails, wildlife, and rural crossroad communities.

Columbus offers many amenities including several tourist, cultural, and entertainment destinations for residents in the surrounding region. Significant attractions include the turn-of-the-century ice cream parlor Zaharakos (pictured above) and the blown glass chandelier (pictured below) by glass artist Dale Chihuly housed in the Columbus Visitors Center.