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Youngstown's Four Platforms

By Pino Di Mascio

The Youngstown 2010 Vision is a guiding document that sets out a framework for understanding and addressing the issues that Youngstown faces. It provides a community-based agenda for change organized around four platforms:

Accepting that Youngstown is a smaller city.

The dramatic collapse of the steel industry led to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs and a precipitous decline in population. Having lost more than half its population and almost all of its industrial base in the last 30 years, the city is now left with too large an urban infrastructure to maintain (it has been described as a size 40 man wearing a size 60 suit). Simply put, there are too many abandoned properties and too many underutilized sites. Many difficult choices will have to be made as Youngstown recreates itself as a sustainable mid-sized city. A strategic program is required to rationalize and consolidate the urban infrastructure in a socially responsible and financially sustainable manner.

Defining Youngstown's role in the new regional economy.

The steel industry no longer dominates Youngstown's economy. Most people work in different industries today. The city must align itself with the present realities of the regional economy. This new positioning means support for a more diverse and vibrant economy founded on the current strengths within the city, such as the university, the health care sector, and the arts community.

Improving Youngstown's image and enhancing quality of life.

Youngstown must become a healthier and better place to live and work. Over time people have grown accustomed to seeing rundown buildings and streets. Urban decay is a constant and demoralizing reminder of Youngstown's decline. It is important that Youngstown begin to "fix its broken windows" and support initiatives to improve its neighborhoods, the downtown, the river, and the education system. The city must also begin dealing with difficult issues such as public safety and racism.

A call to action.

The people of Youngstown are ready for change. The city already has a large number of local leaders who want to involve others and make a contribution. The comprehensive plan must ensure that the excitement and optimism fostered through the visioning process is maintained and advanced. To that end, the city needs a practical, action-oriented plan and a process through which local leaders can continue to be empowered and the city's successes constantly celebrated.

The Youngstown 2010 community engagement process occurred over a seven-month period, from June to December 2002, and involved a series of workshops with more than 200 key community leaders. Six initial workshops elicited opinions and ideas about the future of Youngstown. As the platforms of the vision emerged, community leaders helped craft the final document.

By involving community leaders, the project benefited from diverse perspectives. These individuals provided innovative ideas that were further elaborated as the process moved forward. Crucially, they also became champions for Youngstown 2010. Having built and shaped the vision, community leaders had a considerable stake in overseeing its success. They became the voice for Youngstown 2010 and initiated public discourse. Beyond the formal workshops, many discussions took place in church basements, high school and university classrooms, and community meetings. Local media covered the process as well.

The culminating event in the visioning process was a public meeting held in December 2002 that attracted 1,400 people (remarkable in a city of 82,000). One of the great successes of that night was the number of people who indicated their support for the vision and offered to volunteer their time to see it implemented. To date, several working groups have been established to tackle the various elements of the four platforms.

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