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# DOWNTOWN AND RIVERFRONT

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HAMILTON, OHIO  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



# RIVERFRONT AND DOWNTOWN

## LONG-TERM GOAL:

The transformation of Downtown Hamilton and its riverfront into a 24/7 vibrant community that provides an attractive, safe, and welcoming environment for people to work, shop, visit, and live, with strong connections to the scenic Great Miami River waterfront, that is home to unique residential and commercial mixed-use development communities.

## INTRODUCTION:

“Strong and healthy downtowns are the centerpieces of any region. Generally, a downtown has recreational centers, arts, and cultural centers, as well as retail, [residential], and business activities. They become hubs for business, [residential], cultural, social, and recreational activities, making a downtown the most attractive center in a city. Downtowns are generally the focus for economic development.” (OKI, Strategic Regional Policy Plan p.74)

The Great Miami River waterfront and Downtown Hamilton provide the City’s greatest chance to capitalize on the national trend in renewed interest in urban living. Young creative professionals, empty nesters, and active seniors have recognized the attraction of urban living, especially with its proximity to employment, retail, amenities, and recreation. Most importantly, however, is the desire to live, work, and play in a unique environment in the face of increasingly homogeneous suburban landscapes, especially found in the rapidly growing eastern Butler County and northern Cincinnati Metropolitan Area. Hamilton’s waterfront and downtown building stock can be reinvented for these residents, while allowing the City to increase its housing supply and tax base by downtown and riverfront development opportunities.

# POLICIES STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

## Overall Objectives:

### Section 10.1

- A. The City of Hamilton should delineate the boundaries of the downtown and riverfront area in order to coordinate development there in a manner that provides the greatest benefit to the City and its residents.
- B. “The benefits of a vital downtown or business district include:
- Downtown is a symbol of the community’s economic health, local quality of life, pride, and community history.
  - Downtowns retain and create jobs, which support a community’s tax base.
  - Downtowns reduce sprawl by concentrating retail in one area.
  - The downtown core protects property values in surrounding residential neighborhoods.
  - The traditional commercial district is an ideal location for independent businesses and is a good incubator for new small business
  - Downtowns provide an important civic forum, where members of the community can congregate.
  - Many downtown districts become tourist attractions by virtue of the character of buildings, location, selection of unique businesses, and events held there.” (OKI, Strategic Regional Policy Plan p.83)



Downtown Hamilton Riverfront

# Mixed Use

## Section 10.2

### OBJECTIVES

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- A. The City of Hamilton should create a downtown and riverfront environment where individuals can work, live, and play all in the same location, thus allowing individuals to enjoy higher quality of life.
- B. A variety of regulatory measures and incentives should be used to achieve an overall mix of land uses appropriate to creating an active downtown and placing special emphasis on achieving a critical mass of key land uses.

### STRATEGIES

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In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Riverfront and Downtown Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- "The goals, objectives, and policies of local comprehensive plans will lead to the revision of zoning ordinances to allow mixed-use development, where appropriate." (OKI, Strategic Regional Policy Plan p.85)
- "The deterioration of downtowns in large part is also due to the development of zoning regulations that call for separation of different types of land uses." (OKI, Strategic Regional Policy Plan p.84)
- Many communities have found mixed-use development to be a tool in reversing the deterioration of traditional downtowns and reversing years of separation of different land uses.

- "Historically, downtowns have been a heterogeneous place offering multiple activities. Downtowns always had a broad mixture of land uses including stores, profession offices, theaters, government offices and courts, post offices, banks, apartments, places of worship, libraries, wholesale businesses, train and bus stations, warehouses, and restaurants. Restrictive zoning regulation made the mixture of land uses and activities in the downtowns illegal." (OKI, Strategic Regional Policy Plan p.84)

### ACTIONS

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- A. The City of Hamilton should create a Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan that will guide development with a focus on mixed-use.
- B. The City of Hamilton should utilize current historic structures to create mixed-use centers and to promote Downtown Hamilton as a center for government, culture, and commerce.
- C. Create an Urban Mixed Use Entertainment, Residential, and Retail District in the zoning code applicable to the City's Downtown and riverfront.
- D. Revise current land use regulations to encourage the development and protection of the vital and unique residential environments sought by creative class workers, empty nesters, and active seniors, particularly downtown and along the Great Miami Riverfront.
- E. The City of Hamilton should develop an incentive package that will encourage the realization of the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan including mixed-use development.

## **OBJECTIVES**

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- A. Encourage greater residential diversity in Downtown Hamilton, which will help to create and support a strong retail market.
- B. Create a new riverfront residential neighborhood along Neilan Boulevard.

## **STRATEGIES**

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In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Riverfront and Downtown Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- Permanent residents bring the liveliness and vitality of 24-hour living to downtown whereas commuting workers often leave the Downtown area immediately after work.
- Downtown residents save on commuting time and create demand for a much wider range of goods and services than is presently available.
- Based on current issues, population demographics, work commute patterns, and regional growth trends, the City of Hamilton has a market opportunity to create new downtown and riverfront housing serving the region. By balancing Hamilton's affordability with the Great Miami Riverfront amenity and downtown location, Hamilton can provide residential opportunities within the community and attract a diverse new population.

## **ACTIONS**

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- A. The City of Hamilton should commission a study to determine the level of need for residential units in all price ranges within the downtown and riverfront area and the results should be incorporated into the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan.
- B. Market the Neilan Boulevard area for mixed-income residential development.
- C. The City of Hamilton should encourage development of residential units through renovation of space in older buildings above retail space, where appropriate and feasible.
- D. The City of Hamilton should develop an incentive package that will encourage the realization of the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan including mixed-income residential opportunities.

# Urban Design

Section 10.4

## **OBJECTIVES**

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- A. Increase attractiveness of Hamilton's downtown and riverfront.
- B. Capitalize on the unique urban character of Downtown Hamilton.
- C. Provide visual gateway entrances to the downtown and riverfront.
- D. Use consistent physical elements to define downtown district and create a sense of place.

## **STRATEGIES**

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In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Riverfront and Downtown Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- The concept for Hamilton's downtown focuses on the idea of creating a vibrant mix of human activity consistent with an active 24/7, dynamic, and highly urbanized core. This will depend on an urban design scheme that creates the physical environment suitable for such activity.

## **ACTIONS**

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- A. Create new urban design standards for Hamilton's downtown and riverfront.
- B. Require three or more stories on new buildings facing High Street in the downtown district consistent with the Downtown Overlay District Guidelines.
- C. The City of Hamilton should maintain its unique and valuable urban design as the City continuously develops and changes.
- D. Preserve and reuse historically and architecturally significant buildings, where appropriate, as integral elements of downtown development.
- E. Modify the Zoning Code to support these urban design objectives to encourage and assist in achieving a better built environment.

# Transportation

Section 10.5

## OBJECTIVES

- A. Create a positive visual image that defines the Downtown area as the historic and governmental center of Butler County by creating attractive, distinctive transportation and landscaping entry features.
- B. Complete a balanced transportation system for Downtown that makes optimal use of the road network, public transit, and public space so that as growth occurs transportation needs for all users are met, conflicts between uses are diminished, and pedestrian and traffic safety is enhanced.
- C. Provide riverfront trail access to each side of every bridge approach and improve bridge surfaces to accommodate bike and pedestrian traffic.

## STRATEGIES

In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Riverfront and Downtown Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- Communities across the nation have discovered the success of creating multi-modal transportation hubs as a way of ensuring efficient and safe flow of pedestrian, public transit, and vehicular traffic.



Photography of the new High-Main Bridge

## ACTIONS

- A. Implement traffic signal time and coordination modifications to achieve greater pedestrian and vehicular circulation efficiency.
- B. Install countdown pedestrian signal heads at traffic signals with high pedestrian traffic and improve crosswalks.
- C. Improve pavement markings and signage to help guide visitors within the downtown and riverfront area.
- D. Complete a transportation plan for the area surrounding the Great Miami River in order to assess the impacts of development on the transportation network.
- E. Connect riverfront walkways with major destinations to encourage their use as alternative transportation corridors as well as recreation paths.
- F. Amend the zoning code to require developers to provide public access along the riverfront, and prevent the creation of new barriers to riverfront areas.



# Parking

## Section 10.6

### **OBJECTIVES**

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- A. Ensure that there is an adequate supply of parking in the downtown and riverfront areas to meet current and future demand.
- B. Ensure that the impact of parking on the downtown and riverfront environment is minimized.

### **STRATEGIES**

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In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Riverfront and Downtown Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- "The placement of parking is a key ingredient for successful pedestrian and public transportation circulation". (OKI, Strategic Regional Policy Plan p.64)

### **ACTIONS**

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- A. Develop a Comprehensive Parking Plan to address downtown and riverfront parking for all forms of transportation.
- B. Create a safe, attractive, and welcoming atmosphere in all parking facilities by establishing design and construction standards for off-street parking facilities.
- C. Create effective and attractive signage systems to direct people to parking facilities.
- D. Encourage mix of uses in structures that contain parking facilities.

## **OBJECTIVES**

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- A. The City of Hamilton should permit and encourage appropriate development along the Great Miami River that provides new river-related uses, facilities, and programs.
- B. All developments along the riverfront should follow LEED Certification guidelines to ensure maximum sustainability of the riverfront environment.
- C. The riverfront should offer places and events that will attract visitors as well as area residents.
- D. Identify significant opportunities to encourage the redevelopment of former industrial and other underutilized riverfront property for unique residential and mixed-use projects aimed at creative class professionals, empty-nesters, and active seniors.
- E. Enhance riverfront access and recreational amenities.
- F. Efforts should be made to protect environmentally sensitive areas surrounding the riverfront.
- G. Coordinate riverfront development with existing and future transportation networks and appropriate agencies.
- H. Modifications to dams, channel improvements and regular maintenance could increase the usefulness of the river for recreational boating and boating events such as waterskiing, rowing, whitewater rafting and canoeing.

## **STRATEGIES**

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In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Riverfront and Downtown Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- The greatest impact can be achieved by concentrating the City's downtown and riverfront investments on aesthetic and accessibility improvements within the channel, modifications to the levees, refinements in municipal land use policy, development incentives, and civic advocacy.

## **ACTIONS**

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- A. Conduct a comprehensive survey of riverfront property, evaluating assets and potential impediments to redevelopment.
- B. Prepare design standards and recommendations to ensure that renovations and new construction capitalize on the unique setting provided by the riverfront, historical character and existing architecture.
- C. Development along the riverfront should follow U.S. Green Build Council LEED Certification guidelines.
- D. Identify opportunities to expand existing recreational areas and create new parks along riverfront.
- E. Provide incentives for appropriate riverfront development.
- F. The City of Hamilton should determine the feasibility of maintaining adequate channel depth to accommodate waterskiing events, the feasibility of building and protecting a community rowing center, and the feasibility of modifying the low water dams to improve general safety and to create opportunities for whitewater use.

# ACTION STEPS

## Mixed Use:

- A. The City of Hamilton should create a Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan that will guide development with a focus on mixed-use.
- B. The City of Hamilton should utilize current historic structures to create mixed-use centers and to promote Downtown Hamilton as a center for government, culture, and commerce.
- C. Create an Urban Mixed Use Entertainment, Residential, and Retail District in the zoning code applicable to the City's Downtown and riverfront.
- D. Revise current land use regulations to encourage the development and protection of the vital and unique residential environments sought by creative class workers, empty nesters, and active seniors, particularly downtown and along the Great Miami Riverfront.
- E. The City of Hamilton should develop an incentive package that will encourage the realization of the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan including mixed-use development.

## Residential:

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- A. Create new urban design standards for Hamilton's downtown and riverfront.
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- D. Preserve and reuse historically and architecturally significant buildings, where appropriate, as integral elements of downtown development.
- E. Modify the Zoning Code to support these urban design objectives to encourage and assist in achieving a better built environment.

## **Transportation:**

- A. Implement traffic signal time and coordination modifications to achieve greater pedestrian and vehicular circulation efficiency.
- B. Install countdown pedestrian signal heads at traffic signals with high pedestrian traffic and improve crosswalks.
- C. Improve pavement markings and signage to help guide visitors within the downtown and riverfront area.
- D. Complete a transportation plan for the area surrounding the Great Miami River in order to assess the impacts of development on the transportation network.
- E. Connect riverfront walkways with major destinations to encourage their use as alternative transportation corridors as well as recreation paths.
- F. Amend the zoning code to require developers to provide public access along the riverfront, and prevent the creation of new barriers to riverfront areas.

## **Parking:**

- A. Develop a Comprehensive Parking Plan to address downtown and riverfront parking for all forms of transportation.
- B. Create a safe, attractive, and welcoming atmosphere in all parking facilities by establishing design and construction standards for off-street parking facilities.
- C. Create effective and attractive signage systems to direct people to parking facilities.
- D. Encourage mix of uses in structures that contain parking facilities.

## **Riverfront:**

- A. Conduct a comprehensive survey of riverfront property, evaluating assets and potential impediments to redevelopment.
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# REFERENCES

OKI Regional Council of Governments. Strategic Regional Policy Plan. Cincinnati: 2005.