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## The Vision: Looking Forward

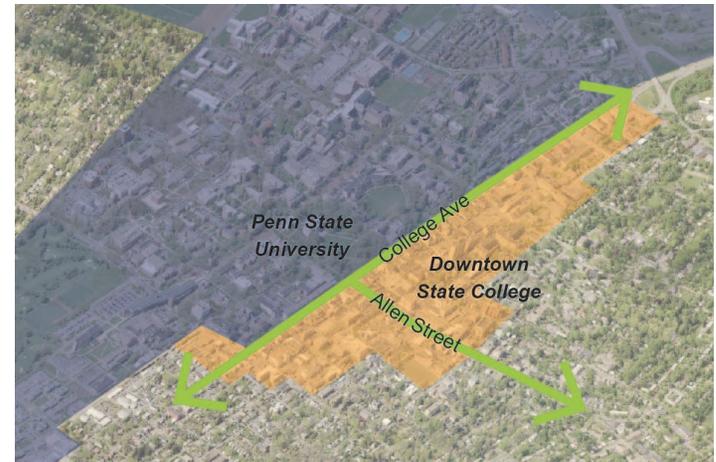
### VISION STATEMENT

Downtown State College will continue to evolve into a world-class college town district that reflects the dynamic town-gown relationship between a major university and a vibrant commercial district. Downtown will be a place where local citizens, regional residents, national and international visitors, faculty, staff and students will find appealing, exciting and diverse offerings. Downtown State College will also emerge as a district that embraces sustainability and offers shopping, dining, entertainment, culture, the arts amidst a variety of living options and places to work.

### BEST PRACTICES FROM GREAT PLACES

In order to achieve the vision with this master plan, it is important to understand the best practices from successful vibrant communities throughout Pennsylvania, the United States and, indeed, the world. While each community is unique and it is critical to protect and enhance the characteristics that distinguish one downtown from another, there are some fundamental practices that are common to great downtowns. These include:

**The “Town Gown” Experience:** For communities in which a significant academic institution is located, the most successful ones have a clear integral relationship among the institution and the downtown. They are not separated by barriers, physical or otherwise and they are dependent upon one another for establishing a “sense of place” for the community.



**Diversity:** Successful downtowns are diverse on many levels. They appeal to and accommodate a diverse population (young and old, singles and families, students and non-students, etc.), they include a diversity of uses and housing in the form of mixed-use development and they provide a venue for a diversity of activities and experiences.

**Transportation Choices:** Successful downtowns accommodate a balance of transportation modes including bicycle, public transit and automobile, but—most importantly—pedestrian. Great downtowns are walkable which means they go well beyond having adequate sidewalks. They are walkable because they are great environments in which to walk; the journey getting from one destination to another offers a variety of experiences, opportunities to run errands, shop, browse, have social interactions and enjoy the beauty of a place.

**Connectivity:** The districts and neighborhoods within and adjacent to downtowns are well connected to one another. There is a comprehensive network of physical connections – streets, sidewalks and open spaces. They are also connected visually with views to landmark buildings, attractions and natural features such as distant mountains.

**Human Scale:** Downtowns were, historically, developed for people to conduct their daily life on in a fairly compact area and were developed at a very human scale. Great downtowns today protect and enhance this attribute and continue to develop at a human scale. Human scale is achieved through the relationship of buildings (and uses within) to the street; appropriately scaled windows, entrances and ground floors; a continuity of uses and absence of “gaps” such as large expanses of surface parking and blank walls. Human scale does not translate to “only low rise buildings,” however. Tall buildings can display a human scale with the manner in which the ground floor is designed and how it and the building uses relate to the street. Conversely, a low building can display an inhuman scale if not designed thoughtfully resulting in uncomfortable proportions, large expanses of blank walls.

**Density:** Dense development patterns often result in

negative connotations. Dense development, however, is critical to a successful downtown where a relatively high number of people can live, work and be entertained in a relatively compact geographic area. Dense or compact development patterns enhance convenience, sense of community and are critical to supporting alternate modes of transportation and walkable environments, lowering the dependency upon the automobile.

**Attractive and Comfortable Public Realm:** Often the negative perceptions of density, identified above, can be attributed to high density development that is developed in a manner with no attention to a safe and attractive public realm. The public realm is comprised of the spaces—streets, alleys, sidewalks, parks and plazas—that knit buildings and uses together. An attractive public realm with plenty of shade, color, public art and things to do that is framed by great architecture makes pedestrian distances between destinations shorter and walking is the preferred manner in which to experience the downtown.

**Sustainability:** Recently, downtowns within the United States have been embracing the trend toward more sustainable communities. While one often thinks of sustainability solely in terms of the natural environment,



*Left: The view in front of Saint's Cafe on Beaver Avenue illustrates an attractive and comfortable pedestrian environment, complete with a wide sidewalk, outdoor seating and a well-scaled first floor to the building.*

sustainable communities are ones that embrace all three of the fundamental components of sustainability— environmental protection, social equity and economic prosperity. Downtown development is in itself a sustainable practice, protecting valuable land resources, creating a venue for local businesses and reducing the need for automobile usage.

## SUSTAINABILITY GOALS



State College continues to adopt sustainable practices throughout the Borough and there is a tremendous opportunity for downtown to embrace sustainable development. Creating a dynamic downtown by its very nature is sustainable as good downtown development practices promote utilization of existing infrastructure, reuse of existing buildings, mixed-use development, local businesses, transportation options other than the automobile, and increased sociability. In addition, the Borough continues to be committed to sound environmental practices in terms of maintaining and expanding tree canopy coverage and exploring innovative ways of reducing and improving the quality of storm water runoff.

Recommended sustainable practices are woven into each of the themes and are described in the pages that follow as they relate to specific recommendations within each theme. The most significant are identified by the icon above. A comprehensive discussion of sustainable design for individual buildings and sites is included as part of Appendix C: Design Guide under “Sustainable Practices.”



*Top: The view of Allen Street in front of the Municipal Building exemplifies the value of a comfortable, well-designed public realm. Mature shade trees, well-scaled sidewalks, consistent treatment of street furnishings and attractive sidewalk paving and ornamental plantings provide a sense of place that improves the experience for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.*

*Bottom: Storm water management facilities on Allen Street near the intersection with Beaver Avenue put the Borough’s commitment to sustainability on display.*



## GUIDING THEMES

Based upon stakeholder input and the planning team's review of background documents and professional observations, the team identified the following Guiding Themes around which to organize the recommendations to achieve the vision for downtown.

**Theme 1 – Marketing the District:** Cultivating Downtown's Identity to Residents, Visitors and Investors

**Theme 2 – Navigating the District:** Building a Pedestrian-Friendly, Multi-Modal Downtown

**Theme 3 – Connecting the District:** Creating a Comfortable, Cohesive and Attractive Downtown

**Theme 4 – Living in the District:** Establishing Downtown as a Place for Professionals to Live and Work

**Theme 5 – Managing the District:** Fostering a Safe and Appealing Downtown

Themes 1, 2 and 3 are focused on design and physical improvements and comprise Phase I of the master planning effort. Themes 4 and 5 are focused on downtown uses, development and community sustainability and comprise Phase II of the master planning effort.

## THEME 1 – MARKETING THE DISTRICT: CULTIVATING DOWNTOWN'S IDENTITY TO RESIDENTS, VISITORS AND INVESTORS

### Overview

As described earlier, downtown State College has many of the aspects of a quintessential college town. Few college towns in America can boast such a distinct delineation between "town" and "gown." Furthermore, downtown State College is a large district that contains within it sub-districts with their own distinct personalities ranging from the distinctive appearance of College Avenue to the "funky" nature of Calder Way.

Unfortunately, downtown State College has lacked a cohesive identity for itself that reflects its unique role in the Borough, the State and the Nation. The district has a tremendous opportunity to better-sustain its downtown by selling its assets, dispelling misperceptions, attracting investment and providing a platform for existing stores, restaurants, entertainment venues, residential opportunities and offices to "sell" downtown as a truly one-of-a-kind place.

In addition to this large collection of assets, downtown State College has few peers that are doing an effective job of this (particularly among Big Ten college towns). This offers

*The existing downtown brands from State College and from its peer communities reflect a varying level of success in terms of effectively communicating their identities. Downtown State College has the opportunity to set itself above other communities with the development of a cohesive marketing strategy that includes a re-imagined brand.*

