

ADOPTED by the Board of Trustees April 20, 2016

Strategic Plan For Downtown West Orange Alliance 2016-2021



Heritage
Consulting Inc.

Prepared by

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Introduction

Downtown West Orange is comprised of Main Street and the other commercial districts (Tory Corner, Eagle Rock, St. Mark's, and the Valley) in West Orange, NJ. Since 2009, the Downtown West Orange Alliance's Board of Trustees, volunteers, and staff have worked hard to enhance the downtown by promoting the variety of retail, restaurants, and service businesses; hosting retail and special events; helping existing business to expand while recruiting new ones; and marketing and communicating about the downtown and the organization throughout the year. The collective downtown commercial districts comprise the historic and current heart of West Orange. These four commercial districts define the local "sense of place" and reflect the community's heritage.

The Downtown West Orange Alliance (DWOA) is a hybrid of two different programs. Since 1998, the organization has had access to property tax funds for downtown services and projects as a Special Improvement District (SID). This state authorized program is set up by and accountable to the Township of West Orange. As a member of Main Street New Jersey starting in 2007, the Downtown West Orange Alliance has followed the Main Street Four Point Approach™, which is a volunteer-driven, historic preservation-based, economic development program. The Main Street program is a nationally successful model for revitalizing downtowns entirely dependent on grants, donations, and volunteer muscle. For the last eight years Downtown West Orange Alliance has blended both to form a highly effective public-private partnership to revitalize West Orange's four downtown commercial areas.

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 authentic character. For West Orange, the volunteer-led teams are critical to the success of the program and involve stakeholders— residents, business owners, and 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. This Strategic Plan represents the next phase in the Downtown West Orange Alliance's organizational development.

Consulting services from Main Street New Jersey

The State Coordinating Program provided staff assistance and consulting services to the Downtown West Orange Alliance as part of the State's effort to enhance the growth, effectiveness, and sustainability of participating Main Street New Jersey organizations.

Heritage Consulting Inc. is a Philadelphia-based consulting firm with a contract with Main Street New Jersey to provide technical assistance to the Downtown West Orange Alliance. The firm led a three-phase Strategic Planning effort. Donna Ann Harris of Heritage Consulting Inc. worked collectively with Megan Brill, the Downtown West Orange Alliance Executive Director, to develop this Strategic Plan. There was active participation by Downtown West Orange

Alliance board members, business owners, merchants, citizens that serve on West Orange’s Boards and Commission, the Mayor, and City Council members. Research was conducted over a year and included three distinct activities, which are outlined below:

1) **SWOT Analysis** — Held on December 11, 2014, this three-hour evening meeting involved the input of 49 participants, including Downtown West Orange Alliance board members, team chairs, downtown merchants, property owners, City Council members, the Mayor, and members of various township boards and commissions. During the meeting, we discussed the current conditions of both the downtown shopping district and the Downtown West Orange Alliance organization. A summary memo was prepared in January 2015 that offered observations and recommendations for solving several specific problems in the short- and mid-term.

2) **Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey** — The survey was open for nine months from February 19, 2015, to November 11, 2015, an unusually long survey period. There were 339 responses. While this is considered a good response, this survey cannot be considered a “statistically representative sample.” We would have needed 379 responses to give us 95% confidence that the opinions expressed in the survey are the same as the 47,000 people who live in Township of West Orange according to the 2010 US Census.¹ Therefore, our survey results are only accurate for the group that took the survey, and we cannot generalize for the whole of Township of West Orange. Despite the small size of the sample, we believe that the information presented is a good snapshot of the enthusiasm and the concerns of current downtown West Orange shoppers. Therefore, the findings should be considered seriously as high-quality intelligence and as fresh information about current shoppers. A 150 page report prepared by Heritage Consulting Inc. was circulated to the Downtown West Orange Alliance board in January 2016.

3) **Visioning and Strategic Planning Workshop** — Held on Wednesday evening, February 10, 2016, this session lasted three hours and included 34 Downtown West Orange Alliance board members, business owners, Team chairs, key volunteers, and several members of West Orange’s Boards and Commission. Prior to the workshop, all participants received the Executive Summary of the Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey Report. The workshop began with a brief summary of the results of the online survey. During the workshop, all attendees participated in a visioning exercise to help the assembled group to visualize the future of the 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.

¹ <http://censtats.census.gov/data/NJ/0603402139510.pdf>

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 overarching strategies and major areas of work for the next 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, and its economic potential. This process involves stakeholders to ensure that the resulting Strategic Plan contains a comprehensive understanding of the organization's preferred future.

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement articulates where the organization is now, not at some desired point in the future. An ideal mission statement identifies why the organization exists, who benefits from it, what the organization 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 quality of life; 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.

New mission and vision statements

We asked participants during the Visioning and Goal Setting workshop to review the existing mission statement of the organization, to determine if it was still valid, and to note if any changes were necessary. There were several different mission statements being used by the organization on a variety of platforms (website or publications). Workshop participants made many comments about the existing mission statement, so we provided a new mission statement to complement the new overall direction of the organization.

Current Downtown West Orange Alliance mission statement

The Downtown West Orange Alliance is a nonprofit organization that manages the town's Special Improvement District. The Downtown West Orange Alliance was formed in August 1998 through the ordinance that created the Special Improvement District. Recognizing the unique contributions by the residential, historic, and commercial properties that collectively form our "downtown," the Township of West Orange created the Special Improvement District to encourage economic revitalization of the neighborhoods of Tory Corner, Eagle Rock, and St. Mark's, and the Valley.

New mission statement

The Downtown West Orange Alliance manages and promotes the downtown commercial district as the focal point of West Orange, NJ.

What is a vision statement?

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

Suggested Downtown West Orange Alliance vision statement

Short version

By 2021, downtown West Orange will be home to more than two dozen new and exciting independent shops; a diverse array of award winning restaurants, cafes, and coffee shops and several thriving entertainment venues that cater to both West Orange residents and the hundreds of thousands of visitors that come to Edison National Historical Park and the Turtleback Zoo.

Long version

Our Vision for Downtown West Orange in 2021.

By 2021, downtown West Orange will be home to more than two dozen new and exciting independent shops; a diverse array of restaurants, cafes, and coffee shops and several thriving entertainment venues. The four neighborhood commercial districts that make up our collective downtown — Tory Corner, Eagle Rock, St. Mark's, and the Valley — will all house *New Jersey Monthly* award-winning eateries, boutiques, and locally-owned coffee houses for West Orange residents as well as the hundreds of thousands of visitors that come to Edison National Historical Park and the Turtleback Zoo to enjoy.

Customers will fill our downtown during the week, as they walk or bike to work or go to appointments with the many professional service providers in downtown. On weekend days, downtown will be crowded with young families running errands and Baby Boomers poking around at their favorite shops and cafes. The sidewalk cafes, entertainment venues, and seasonal special events will keep the sidewalks and parking lots full virtually year-round. Our downtown shoppers will find the latest fashions and accessories at a growing number of fine,

Independent boutiques. On both Friday and Saturday nights, we are attracting more and more West Orange residents, who are dining at our increasing number of quality restaurants and cafes. Several of these new eateries have won *New Jersey Magazine* “best of” awards. No longer do local residents routinely drive to neighboring communities for dinner; they can now find diverse dining options in their own downtown.

By 2021, our budget will be \$300,000 from both earned and contributed revenues. Over a third of the budget comes from an assessment on the property owners, the geographic boundaries of which were expanded in 2020. Our Board and Teams raise more than \$80,000 annually from a highly diverse number of revenue sources.

The downtown is highly managed, with the Downtown West Orange Alliance taking responsibility for all aspects of the customer experience, including event planning, wayfinding, and its traditional role of assuring that downtown is safe and clean. Our new Design Guidelines assist owners to better use our expanded incentive program to invest in their buildings. In the last five years, more than a dozen high quality storefront rehabilitation projects were completed. We work closely with our tourism partners at the Thomas Edison National Historical Park, the Turtleback Zoo, and other attractions in West Orange to distribute our handsome annual downtown shopping and dining guide, which also appears on our web site.

The Downtown West Orange Alliance assists merchants with promoting a handful of high quality and creative retail events each year that appeal to the variety of market niches in our downtown. The Downtown West Orange Alliance office has become the “go to” place for those who wish to locate or expand their business downtown because the Downtown West Orange Alliance maintains a list of interested local and national retailers. In the past five years, our Economic Revitalization Team recruited more than two dozen new or expanded businesses into the heart of our community and fundamentally changed the business mix in downtown West Orange. All of these new businesses and rehabilitated buildings have significantly increased the Township of West Orange and Essex County tax base, created new jobs, and generated a positive buzz about our downtown and our future.

The long-anticipated historic Edison Battery Factory project has been the catalyst that we hoped for. Private sector developers are buying up historic buildings to revitalize, and plans are being made for new structures on vacant and underutilized parcels. The historic St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, which so tragically burned in 2015, has been reborn as a well-used, multi-use space in the center of Main Street.

Our many partners, residents, and friends have worked in tandem with us to implement these positive changes in our downtown district in the last five years. We are justly proud that our vision for downtown as the focal point of the community has become a new reality for West Orange residents.

Strategic goals

The goal-setting portion of the February 19, 2016, workshop helped the Downtown West Orange Alliance to use the long-term vision to create a specific future direction for the downtown to be accomplished in the next five years. Team members formulated goals that fit neatly within the traditional purview of the Main Street Four Point Approach™. Board and Team members prepared a brief statement of their Team's overall goal for the future. They were asked to be specific about the outcome of five years' work. The following are the future strategic goals for downtown West Orange from the February 19, 2016, evening workshop.

2016-2021 Downtown West Orange Alliance Strategic Goals

1. DWOA BOARD OF TRUSTEES: To manage a well-funded and expertly managed volunteer driven, historic preservation based, downtown revitalization organization.
2. ORGANIZATION: To assist the board with fundraising, communicate about our work and involve hundreds of volunteers in our projects.
3. ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION: To increase public and private investment in downtown West Orange. Manage the business mix by retaining and expanding retail, restaurant, and service and entertainment businesses, and working closely with our tourism partners.
4. PROMOTION: To promote the West Orange business district as the heart of commerce, culture, history and community life for residents, shoppers and visitors.
5. DESIGN: To maintain the unique character of downtown West Orange, encourage rehabilitation of historic buildings, assure downtown is clean and safe, and highlight our history through partnerships with local visitor attractions. In addition encourage the coordination between the township's departments and local groups and organizations.

The five Strategic Goals serve as the bridge to the new vision for the future of the heart of downtown West Orange. All of the short- and longer-term projects, individually and collectively, move the organization towards making this vision into reality by allocating all of its financial and volunteer resources accordingly.

All of the activities and programs that the Downtown West Orange Alliance will implement in the future through a combination of board, staff, teams, partners, and individual task force volunteers must be aligned to achieve at least one (1) of the above five (5) Strategic Goals. If a project does not *clearly* meet any of the Strategic Goals, the project should neither be staffed nor funded because the organization has a finite number of volunteers and financial resources.

Role of work plans

Work plans for each project are completed by the volunteer teams and are approved by the board. The plans provide detail on how to implement an effective project. Every work plan contains the following elements: who (person or partner organization), what, when, cost, revenue, volunteer hours, staff hours, anticipated results, and the Strategic Goal(s) met. Collectively, these work plans become the substance of the materials submitted to Township of West Orange by the Downtown West Orange Alliance in addition to the proposed budget for support each year. Work plans can be used to sell sponsorships and to support fundraising efforts, volunteer recruitment, and partner identification and recruitment.

Staffing and volunteers

This Strategic Plan sets out a very ambitious improvement agenda for the Downtown West Orange Alliance over the next five (5) years. All of these activities are important and worthy, but the Downtown West Orange Alliance Board of Trustees must reach an agreement about how it will staff them.

While there are already some 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. The hiring of an event coordinator is critical for the continued success of the organization's ambitious agenda.

If the Downtown West Orange Alliance Board of Trustees, along with teams of new volunteers, is to be responsible for implementing these tasks, then the board must continue to invest substantially in volunteer and fundraising infrastructure. Leadership for any new volunteer and fundraising effort must come from the board itself, primarily in the form of promoting volunteer recruitment throughout the teams and organization as a whole.

Conclusion

This 2016-2021 Strategic Plan for the Downtown West Orange Alliance is a review of the past performance of the organization and a representation of its bright future. This Strategic Plan contains new mission and vision statements. The five 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.

The Downtown West Orange Alliance Board of Trustees

Strategic Goal: To manage a well-funded and expertly managed volunteer driven, historic preservation based, downtown revitalization organization.

Objective 1. Approve work plans yearly and monitor them monthly

Projects

- Assure that the Team chairs submit for approval all work plans for Downtown West Orange Alliance events and activities in a timely manner.
- Review the progress of all Team activities monthly at the Board meeting and monitor all profit/loss activity through the monthly financial statements.

Objective 2. Assure high quality Board leadership thorough Nominating Committee process

Projects

- Work with the Organization Team to create a Nominating Committee. Identify possible board candidates throughout the year.
- Work with the Executive Committee to understand the succession issues for the organization. Work with Main Street New Jersey to get its recommendations for training or mentoring to bring likely officer candidates into more responsible positions so they can step into leadership positions in the next year.
- Invite the superintendent of the Edison National Historical Park to become an *ex-officio* board member as soon as possible. Encourage the superintendent to identify park staff members to work with various Downtown West Orange Alliance teams to assure good coordination and cooperation.
- Conduct Board training at least every other year.

Objective 3. Provide a wide variety of training opportunities for Board, Staff, Teams and Volunteers

Projects

- Work with Main Street New Jersey to provide Board training at least every other year to ensure that each board member understands their roles and responsibilities as a Main Street board member and Special Improvement District representatives
- Host Main Street 101 training as needed for board members and volunteers.
- Encourage all board members and team chairs to attend the National Main Street Center annual conference at least once during their board tenure. The Downtown West Orange Alliance will pay a portion of the fees for travel and lodging.
- Encourage all volunteers to attend the quarterly trainings offered by Main Street New Jersey.

- Send board and staff members to any fundraising training available and host Main Street New Jersey fundraising workshops in West Orange.

Objective 4. Manage and retain quality staff

Projects

- The board should review the executive director's job description to identify which events and activities can be jettisoned to free up time for assisting the Organization Team with fundraising and the Economic Development Team with business recruitment and retention tasks.
- Conduct personnel evaluations yearly.

Objective 5. Raise sufficient funds to assure a well-funded organization

Projects

- By 2021, the annual operating budget of the Downtown West Orange Alliance will be \$300,000. To meet this budget target, the board needs to raise over \$80,000 each year from individual donations, grants, fundraising events, a residential investor (membership) program, sponsorship, advertising, vendor fees, and other earned and contributed revenue.
- To meet the budget target in 2021, the Downtown West Orange Alliance board will need to grow its capacity to raise funds from the private sector to \$80,000 annually. Board members and staff members will participate in fundraising training of various kinds to expand our skills, so we can confidently raise more money each year to meet this ambitious budget goal of raising \$80,000 annually in five years.
- Because the private sector fundraising goals of the organization for the next five years are ambitious, consider creating a standing committee or team of the Downtown West Orange Alliance Board dedicated to coordinating the overall fundraising and revenue diversification efforts of the organization.
- Review existing earned revenue sources, determine if sponsorships or fees could be increased on some events, and implement as needed.
- Determine if approaching Essex County for grant funds is appropriate.
- Create a board member letter of commitment and have the board president discuss board member contributions with each board member.
- Discuss how eliminating certain events/activities may impact the organizational budget and make revisions as needed to the 2016 adopted budget.
- Continue to manage the finances by developing good accounting procedures.

Expand the Special Improvement District

Project

- Develop a work plan and perhaps create a special task force to expand the existing Special Improvement District to a larger geographic area, thus decreasing the Special Improvement District assessment on individual property owners. Identify and obtain any funding needed for this multi-year effort. Begin to cultivate property owners in the expanded district area to understand their needs and how to meet these needs through the Special Improvement District. Obtain advice from Main Street New Jersey about Special Improvement District expansion as needed.

Organization Team

Strategic Goal: To assist the board with fundraising, communicate about our work and involve hundreds of volunteers in our projects.

Expand the team

Projects

- Work with the Organization Team chair to identify skills needed for the team and create job descriptions for specific volunteer jobs.
- Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments as described in work plans. Work with the superintendent of Thomas Edison National Historical Park to identify staff to serve on this team.

Create work plans for all team projects

Projects

- Create work plans for all events so that the board can track all events and activities on a monthly basis. All event teams should review the profit/loss for their event/activity as soon as it is complete and adjust the work plan for the event next year.

Objective 1. Assist the board with fundraising strategies for projects and administration, from donations and sponsorships

Projects

- Identify subcommittee or team leadership to spearhead a residential membership/investor campaign in 2016. Contact Main Street New Jersey to bring a trainer to help.
- Begin planning for a residential investor/membership campaign in 2016 to show residents how they benefit from the many Downtown West Orange Alliance events and a revitalized downtown. The 2017 net fundraising goal is \$3500. Grow this revenue source to \$15,000 by 2021.
- Continue to manage the annual mayor's 5K race and expand it from the \$14,500 net profit in 2016 to \$22,000 in net profit in 2021.
- Identify another fundraising event at a different time of the year and begin planning it in 2016. Develop this fundraising idea so that it grows to \$25,000 in net profit in 2021.
- Compile a list of all sponsorship opportunities for Team use.

Objective 2. Manage staff and volunteers by recruiting people, supervising them, and rewarding good work

Projects

- Host quarterly volunteer planning meetings to expand the volunteer pool to help implement activities. Expand the volunteer pool through aggressive recruitment at Downtown West Orange Alliance sponsored events and by publishing volunteer job descriptions on Facebook, the website, and in the new Downtown West Orange Alliance e-newsletter.
- Expand the volunteer pool through aggressive recruitment at Main Street-sponsored events and by publishing volunteer job descriptions on Facebook and the new Downtown West Orange Alliance e-newsletter
- Continue to add to the current volunteer database. Add anyone who has expressed interest in volunteering on any project. Use this list to solicit volunteers for any project across team or task forces. Add to this list as new volunteers come forward.
- Create short volunteer job descriptions for specific projects where expertise is needed.
- Encourage the most interested volunteers to take on increasing leadership roles by chairing events, by becoming team leaders, or by serving on the Downtown West Orange Alliance board. Offer to send these star volunteers to trainings as available.
- Identify team members to develop simple volunteer job descriptions for specific volunteer tasks (writer, designer, accountant, etc.). Once complete, promote these opportunities on the website and Facebook page. Place volunteers in fulfilling jobs as they come forward. Host a brief, fun orientation meeting for new volunteers.
- Consider holding an all-team work plan training session to create simple work plans for each project, so that teams can complete these work plans at their next regularly scheduled meeting.
- The Downtown West Orange Alliance staff will review the current volunteer database and make sure information is complete in each record (name, home phone, cell phone, email, address, etc.).
- By 2021, more than 150 volunteers on the roster will provide leadership for and mount the award-winning special events and retail events. Over 4,000 volunteer hours were expended in 2021.
- By 2021, the volunteer appreciation event will be considered an important annual event in town.
- Assure that annual personnel evaluations are conducted by the board.

Objective 3. Promote the program to downtown interests and the public

Projects

- Continue to build the new website in early 2016 to assure that it is mobile friendly and is integrated with the Downtown West Orange Alliance Facebook page and other social media platforms. Utilize a content management system that permits the Downtown West Orange Alliance staff to make updates easily. Use Google Analytics to understand who visits the website and to maximize content through Search Engine Optimization.
- Host an online calendar of community events happenings downtown on the Downtown West Orange Alliance website.

- Update the website, branding, and business recruitment materials as needed.
- Continue and expand the communication efforts to promote both the organization and the downtown. Regularly update the website. Continue social media efforts (Facebook), other promotion, and public relations efforts.
- Consider creating a quarterly newsletter “The Current” to regularly communicate with West Orange residents about events, discounts, and other activities to drive customers into downtown businesses in both hard copy and digital format.
- Regularly evaluate the marketing efforts by conducting surveys at events, online, and through broad outreach to downtown customers.

Economic Revitalization Team

Strategic Goal: To increase public and private investment in downtown West Orange. Manage the business mix by retaining and expanding retail, restaurant, service and entertainment businesses, and work closely with our tourism partners.

Expand team membership

Projects

- Expand the Economic Revitalization Team expertise through strategic recruitment of team members or by developing relationships with area economic development agencies and area commercial real estate brokers.
- Create job descriptions for specific volunteer jobs. Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments. Help new volunteers to identify the specific event/task that they will execute from the team work plans. Work with the superintendent of Thomas Edison National Historical Park to identify park staff to serve on this team.

Create work plans for all team projects

Projects

- Create work plans for all Economic Revitalization Team events/activities so that the board can track all them on a monthly basis. All event teams should review the profit/loss for their event/activity as soon as it is complete and adjust the work plan for the event next year.

Objective 1. Learn about the district's current economic condition and identifying opportunities for market growth

Projects

- Update the existing business inventory, including first- and second-floor businesses in downtown, at least once a year. Regularly update this data on the business directory portion of the Downtown West Orange Alliance website.
- Provide useful advice to merchants and property owners about the changing demographics in West Orange from the materials provided regularly by Main Street New Jersey or other consultants.
- Provide information and workshops about the dominant downtown customers and opportunities for business expansion as needed.
- To better understand the business mix, create an inventory of vacant properties, match inventory with need, and notify people of the spaces available to open a business with the guidance of retail market specialists.

Staffing

- An overwhelming percentage (85%) of survey respondents noted that the Downtown West Orange Alliance's primary organizational objective was to retain and recruit new businesses. To undertake that work, staff time must be significantly redirected away from event planning and execution towards business recruitment and retention activities.

Objective 2. Monitor the economic performance of the district, and report statistics

Projects

- Continue to supply Main Street New Jersey with the district's Reinvestment Statistics as required and widely promote any successes in attracting new business, new investment, and new jobs in the downtown district.
- Consider offering an Annual Report and make these impressive statistics widely available.

Objective 3. Find ways to strengthen existing businesses and help them to expand

Projects

- Continue to host welcome ceremonies and ribbon cuttings when new businesses open downtown.
- Continue to visit district merchants to keep them up to date on Downtown West Orange Alliance activities.
- Post the recently completed Consumer and Stakeholder Survey on Downtown West Orange's website and widely disseminate.
- Work with individual merchants to alter their product mix to appeal to current downtown shoppers as noted in the Survey Report.
- The Consumer and Stakeholder Survey noted that the vast majority (85%) of current shoppers live in West Orange. Use this information to refine any advertising for the Downtown West Orange Alliance and make existing merchants aware of this information so they can adjust their media buys accordingly.

Educate and retain existing businesses

Projects

- Continue to regularly visit existing businesses to keep up to date with their concerns, to hear about any possible business expansion plans, and to alert them to any Downtown West Orange Alliance-created business promotions and events. Make connections for business owners to service providers to help them be better business people.
- Produce a series of workshops or seminars for area business owners to help them improve their business skills. Work with the local Small Business Development Center to identify speakers after polling merchants about topics of interest.

- Continue to feature individual businesses on the Facebook page, website, and in any newsletters.
- Strengthen relationships with property owners and area commercial real estate brokers that represent commercial properties in the downtown.
- Work collaboratively with the Promotion and Design Teams on a new business “welcome packet.”

Foster a business-friendly environment in downtown West Orange

Projects

- Make downtown as attractive as possible for real estate owners and investors by working closely with Township of West Orange officials to ensure we are a business-friendly community.
- Work closely with township officials to determine if it is easy to open a business downtown. If not, create a task force to make changes in local codes and ordinances in partnership with the township.
- Review the 25+ page handout of township guidelines for small businesses to determine if it is easy to understand. Work with the township to make opening a small business downtown less intimidating.
- The surrounding shopping districts and towns all have train stations, but West Orange does not. Work with a small task force to make the lack of a train station a selling point that would help the downtown.

Objective 4. Recruit new complementary business

Projects

- Work with the property owners who have vacant storefronts first.
- Work with the JGSC Group on a business recruitment plan.
- Recruit new businesses, especially restaurants, to diversify the current restaurant niche.
- Review existing marketing materials for business recruitment and retention purposes in the downtown and create new materials as needed with the guidance of the JGSC Group.
- Target specific business types for recruitment from the Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey completed in 2015.
- The Economic Revitalization Team should partner with the Design Team on any discussions with the township Planning, Zoning Boards and Code Enforcement on new construction and infill in the district.
- Get to know local commercial real estate brokers and local economic development agencies to learn more about their impressions of the downtown real estate market in West Orange. Invite them to speak to business and property owners on a regular basis.
- The Downtown West Orange Alliance staff will assist the Economic Revitalization Team volunteers in making calls and visits to prospective tenants for vacant or underutilized spaces in the downtown.

Objective 5. Develop financial incentives and capital for building rehabilitations and business development

Projects

- Work with the Design Team to promote the use of the existing façade improvement program. Encourage property owners and tenants to make use of this program.
- If the Design Team wishes to evaluate the current incentive program's effectiveness, work in partnership with the Team on any review.
- Work with the local SCORE chapter, the local Small Business Development Center and other business technical assistance and small business financing entities to provide information to downtown business owners interested in developing their business skills or financing to grow their businesses.

Objective 6. Find new economic uses for traditional Main Street buildings

Projects

- Work with the JGSG Group to identify if the buildings in the four different commercial districts are appropriate for particular market niches based on the upcoming market analysis

Promotion Team

Strategic Goal: Promote downtown West Orange as the heart of commerce, culture, and history and community life for residents, shoppers and visitors.

Expand team membership

Project

- Work with the team chair to identify skills needed for the Team and create job descriptions for specific jobs. Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments. Help new volunteers to identify a specific event/task that they will execute. Work with the superintendent of Thomas Edison National Historical Park to identify staff to serve on this team.

Create work plans for all team projects

Project

- Create work plans for all events so that the board can track all events on a monthly basis. All event teams should review the profit/loss for their event as soon as it is complete and adjust the work plan for the event next year.

Objective 1. Understand the changing market, both potential shoppers and your “competition” and define Main Street’s market niche, as its unique “position” in the marketplace

Projects

- Partner with the Economic Revitalization Team to understand the retail market analysis supplied by Main Street New Jersey or other groups and to clarify the existing market and business clusters for the downtown.
- Provide training for downtown merchants on the market research and show merchants how they can use this information to expand their businesses.
- Work collaboratively with the Economic Revitalization and Design Teams on a new business “welcome packet.”

Objective 2. Create NEW image campaigns, retail promotions, and special events to lure people back downtown.

Review existing Downtown West Orange Alliance special events

Projects

- The Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey respondents were clear that filling vacancies and business recruitment, rather than event planning, should be the key activities of the organization. Staff time must be redirected away from event planning and implementation to free up time for business recruitment and retention.
- Conduct simple evaluations of each Downtown West Orange Alliance-sponsored special event to determine volunteer and attendee satisfaction.
- The Downtown West Orange Alliance has hosted the West Orange Farmers Market for several years. The Farmers Market needs a new leader/partner organization and home base. Work with interested community members who wish to continue the market and provide them with the Downtown West Orange Alliance files as needed.

Continue Downtown West Orange Alliance-sponsored special events

Projects

- Continue the Annual West Orange Street Fair and Edison Day. Create a work plan and recruit volunteers to implement this activity. Ensure that this event breaks even or makes a small profit each year.
- Continue to host the Mayor's Run/Walk to Break the Silence fundraiser. As a major fundraiser for the Downtown West Orange Alliance, this event will raise \$14,500 in 2015. Expand this event so that the net profit in 2021 is \$22,000.
- Continue to host Small Business Saturday: Shop Small at the start of the holiday shopping season. Identify volunteers and create a work plan for board approval.
- Continue the Downtown Holiday Open House and expand its offerings. Create a work plan for approval and recruit volunteers to manage this event. Assure that this event breaks even or makes a small profit each year.

Create new special events

Projects

- Partner with the Oskar Schindler Performing Arts Center (OSPAC) in West Orange to undertake a summer concert or movie series downtown. Identify volunteers, create a work plan for approval, and raise funds to support this project.
- Identify other events such as those held at OSPAC and create "after parties" downtown to encourage bar and restaurant sales.
- Partner with other groups on new special events downtown, such as a Community Arts Festival or a Black Film Festival. Ensure that these events break even or make a small profit for the Downtown West Orange Alliance each year.

Create unique, retail-oriented activities and events designed to ring cash registers that day

Projects

- Over the next four years, fill out the calendar of downtown events to bring shoppers to downtown West Orange by creating new retail events designed to ring cash registers at downtown businesses throughout the year. Work with area merchants to identify retail events that would most benefit them and enlist them in planning and implementing these events.
- Create new retail or special events based on volunteer interests.
- Review existing sponsorship opportunities and vendor fees for all existing events, determine if some of the sponsorship fees could be increased each year, and implement increases as needed.
- Work with other groups that sponsor events held in the downtown, such as the St. Patrick's Day Parade, and work with merchants to create shopping opportunities around these events to drive customers into their stores.

Create campaigns to improve the image of downtown

Projects

- Review and revise the advertising and marketing efforts for all events and activities as Needed. Coordinate with the Thomas Edison National Historical Park on any promotional event. Involve park staff on the Promotion Team to make it mutually supportive.
- Work collaboratively with the Township of West Orange Public Relations Commission on the creation of a shopping and dining guide in 2016. Place this guide on the Downtown West Orange Alliance website. Update the printed guide at least once a year.
- Consider an aggressive effort to collect email addresses and add these names to the e-blast list so that it continues to grow to at least 1000 names. Send out regular e-blasts to this large and vibrant readership.
- Continue to invest in social media. Maintain an active presence on Facebook and expand the number of "likes." Consider adding other social media platforms as they become available.

Objective 3. Identify downtown assets including people, buildings, history, and institutions

Projects

- Significantly expand our relationship with the Thomas Edison National Historical Park and include the Superintendent or his representative on our board starting in 2016.
- Encourage the Promotion Team to work closely with the park. The Promotion Team will work with the Township of West Orange's Public Relations Commission to publish an

attractive annual shopping and dining guide to be distributed at the park and other attractions in the township.

- Cultivate a relationship with Essex County, especially since Main Street is a county road. Identify if there are appropriations, contracts, or grants available from the county that will assist us in our downtown revitalization work.
- Begin a relationship with the Turtleback Zoo leadership and explore how we can create mutually beneficial, cross-promotional efforts and encourage their 700,000 visitors to come downtown.
- Work with event partners that host events in the downtown to offer shopping opportunities before and after their events.
- Partner with the Valley Arts District to promote this venue for entertainment for local residents.
- Continue to partner with the Library, a central and important institution in downtown. Use the outside of the Library as a central gathering space for tours or other meet-up events.

Design Team

Strategic Goal: To maintain the unique character of downtown West Orange, encourage rehabilitation of historic buildings, assure downtown is clean and safe, and highlight our history through partnerships with local visitor attractions. In addition encourage the coordination between the township's departments and local groups and organizations.

Expand team membership

Projects

- Work with the team chair to identify skills needed for the team and to create job descriptions for specific volunteer jobs.
- Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments. Help new volunteers to identify a specific event/task that they will execute from the team's work plan. Work with the superintendent of the Thomas Edison National Historical Park to identify staff to serve on this team.

Create work plans for all team projects

Projects

- Create work plans for all Design Team activities so that the board can track them on a monthly basis. All event teams should review the profit/loss for their event (if any) as soon as it is complete and adjust the work plan for the activity next year.

Objective 1. Assure that the downtown is clean

Projects

- Continue to clean the district with Township of West Orange sanitation personnel paid with Special Improvement District funds.
- Continue to monitor the general condition of downtown sidewalk and gutter cleanliness, trash, dumpsters, and township-placed trashcans.
- Continue to partner with other groups on regular cleanup events during the spring, summer, and fall.
- Create monthly award program to recognize local businesses that regularly and consistently clean their sidewalks, curb, and gutters around their property. Regularly publish photos of these business owners with their awards in traditional and new media.

Objective 2. Assure that the downtown corridor is a safe place to visit and that local perception is that downtown is safe

Projects

- Work with the Essex County Roads and Bridges Commission and the township to identify locations in the downtown that are considered too dark for pedestrians and methods to address the perception that downtown is too dark at night.
- Implement the Complete Streets concept with the recently completed report from the Masters students from Rutgers, (see the full report on line with the Planning Department).
- Address the need to improve crosswalks so they are perceived as safe.
- Work with the township on parking meters with the goal of making them consistent throughout the district.
- Continue regular meetings with the local police precinct, host safety meetings with merchants as needed, and publicize the results of any meetings widely.
- Work closely with the Essex County Highway Department on their Safe Streets Initiative as it relates to Main Street in our downtown. Encourage the county to install more pedestrian friendly sidewalk and crosswalk options in our downtown. Identify if there are any possible sponsorship opportunities for component parts of the Complete Streets program. If there are, develop a sponsorship program and solicit local businesses to participate.
- Report any vandalism, graffiti, or broken parking meters to the township and follow up until they are repaired. Report broken streetlights to the county and follow up until they are repaired. DWOA will report and encourage residents to use the new 311 program for repair requests.
- Combat misconceptions about downtown safety by publicizing any positive change in crime statistics in the downtown to a broad network of stakeholders using traditional and new media.
- Work with the township and the county to explore the feasibility of a bike share program in downtown West Orange.

Objective 3. Educate others about good design by enhancing the image of each business as well as that of the district.

Projects

- Complete the Design Guidelines for the downtown district in 2016 and publish them widely.
- Post the completed Design Guidelines on the Downtown West Orange Alliance website.
- Work collaboratively with the Economic Revitalization and Promotion Teams on a new business “welcome packet.”

Objective 4. Motivate others to make changes by creating incentives and targeting key projects.

Projects

- Review the existing façade improvement program to determine if these regulations need to be revised, perhaps to offer larger grants or more flexibility as to use of the grant funds.
- Publicize existing façade grants available through the township to merchants and property owners.
- Meet with individual merchants and property owners to encourage them to participate in the storefront rehabilitation matching grant program.
- Promote any quality rehabilitation in downtown through traditional and social media.

Objective 5. Provide good design advice by encouraging quality improvements to private properties and public spaces

Projects

- Continue to provide good advice to any district property owner or business owner by becoming the “go-to” office for assistance with signage, façade, or exterior improvements by maintaining abundant materials including examples and vendors. Continue to host walking tours and a video series.
- Continue and enhance the current historic marker initiative.
- Encourage the Design Team to create mutually supportive interpretive activities with the Thomas Edison National Historical Park in the downtown.

Objective 6. Plan Main Street’s development by guiding future growth and shaping regulations

Projects

- Continue to monitor the downtown with respect to code enforcement and deepen relationships with officials and supply information as needed.
- Continue to monitor any planning and zoning submission.
- Partner with the Valley Arts Program to identify ways to introduce arts into the downtown district through murals, ghost signs, or other activities through grants.
- Determine if the Valley Arts Program is interested in working with the Design Team to explore creating artist lofts in the downtown district.
- Work with the township to determine if the Lando Parking Lot behind the firehouse/police station needs to be reconsidered as a parking lot because the current

configuration is not efficient for safe movement of parked vehicles. Consider if this might be a design project for a landscape architecture class at a local college/university.

**Strategic Plan for Downtown West Orange Alliance
Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term
Projects 2016-2021**

Downtown West Orange Alliance Board of Trustee Projects

Within one year

- Assure that the Team chairs submit all work plans for approval in a timely manner
- Review the progress of all Team activities monthly at board meetings
- Create a Nominating Committee and identify board candidates throughout the year
- Understand and plan for officer succession
- Invite the superintendent of the ENHP to become an *ex-officio* board member
- Work with Main Street New Jersey to provide Board training
- Encourage all volunteers to attend the quarterly trainings of MSNJ
- Send board and staff members to any fundraising training available
- The board should review the executive director's job description
- Conduct personnel evaluations yearly
- Board and staff should participate in any fundraising training offered
- Review existing earned revenue source to increase fees or sponsorships levels
- Create a board member letter of commitment
- Decide how eliminating certain events/activities may impact the organizational budget
- Continue to manage the finances by developing good accounting procedures.

Within two to three years

- Determine if approaching Essex County for grant funds is appropriate
- Create a standing team to coordinate fundraising and revenue diversification efforts
- Host Main Street 101 training as needed
- Encourage all board members and team chairs to attend the National Main Street Center annual conference
- Grow the board capacity to raise funds from the private sector to \$80,000 annually
- Determine if approaching Essex County for grant funds is appropriate
- Create a special task force to expand the existing Special Improvement District

Organization Team Projects

Within one year

- Identify skills needed for the team and create job descriptions
- Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers, seek ENHP staff involvement for this team
- Create work plans, review the profit/loss for their event/activity
- Identify leadership for residential membership/investor campaign to rise \$3500 in 2016
- Continue to manage the annual mayor's 5K race and raise \$14,500 net profit in 2016
- Identify and begin planning another fundraising event in 2016
- Compile a list of all sponsorship opportunities for Team use
- Host quarterly volunteer planning meetings to expand the volunteer pool
- Expand the volunteer pool through aggressive recruitment
- Create short volunteer job descriptions for specific projects
- Encourage the most interested volunteers to take on increasing leadership roles
- Assure that annual personnel evaluations are conducted by the board
- Continue to build the new website, host online calendar of events
- Continue and expand the communication efforts to promote the organization
- Create a quarterly newsletter in hard copy and digital format

Within two to three years

- Staff to review the current volunteer database to make sure it is complete
- Implement a new fundraising event in 2017 and grow it yearly
- Host an all-team work plan training session
- Update the website, branding, and business recruitment materials
- Consider creating a new e-newsletter to regularly communicate with shoppers

Within four or five years

- More than 150 volunteers will provide leadership for special events and retail events
- The DWOA volunteer appreciation is an important annual event in town
- Regularly evaluate the marketing efforts by conducting surveys at events, online, and through.

Economic Revitalization Team Projects

Within one year

- Identify skills needed for the team and create job descriptions
- Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers
- Create work plans, review the profit/loss for their event/activity

- Update the existing business inventory, including first- and second-floor businesses
- Provide advice about the changing demographics in West Orange to merchants
- Redirect staff time towards business recruitment and retention activities
- Continue to supply Main Street New Jersey with the district's Reinvestment Statistics
- Continue to host welcome ceremonies and ribbon cuttings
- Continue to visit district merchants to keep them up to date on activities
- Post the Consumer and Stakeholder Survey on Downtown West Orange's website
- Continue to feature individual businesses on the social media
- Work with the property owners who have vacant storefronts
- Work collaboratively with other teams on a new business "welcome packet."

Within two to three years

- Provide workshops on downtown customers and business expansion opportunities
- Create an inventory of vacant properties, make matches with interested tenants
- Work with individual merchants to alter product mix for current downtown shoppers
- Make existing merchants aware preferred communication channels so they can adjust their media buys
- Produce seminars for area business owners to improve their business skills
- Strengthen relationships with area commercial real estate brokers
- Assure that the Township of West Orange is a business-friendly community
- Work with the JGSC Group on a business recruitment plan, create materials as needed
- Recruit new businesses, especially restaurants, to diversify the current restaurant niche.
- Target specific business types for recruitment based on Survey Report
- Work with the Design Team on any Planning, Zoning and Code Enforcement issues
- Get to know local commercial real estate brokers and economic development agencies
- Staff will assist Team volunteers in making calls to tenants
- Work with the Design Team to promote façade improvement program

Within four or five years

- Consider creating an Annual Report to make the reinvestment statistics widely available
- Work closely with township officials to make it easy to open a business downtown
- Determine if the Township's guidelines for small businesses are is easy to understand.
- Create a task force to make the lack of a train station a selling point
- Promote small business technical assistance and financing programs to merchants
- Identify potential market niches for buildings in the four commercial districts

Promotion Team Projects

Within one year

- Identify skills needed for the team and create job descriptions
- Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers, include ENHP staff on this Team
- Create work plans, review the profit/loss for their event/activity
- Understand the retail market analysis supplied by MSNJ
- Train downtown merchants on the market research for business expansion
- Redirected staff time away from events towards business recruitment and retention
- Conduct simple evaluations of each special event
- Find a new leader/partner organization for Farmers Market
- Continue the Annual West Orange Street Fair and Edison Day
- Continue to host the Mayor's Run/Walk to Break the Silence fundraiser
- Continue to host Small Business Saturday: Shop Small
- Continue the Downtown Holiday Open House and expand its offerings
- Coordinate with the ENHP on any promotional event.
- Work collaboratively with Public Relations Commission shopping and dining guide
- Significantly expand our relationship with the ENHP
- Work collaboratively with other teams on a new business "welcome packet."

Within two to three years

- Partner with OSPAC summer concert or movie series
- Review existing sponsorship opportunities and vendor fees for all existing events,
- Work with other groups that sponsor events to create shopping opportunities Collect email addresses and add these names to the e-blast list
- Continue to invest in social media
- Identify if there are appropriations, contracts, or county grants available to assist us
- Create a mutually beneficial relationship with the Turtleback Zoo to cross-promote
- Offer shopping opportunities before and after non DWOA events
- Partner with the Valley Arts District to promote their venue
- Continue to partner with the Library, a central and important institution in downtown

Within four or five years

- Create "after parties" for OSPAC events to encourage bar and restaurant sales
- Partner with other groups on new special events downtown
- Create new retail events designed to ring cash registers at downtown businesses
- Create new retail or special events based on volunteer interests

Design Team Projects

Within one year

- Identify skills needed for the team and create job descriptions
- Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers, include ENHP staff on this Team

- Create work plans, review the profit/loss for their event/activity
- Continue to clean the district with Township of West Orange sanitation personnel
- Create a monthly award program to highlight a local business that cleans regularly
- Continue to monitor sidewalk, gutters, dumpsters and trashcans
- Continue to partner with other groups on regular cleanup events
- Continue regular meetings with the local police precinct
- Work closely with the Essex County on Safe Streets Initiative, create sponsorship program if feasible.
- Publicize any positive change in crime statistics in the downtown
- Complete the Design Guidelines for the downtown district and place on web site
- Publicize existing façade grant program and encourage merchants to participate
- Promote quality storefront improvements through social media
- Continue to provide good advice to any business or property owner
- Continue to host walking tours and a video series.
- Continue and enhance the current historic marker initiative.
- Continue to monitor code enforcement any planning and zoning submission
- Work collaboratively with other teams on a new business “welcome packet.”

Within two to three years

- Work with the Essex County and township to identify dark locations for pedestrians
- Work with the township on parking meters to make them consistent.
- Report any vandalism, graffiti, or broken parking meters follow up
- Report broken streetlights to the county and follow up, use the new 311 program for reporting
- Review the existing façade improvement program to determine if fixes are needed
- Create mutually supportive interpretive activities with the TENHP

Within four or five years

- Explore the feasibility of a bike share program with township
- Partner with the Valley Arts Program to introduce arts into downtown
- Determine if the Valley Arts Program is interested in creating artist lofts downtown
- Determine if the Lando Parking Lot needs to be reconsidered as a parking lot.

Proposed Revenue Sources for DWOA

DWOA Revenue Operating	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Special Improvement District	105,000	105,000	105,000	105,000	105,000	105,000
Township contribution or contract	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Mayor's 5K run	14,500	16,000	18,000	20,000	21,000	22,000
Current event profits	10,500	13,000	16,000	18,000	21,000	25,000
General sponsorship		5,000	10,000	15,000	17,500	20,000
Residential investor campaign		3,500	6,000	9,000	12,000	15,000
Township in kind (office)	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000
Fund balance	26,000	15,000	5,000	0	0	0
Carried over, other fundraising events	11,000					
Earned revenue		5,000	10,000	15,000	18,000	20,000
New fundraising event 5K		3,000	6,000	12,000	20,000	25,000
TOTAL REVENUE	235,000	233,500	244,000	262,000	282,500	300,000
<i>New fundraising total</i>		<i>16,000</i>	<i>32,000</i>	<i>51,000</i>	<i>67,500</i>	<i>80,000</i>

RED=NEW REVENUE

Credits

Donna Ann Harris wrote this 2016-2021 Strategic Plan for the Downtown West Orange Alliance.

Donna Ann Harris is the principal of Heritage Consulting Inc. a Philadelphia-based Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) boutique consulting firm that provides assistance to non-profit organizations and government agencies nationwide in the following practice areas: downtown and commercial district revitalization, historic preservation, tourism product development, and non-profit organizational development.

Prior to starting her firm twelve years ago, Ms. Harris was the 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 one 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.

Since starting her firm, Ms. Harris has worked with state, regional, and local Main Street programs in 23 states. She has written six feature articles in the National Main Street Center's quarterly publication *Main Street Now* and is a regular contributor to their *Main Street Week* blog. She has also spoken at the Main Street Center's annual conference for the last twelve years and has conducted webinars for the Center on a variety of topics. Ms. Harris has authored scholarly articles in the American Association for State and Local History's *History News* and the National Trust's *Forum Journal*. Ms. Harris's book *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses* was published by AltaMira Press in 2007. Ms. Harris is a Certified Main Street Manager.

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