

Dear Youngstown 2010 leaders,

I listened to the Youngstown 2010 update two weeks ago (November 2004) and enjoyed the discussion provided by the audience. Would it be feasible to catalog and store on your youngstown2010.com web servers all of the past forums (video as well as audio) in addition to the upcoming January meeting? As the strategic planning process continues, more and more people will begin to pay attention to Youngstown 2010 progress and it would be helpful if all of the past information and broadcasts are located in one downloadable place. I also picked up from the show that now is the time to throw in my two cents to be considered as the master plan is being created. I was not able to attend the downtown neighborhood meeting, but as a resident of the city of Youngstown, most of my comments will be concentrated on the downtown area and regional strategies.

I'm sure that many of the issues discussed here are evident to other local city planners and some solutions have already been considered, but I wanted to express what topics are important to myself and perhaps other students and residents of the Valley.

Thanks for listening.

### **Building and Enhancing Regional Strengths**

One of my first questions is: what is produced in Youngstown that can compete in markets across the entire world? Then take a step back in geographic scope. How can we compete in the nation? The state? How can we compete in Northeast Ohio? Has an effort been made in the past five years to look at how aspects of our economy can better compete at all of these different levels? Are there any unique characteristics or cultural aspects of the Valley that can be advertised beyond our region?

- Competitiveness and Perception - Even though historically the Valley is tied to the demise of the steel industry, a large component of the current regional economy remains manufacturing. If you visit the Regional Chamber web site, [www.regionalchamber.com](http://www.regionalchamber.com), the Youngstown/Warren Area is promoted to the world as "Just In Time, USA". Does the catch phrase "Just in Time" accurately represent how we need to advertise ourselves? Is it a dated statement of past trends or is it an accurate statement of the type of growth we are seeking? Maybe that's just a marketing tool and maybe indeed that is the best strategy we have at the time, but I wonder if the continuing drive to compete on a low-cost and quick delivery basis may put us in a harder position in the long run, as more and more countries develop manufacturing capabilities at even lower costs. **My fear is that too much of the direction of production in the Valley is based on lean manufacturing and cost minimizing methods, instead of creating sustainable companies that compete with innovative processes.** So another question is, what is the region, or the state of Ohio, doing to aid

manufacturers in the adoption of more innovative practices? Do they monitor workforce training, private levels of investment, or even assist companies in developing low-cost practices? I honestly don't know the answers to these questions, but I believe there needs to be a serious effort to look at all of the manufacturers in the region and develop programs to share ideas and technologies which will allow them to gain innovative practices.

- Maintenance of Information - Concerning the Regional Chamber web site, **several links on the web site don't function.** I wanted to watch a video and the link was dead. If the goal is to advertise the area, improve how the Chamber and the Valley is presented to the rest of the world by updating the web page.
- Native Talents - Last month in the Business Journal, there was a story about Jim Reese, a Valley native who is extremely well educated and the chief operations engineer at Google. He came home to give a speech and I wonder if people like Jim have ideas about what can be used to assist the region economically. Is it possible for the 2010 program to sit down with him and pick his brain? The fact is, many people leave Youngstown to find their futures elsewhere. But that doesn't mean there is not a fondness for the region, and a possible willingness to advise or invest finances in the area. I remember the story a few years back about the Cisco Training Academy at YSU formed out of the relationship between one of their executives and the university. **There must be thousands of people born in this area that can be used to promote and provide insight to the regional planners here. Find them and ask for their assistance.** Some good ideas may develop from the outside.
- Entrepreneurial Environment - What is the status of institutions that can build the entrepreneurial environment in Youngstown and Northeast Ohio when it comes to seed grants, angel investment and venture capital? Even if the total number of these types of firms and their amount of capital may be small compared to other parts of the country, the region should **strategize to develop investment networks for new businesses.** Perhaps investment groups could be funded by a variety of wealthy local individual risk takers who pool their funds together. Developing funds even for simple small angel grants may **produce a more entrepreneurial atmosphere** in Youngstown.
- The Taste of Youngstown - One of Youngstown's most outstanding unique assets is its ethnic diversity. I ship local specialties and food from the area to people all over the country. We need a way to **incorporate this diversity into citywide events celebrating all cultures together in one big experience.** We could market our diversity and ethnic food heritage as an asset. It seems the current festival system is based on neighborhood and ethnic churches. And we could build on that, having fests downtown with Polish, Puerto Rican, African, Irish, Italian, Chinese, Mexican, etc...all types and varieties of food, dances, native language events, ethnic arts, all rolled into one event where people can share their culture and learn about others. I'm talking, for example, region-wide "best" pizza contests, best wedding soup, best pierogies, best haluski, and best barbecue contests - all ran and entered by locals and marketed throughout the region.

## **Alliances**

How many times do the leaders of Youngstown work with the leaders of Cleveland and Pittsburgh? With similar cities like Akron and Canton? With smaller cities like Sharon and Niles? Have the county commissioners in the entire region from Cleveland to Pittsburgh tried to develop regional strategies for economic development?

- Building Alliances - **Develop hybrid organizations that combine the public and private sectors to concentrate economic development at various levels of regionalism.** If some elected officials reject the regional approach, try to sell the idea to them, but bypass them if they are an impediment to progress and planning. Bring as many people to the table...and then more people. A quick Google search shows more than a handful of Northeast Ohio alliances dedicated to economic development – but Youngstown is sometimes absent.
- Future Leaders - In the next mayoral campaign, stress the importance in the race to **have the next mayor appreciate the necessity of the planning process.** I want all of my leaders to be knowledgeable about what Akron is doing in their downtown, how Cleveland is developing their economic sectors, and how Pittsburgh is preserving many of their historical buildings.
- Clean Resources for All Residents - Make it a **regional priority to dredge and clean up the Mahoning River.** Encourage local politicians to endorse the plan and fight like hell to get money for the project. The whole Valley needs to be sold on the economic and recreational benefits a clean river will bring and the interdependence between the environment and the economy in the long term.

## **Arts & Entertainment District**

For a while now, this whole Arts and Entertainment District has been discussed, but is there a plan in place to create an entertainment corridor? Are we shooting ourselves in the foot for future growth by plunking down government buildings with **no mixed-use design up and down Federal Street?** Why can't the proposed 7<sup>th</sup> District Court of Appeals on Federal Street have a few restaurants or shops positioned along the ground floor? If the design doesn't incorporate the functionality required for dynamic Federal Street, it should be changed. Do the zoning laws complement the future plans for the downtown? We need to rethink the future design of new buildings. Once they are built, the structure will not change for 30 years or more, and you could be stuck with a building that's dead on the weekends and after 5pm. Some ideas:

- Mutual Discounts - Get all the downtown attractions, restaurants, and bars to work together on discounts. Perhaps with the purchase of ANY ticket for a downtown event, ALL of the downtown restaurants involved would **offer 10% off the price of food with the ticket stub.** People who go to the Arms Museum can get a discount at MVR. Those attending the hockey games in the new arena will get a discount at Tomasino's Pizza. Residents who attend the symphony or steel museum can get a discount to eat at Cedar's, Anthony's, or any restaurant that may appear in the future.
- Unique Entertainment - There is a need to get more people downtown later in the evening. The city needs to offer more alternatives after the restaurants close to compete with the suburbs. Take advantage of the special area designation to

**extend bar hours until 3am or 4am** on the weekdays and/or weekends. This has worked in other cities to jazz up the nightlife in certain areas depending of the legal structure of the entertainment area. The police presence may need to be beefed up if the hours are extended, but more alternatives may develop downtown if these changes were put in place.

- Enhance Youth Involvement - Devise **youth-oriented memberships or young professional events at the local attractions**. Have a Mahoning Valley Professionals (MVP 20/30) meeting and movie night in the McDonough where martinis are served. What about foreign films at the auditorium in the Butler after work at 5pm during the YSU school year? Have a symphony guild meeting with high school musicians from the area. Provide cheaper memberships and ticket rates for students, people under 35 years of age, and first-time members of the Valley's civic and cultural institutions. Get fresh faces to feel they are stakeholders and a part of the culture scene.
- Promote Local Restaurants - On the Vindicator web site, they have food listings now. Can discounts and specials be advertised here? What about downloadable coupons for restaurants and cultural events?

## **Downtown Development**

I think there are many people who would live downtown if a **livable infrastructure** were developed. There are more than enough of these lackluster, crappy, carbon-copy communities like Monticello Apartments in Liberty and others in Boardman and Austintown filled with single people, young couples, and YSU students. These apartment complexes offer little except for cheap rent and parking. If the price, the security, and supporting amenities can be provided, perhaps many of these people (most of whom don't have children so they don't care as much about the public school system) would move downtown, creating a larger tax base. **We need to create a critical mass of people living downtown and around the university.**

- Sustainable Downtown Living - A serious **planning session needs to be developed concerning certain corridors within the downtown**. Change the zoning to mixed-use and other flexible solutions if necessary. Is Federal Street going to become a mixture of private and government buildings that close after working hours with isolated islands of nightlife and restaurants or a continuous strip of activity? We need to make the downtown not just a one-stop entertainment shop for people with cars, but a place people stay beyond the end of the show. How can certain sections of the city expect to develop if they have no valuable neighbors or synergy along pedestrian areas? Perhaps some type of tax incremental financing (TIF) can be established to get a head start on funding for capital investment.
- Protect Unique Historical Buildings - **Avoid demolition of the Paramount Theater on Federal Street and other historical buildings**. One day, some of these places will be reborn, but with alternative uses that we have traditionally used them for. Perhaps one use could be a theater or a stage for music events that serves food and drinks inside. What about a movie theater where you could have a glass of wine with the show? Even if the roof is ruined, the façade can be saved. I've seen in many cities where they structurally support the front and redesign the back just to keep the look of the building. Try to retain the option

for redevelopment. In fact, think very long and hard before completely demolishing any additional buildings downtown if they have architectural value that adds to the uniqueness of downtown.

- Build Basic Residential Needs - The downtown needs grocery store with produce, the natural foods co-op on Pyatt Street is closing, and the Farmers Market on the North Side is beginning to catch on. What about **combining and expanding these produce and market institutions in either the downtown area or near YSU**? Students and downtown workers could support the store next door, and the specialty items sold at the co-op might be closer to customers demanding organic goods if it is next to the university. Nashville has done a nice job with a similar project, along with adding a food court inside that includes many international options – maybe it could become a lunch destination for professionals and students. Anyone living near campus or downtown needs to take a car or a bus for a few miles to get groceries – that needs to change soon.
- Display Development Successes - Some of the press in the past few months includes the redevelopment of buildings such as the Wells Building and the Reality Building in the downtown. Before these buildings are rented or leased to future residents, perhaps the **CIC could sponsor open houses with the renovated buildings**, showcasing development success stories, distributing information on other properties in the Youngstown market, and providing examples of downtown revitalization.
- Develop Safe Bicycle Lanes - I see many people riding their bikes in Mill Creek Park and on occasion, people commuting by bike from the North Side to YSU. What if a bike path or **roads with bike lanes can be built** that originate in the Park near the Riverside Gardens, run along Mahoning Avenue over the river, and up Fifth Avenue all the way past route 422 to Wick Park? People living on the West Side, in the Mahoning Commons, and on the North Side can follow these bike lanes to the university and downtown.
- Acknowledge Inner-City Retail Markets - If you look at local commerce, there is a serious lack or inexistence of movie theatres, shoe stores, car dealerships, grocery stores, etc within Youngstown's city limits. Why are the only options outside of the city? Even poorer people when pooled together represent a significant amount of purchasing power. There are academic studies and viable businesses that specialize in inner-city retail and entertainment development. We need to **develop retail opportunities closer to where people live** so they won't be confined to only spending their money in the suburbs.
- Protect Empty Historic Buildings - So now the B&O brewery has closed. Will it fall into disarray in a few months just like the windowless Salvation Army building across the tracks? Even if private hands own these buildings, we need to **take steps to secure these structures from damage and theft**. Otherwise the blight grows and we come closer to losing even more history and infrastructure.

## University

- Build Research Capacity - A recent press release by YSU stated the amount of funds for research is now above 6 million dollars. That's a start and recent growth has been good, but more is needed. In 2000, YSU was ranked last among

state universities in Ohio in most research expenditure measures (see Appendix). We also need to establish an entrepreneurial culture by hiring not only great teachers, but also faculty with the potential to create business opportunities.

**Every new hire in the sciences and especially in engineering should include people who promote and develop business opportunities** from their research. If an additional core group of 10 or so professors with these specific entrepreneurial abilities are added, they may have a tremendous effect on the amount of possible spin-off in local innovative growth.

- **Build Intown Neighborhoods with YSU Employees** - How many of the YSU faculty, staff, and administration live within the city limits of Youngstown? If incentives were created to minimize the costs of mortgages and home improvement loans for houses within a half-mile of the university, would YSU employees use them? Work with local banks and credit unions to create advantageous programs that will allow the neighborhoods around YSU to be filled with people who have a stake in the success and livability of the campus. **Create incentives to increase the city's population with YSU employees.**
- **Build Undergraduate Education Relationships** - In many of the departments on campus, capstone projects that involve the private sector are mandatory as part of the curriculum. Encourage the development of similar programs in as many departments as possible, if not all of them. **Create working relationships between students and the private sector.** Maybe more of them will stay in the area upon graduation if they realize the possibility of employment in the Valley.
- **Incubator on Campus** - There is discussion about building a new home for the College of Business. There is also talk of the expansion of the Youngstown Business Incubator. Why not combine the two needs by **creating an incubator that's part of the Business School on campus?** This new facility would be more visible to the campus community, can utilize students for possible employment, might encourage a more entrepreneurial spirit on campus, and could be a place where spin-off from campus innovation and research may occur.
- **More Housing - Build more apartment-style residences.** Advertise near areas where students already live in the suburbs. Provide a secure place at a competitive price, plug the benefits of living near campus, get more bodies downtown.
- **New Connections** - How often do groups like Wick Neighbors, the North Side Citizens' Coalition, Youngstown 2010, and members of the Youngstown Club interact with YSU Student Government or the MVP 20/30 organization? Reach out and **create connections between the established organizations and the young leaders** in the Valley. The younger leaders have friends and know volunteers that may assist the established organizations. Someone needs to reach out and build the social capital within the Valley.

## Closing

- You have momentum. **Get as many quality people to the table and to future neighborhood meetings.** Don't allow Youngstown 2010 to be primarily composed of planners and business leaders dictating ideas without

getting the city residents involved as well. Every once in a while, look around the room and see who is and who isn't present.

- Build on the manufacturing strengths of the past, but don't always push the "just in time" thing. Different potential businesses have different needs and desires. Sometimes **push the innovation and high-end manufacturing** that occurs as well. There are sectors of the economy that Youngstown cannot develop outright that exist in larger cities. For example, many argue we should go into new fields like biotechnology, but we may not be able to compete in biotech because we lack the knowledge-based infrastructure. Perhaps we can compete by manufacturing the medical devices designed in other areas. The innovation-based component of Youngstown's economy will only grow if certain structures are in place first, which includes partnerships with the surrounding cities.
- **Let's make downtown a livable place**, not just an array of buildings that gets busy only during the weekdays or when a special event is occurring. When people think of the past, they don't recall the glorious courthouses and government buildings they attended, but instead savor the shopping and social life that they once enjoyed. A lot of changes may be happening soon downtown. We need to plan ahead and make smart choices so when we look back thirty years from now, the planning ensured that downtown Youngstown became an enjoyable place to live.

## Appendix

### Research and Development Expenditures of Universities and Colleges in Ohio Fiscal Year 2000 (value in thousands)

	Total	Federal Gov't	State & Local	Industry	Institutional	Other Sources
Ohio, total	918,500	498,967	83,520	87,570	179,722	68,721
Public, total	681,312	313,691	79,303	76,038	161,029	51,251
Air Force Inst of Tech	7,771	5,371	258	2	2,140	0
Bowling Green State U	3,454	1,847	88	273	1,246	0
Central State University	560	283	0	125	38	114
Cleveland State U	10,214	3,318	3,792	969	1,991	144
Kent State University	10,817	7,736	848	708	1,525	0
Med Col of Ohio	13,747	9,944	790	309	1,914	790
Miami University (OH)	10,674	2,674	661	1,663	5,555	121
N.E. Ohio Univ Col of Med	4,011	2,002	150	22	1,280	557
Ohio State University	361,399	132,219	61,978	57,075	79,583	30,544
Ohio University	23,767	11,695	1,841	1,591	7,375	1,265
University of Akron	19,495	7,081	1,153	3,090	6,356	1,815
University of Cincinnati	172,085	110,475	3,355	5,166	38,254	14,835
University of Toledo	13,694	6,312	669	2,013	4,089	611
Wright State University	29,092	12,543	3,648	2,968	9,478	455
<b>Youngstown State Univ</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>0</b>
Private, total	237,188	185,276	4,217	11,532	18,693	17,470
Antioch University	0	0	0	0	0	0
Case Western Reserve U	193,057	150,586	3,622	5,890	16,605	16,354
College of Wooster	593	276	0	44	61	212
Denison University	328	238	0	0	41	49
John Carroll University	1,072	1,072	0	0	0	0
Oberlin College	691	691	0	0	0	0
Ohio Wesleyan University	255	185	0	0	0	70
U of Findlay	350	275	75	0	0	0
Union Institute, The	1,217	0	0	0	592	625
University of Dayton	39,345	31,717	520	5,598	1,350	160
Wilberforce University	280	236	0	0	44	0

Source: National Science Foundation, Academic and Research Expenditures 2000  
<http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/srs02402/start.htm#ge01>