

SIX CORNERS ASSOCIATION

STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT SUMMARY REPORT



THE LAKOTA GROUP

JULY 13, 2010

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SIX CORNERS ASSOCIATION

The Lakota Group provided this *Strategic Planning Retreat Report* as a technical consulting service to the Six Corners Association. The Six Corners Association (SCA) is a non-profit business organization that follows the Main Street Four-Point Approach©, a commercial district revitalization methodology developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Association is also a delegate agency of the City of Chicago and the service provider organization for Special Service Area #28. For additional information on Six Corners Association, view the SCA website at www.sixcornerschicago.com.

THE LAKOTA GROUP

The Lakota Group is a team of professionals providing services in Planning, Urban Design, Landscape Architecture, Historic Preservation, and Community Relations. The firm’s approach is reflected in its name, “Lakota,” which is a Native American word meaning, “*we are allies.*” Lakota’s professionals share a strong respect for the land and built environment, a sense of community, and a desire to bring people together to work as *allies* for positive change.

THE MAIN STREET FOUR-POINT APPROACH©

The Main Street Four-Point Approach©, developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is a comprehensive strategy that provides merchants, commercial property owners, and community residents with tools and information necessary to carry out an effective commercial district revitalization effort. The Main Street Approach consists of the following:

- ❑ **Design** seeks to improve and enhance the visual assets inherent in the Six Corners commercial district by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays, and promotional materials. This aspect of

the Main Street Approach stresses the importance of improving design quality in all areas of a commercial district's physical environment, to educate people and stakeholders about design quality, and to expedite physical improvements in both public and private realms.

- ❑ **Promotion** takes many forms, but its central aim is to create a positive, unified image Six Corners to renew pride and civic spirit as well as to attract investors, developers, and new businesses to its individual commercial districts. Promotion seeks to improve a commercial district's overall image through retail sales events, festivals, and marketing and advertising activities.
- ❑ **Economic Restructuring** is intended to strengthen Six Corners' existing economic assets by diversifying its overall economic base. Economic Restructuring activities typically entail retaining and expanding existing businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, converting unused or underutilized spaces into productive property, and sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of neighborhood business people through education and business development activities.
- ❑ **Organization** establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in Six Corners. This will allow the Six Corners Association, or successor Main Street organization, to provide effective, ongoing advocacy and management of its individual commercial districts. Diverse groups from the public and private sectors (City of Chicago, State of Illinois, local merchants, property owners, neighborhood leaders, and others) must work together toward a building consensus and a strong, effective revitalization effort.

THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF MAIN STREET

While the Main Street Approach™ provides the methodology and process for successful revitalization, implementation of the methodology is based on eight principles that pertain to all areas of the revitalization effort including:

- ❑ **Comprehensive.** Business district revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished by a single project. For successful long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach must be used.
- ❑ **Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help to develop skills so that complex problems can be addressed through successful projects and initiatives.
- ❑ **Self-help.** Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the project successful. Illinois Main Street, other State agencies, and private consultants will provide direction, ideas, and training, but continued and long-term success depends upon the involvement and commitment of the neighborhood.
- ❑ **Public/Private Partnership.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical viability of a traditional commercial district like Six Corners. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations so that effective partnerships can be forged.
- ❑ **Assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities — like distinctive buildings and their human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.

- ❑ **Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program from storefront design to promotional campaigns to educational programs.
- ❑ **Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.
- ❑ **Implementation.** Activity creates confidence in the program and ever-greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger activities as the revitalization effort

INTRODUCTION

On June 24, 2010, The Lakota Group, multi-disciplinary planning firm based in Chicago, Illinois, facilitated a strategic planning retreat with the Six Corners Association and members of the Special Service Area #28 Board of Commissioners. The purpose of the retreat was to determine strategic priorities and revitalization initiatives for the Six Corners Association in the year ahead. The planning retreat took place at the Deer Path Inn in Lake Forest, Illinois. Approximately 15 people participated in session proceedings.

As part of this assignment, Lakota facilitated sessions with members of the SCA Board of Directors, the SSA Board of Commissioners, and the Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring, and Promotion committees. Prior to the sessions, Lakota also presented a short overview on the Main Street Four-Point Approach and the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Directors, Main Street committees, and executive staff. A complete summary of the retreat's proceedings is presented in this final report.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This *Strategic Planning Retreat Report* should be distributed to all standing committee members of the Six Corners Association, relevant City staff, and other important stakeholders, constituents and partners of the revitalization effort, as deemed appropriate. It is recommended that all SCA Main Street committee volunteers and SSA Board of Commissioners read the *Retreat Report* and discuss its contents in order to complete the development of Main Street committee work plans in the year going forward.

It should be noted that this *Retreat Report* is a summary of the proceedings of the June 24, 2010 workshop and does not represent a complete work plan. Only strategic priorities for the SCA and the Main Street committees were discussed and determined. Long-term success in Main Street revitalization requires local programs to develop comprehensive, detailed work plans with committee goals and objectives, volunteer assignments, budgets, timelines, and project benchmarks.

In addition, for reference purposes, the Draft Strategic Work Plan, which was included in the *Six Corners Assessment Report* (page 38) has been incorporated in various portions of the workshop summary. These references are noted as "*Taken from the Assessment Report*". Each Main Street committee should review the Draft Strategic Work Plan and determine if some or all of the projects listed should be incorporated into upcoming committee work plans for the coming year. The Board and the committees should undertake this determination if Draft Work Plan projects address the priorities established during the retreat. The committees can also decide to develop new projects if they also meet revitalization objectives. As one reviews the proceedings, Lakota has added objective statements and other projects from the Draft Strategic Work Plan to frame committee activities according larger revitalization goals and objectives. These objective statements and additional projects are italicized throughout the proceedings.

Last, the SCA Board should refer to the *Six Corners Association Assessment Report* for additional recommendations on committee work plans, the work planning process and potential short and long-term Main Street committee projects.

Lakota Group assistance does not end with this Report. Lakota strongly encourages the Six Corners Association, committee members, and volunteers to contact Lakota to discuss the contents of this report.

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

The following is a proposed strategic set of work plan priorities for the Six Corners Association and the Main Street committees. The SCA should prioritize which committee activities should be implemented first and others undertaken at different points during the upcoming year as volunteer and financial resources allow. Bullet points that are bolded below represent the consensus of the workshop attendees regarding strategic priorities and initiatives in the year ahead.

Big Ideas for 2010-2011

- ❑ **Need to improve Six Corners' brand identity with improved logo, messaging and additional public improvements**
- ❑ **Building improvements — the district needs better looking buildings, storefronts and signage.**
- ❑ **Organizational identity — the Six Corners Association needs to promote its role in the revitalization process.**
- ❑ Celebrating the new streetscape should be a high priority — get the word out about the positive change in the neighborhood
- ❑ **Pursue National Register Historic District listing for Six Corners**
- ❑ Parking issues- perception that parking pay boxes and the neighborhood parking permit system are deterrents to shoppers.
- ❑ Vacant commercial buildings is an immediate priority
- ❑ Attracting shoppers and families to the district
- ❑ Developing public space — there is no central plaza or public space in the district.

It was decided among workshop participants that wayfinding design, improving building appearances and educating property owners regarding design improvements should be key priorities for the year ahead.

Design Committee Priorities/Issues for 2010-2011

- ❑ **Need for better wayfinding signage**
- ❑ Landscaping Cuyler and other parking lots in the commercial district
- ❑ **Empty Storefronts and Poor Facades**
- ❑ Need to “dress up” empty storefronts with “*Coming Soon*” signs
- ❑ Portage Theater Improvements
- ❑ **Educating property owners on the “do’s” and “don’ts” of building maintenance and improvements**
- ❑ Pursue National Register District designation and listing

The workshop participants then selected developing a wayfinding signage program as sample project to work plan and develop.

Design Committee Draft Work Plan

Objective #1: Encourage and facilitate improvements to public spaces, and promote safety and security (taken from Assessment Report).

- Activity #1: Developing Wayfinding Signage Program (consideration — wayfinding design costs, possible new banners and their location in Six Corners).
- Activity #2: Landscape the Cuyler Street parking lot.

Organization Committee Priorities/Issues for 2010-2011

- ❑ Identity of the Six Corners Association — do we need a vision and mission statements? An enhanced website? Monthly meetings for the neighborhood?
- ❑ Moving the SCA office is important to promote organization visibility
- ❑ Need for more members — do we need more money or more volunteers?
- ❑ Need for active volunteer recruitment
- ❑ Do we need an advisory board
- ❑ Need for staff professional development and staff planning- how much staff do we need in the long term?
- ❑ Financing plan — how much money do we need now and in the long term?

Workshop participants determined that addressing public relations for the Six Corners Association was a critical priority for the year ahead. The participants selected a “Celebrating Streetscape” event as a work plan project to consider.

Objective: Conduct effective neighborhood outreach initiatives to inform stakeholders on SCA activities and revitalization initiatives (Taken from Assessment Report).

- Activity: Conduct a “Celebrate Streetscape Event” to promote the completion of the new Six Corners streetscape project.
 - Brainstorming for event work planning
 - Should it be a Saturday one-day event?
 - Should construction equipment be allowed for display at the event?
 - Should we cordon off the 4000 block of Milwaukee Avenue for the event.
 - Adding a children’s event should be a priority
 - What are the insurance requirements
 - Ensure that invite important dignitaries, the media, and the community to the event.
 - Should we plan a Sears Building light show?
 - Check with City of Chicago to see if they are planning the event

Promotion Committee Priorities/Issues for 2010-2011

- ❑ **Need for a signature event in the commercial district. Six Corners Cornopia and the Halloween event will be combined this year — can this be the signature event?**
- ❑ **Values Pages — does it need a new parking map as part of the advertisement? Does it need “freshening up”**
- ❑ **Need to develop additional partnerships to put one events?**
- ❑ Developing a different kind of sidewalk sales to promote existing businesses
- ❑ Portage Park has its own farmers market — should an “urban market” be developed for Six Corners?
- ❑ Organizing a holiday raffle?

Workshop participants chose developing a signature promotion event, developing new partnerships and re-evaluating the Values Pages as priorities for the coming year.

Objective #1: Effectively plan for all SCA promotion and marketing activities (taken from Assessment Report).

- *Activity: Conduct evaluation session and develop and 18-month committee work plan (taken from Assessment Report).*

- Activity: Seek partnerships with other neighborhood organizations and entities to help support existing and future Six Corner events.

Objective #2: Develop and implement a series of special events to introduce target customer markets to the Six Corners commercial district (taken from Assessment Report).

- Activity: Organize and implement the Six Cornucopia (taken from Assessment Report)
- Activity: Consider development and implementation of a Six Corners signature special event

Objective #3: Develop and implement a series of retail-based events to promote sales among Six Corners' businesses (taken from Assessment Report).

- Activity: Hold three holiday raffles
- Activity: Organize and implement Ladies Night Out (taken from Assessment Report)

Objective #4: Develop an effective marketing program that promotes the Six Corners commercial district and its businesses and services.

- Activity: Conduct media ad campaign promoting Six Corners as a unified district (taken from Assessment Report)
- Activity: Develop and distribute a printed Six Corners business directory (taken from Assessment Report)
- Activity: Work with Organization Committee to revise corporate website to include additional marketing content. (taken from Assessment Report)
- Activity: Redesign Values Pages to include an updated parking map.

Economic Restructuring Priorities/Issues for 2010-2011

- Too many vacant buildings**
- Need for more restaurants
- Promote the SBIF more with brokers and developing actual project case studies on the website and in the SCA newsletter**
- Should we develop a new signage incentive**
- Should we promote design assistance
- Develop an incentive brochure to distribute to potential investors
- Implement a proactive business support program.
- Building relationships with the local banks
- Developing a relationship with a local Small Business Development Center to help provide business development assistance

Workshop participants chose developing a new signage incentive, promoting the SBIF and the addressing the vacant building as key priorities in the year ahead.

Objective: Undertake business recruitment and retention initiatives.

- Activity: Explore the development additional financial incentives including a micro-loan and/or new signage incentive program.

2010-2011 DRAFT STRATEGIC WORK PLAN

The following is a proposed draft strategic work plan for the Six Corners Association and the Main Street committees that was prepared as part of the *Six Corners Association Assessment Report* completed in April 2010. The following plan is based on the current SCA work plan and incorporated recommendations presented in this *Assessment Report*. The SCA should review the following to adjust its current work plan or to use components of it as a foundation for next year's work plan. The SCA should prioritize which committee activities should be implemented first and others undertaken at different points during the years as volunteer and financial resources allow.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS WORK PLAN

Objective: Undertake board development activities that enhance the capacity of board members to implement the Main Street Four-Point Approach.

- Activity #1: Develop board members and officer job descriptions (could be relegated to Organization Committee).*
- Activity #2: Conduct a board member training/orientation session (could be relegated to Organization Committee).*
- Activity #3: Form ad-hoc Nominating Committee for board elections.*
- Activity #4: Encourage attendance at training conferences including state and national Main Street conferences*

Objective: Ensure the proper and cohesive internal operations of the organization

- Activity #5: Revise corporate by-laws*
- Activity #6: Develop vision and mission statements*
- Activity #7: Develop and adopt fundraising plan in collaboration with Organization Committee*
- Activity #8: Formalize work planning process and policies*
- Activity #9: Perform annual audit, payroll and bookkeeping (Treasurer's responsibility)*

Objective: Conduct Effective Personnel Management

- Activity #11: Revise Program Manager Job Description*
- Activity #12: Relocate Main Street Office*
- Activity #13: Develop Program Manager performance review policies and procedures*

ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

Objective: Conduct effective neighborhood outreach initiatives to inform stakeholders on SCA activities and revitalization initiatives.

- ❑ *Activity #1: Conduct semi-annual general meetings*
- ❑ *Activity #2: Continue publication and distribution of newsletter*
- ❑ *Activity #4: Develop a Six Corners Association brochure*
- ❑ *Activity #5: Update corporate website on a regular basis*

Objective: Implement an on-going volunteer development program to support Main Street Committee activities.

- ❑ *Activity #6: Conduct an annual training session for new volunteers*

Objective: Diversify SCA's financial base to support additional commercial district revitalization activities.

- ❑ *Activity #7: Plan and undertake a membership drive*
- ❑ *Activity #8: Work with Promotion Committee to develop a master sponsorship list*

PROMOTION COMMITTEE

Objective: Effectively plan for all SCA promotion and marketing activities.

- ❑ *Activity #1: Conduct evaluation session and develop and 18-month committee work plan.*

Objective: Develop and implement a series of special events to introduce target customer markets to the Six Corners commercial district.

- ❑ *Activity #2: Organize and implement Six Cornucopia*
- ❑ *Activity #3: Consider development and implementation of a Six Corners signature special event*

Objective: Develop and implement a series of retail-based events to promote sales among Six Corners' businesses.

- ❑ *Activity #4: Hold three holiday raffles*
- ❑ *Activity #5: Organize and implement Ladies Night Out*
- ❑ *Activity #6: Organize and implement Six Cornucopia event*

Objective: Develop an effective marketing program that promotes the Six Corners commercial district and its businesses and services.

- ❑ *Activity #7: Conduct media ad campaign promoting Six Corners as a unified district*
- ❑ *Activity #8: Develop and distribute a printed Six Corners business directory*

- ❑ *Activity #9: Work with Organization Committee to revise corporate website to include additional marketing content.*

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING COMMITTEE

Objective: Undertake data collection and research to determine market strengths and weaknesses.

- ❑ *Activity #1: Work collaboratively with Design Committee to undertake a complete business and building inventories*
- ❑ *Activity #2: Undertake a comprehensive retail market analysis*

Objective: Undertake business recruitment and retention initiatives.

- ❑ *Activity #3: Implement a business visitation program*
- ❑ *Activity #4: Form partnership with Wright College Entrepreneurship Program.*
- ❑ *Activity #5: Undertake targeted business recruitment activities.*
- ❑ *Activity #6: Attend ICSC and Illinois Alliance conferences and programs.*
- ❑ *Activity #7: Maintain an available spaces list for prospective business tenants.*
- ❑ *Activity #8: Explore the development additional financial incentives including a micro-loan program.*

DESIGN COMMITTEE

Objective: Encourage and facilitate private sector building improvements in Six Corners

- ❑ *Activity #1: Work collaboratively with Economic Restructuring Committee to complete a comprehensive building inventory.*
- ❑ *Activity #2: Develop a design assistance program and target properties for assistance.*
- ❑ *Activity #3: Develop a contractors list or database*
- ❑ *Activity #4: Develop and distribute a design assistance program-marketing piece.*

Objective: encourage, facilitate improvements to public spaces, and promote safety and security.

- ❑ *Activity #5: Install holiday decorations*
- ❑ *Activity #6: Participate in City of Chicago's Clean & Green Initiative*
- ❑ *Activity #7: Explore programs and initiatives to reduce panhandling and vagrancy.*

Objective: Raise the awareness of good design in the Six Corners commercial district.

- Activity #8: Revise set of design guidelines.*
- Activity #9: Conduct an education workshop on improving storefront displays.*
- Activity #10: Conduct an education workshop on available financial incentives for building rehabilitation.*

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are additional recommendations for SCA Board leaders and volunteers to consider as the organization moves forward in developing its work plans.

- ❑ **Vision and Mission Statements.** The *Assessment Report* recommends that a comprehensive vision statement be developed and adopted by the SCA Board of Directors that summarizes the neighborhood’s consensus for a future revitalized commercial district. In addition, a mission statement that describes the SCA’s role in achieving the vision should also be developed. Please review the *Assessment Report’s* recommendations on visioning for further guidance (*Page 12*). A sample vision statement is also included as Appendix A in the *Assessment Report*.
- ❑ **Work Plan Completion.** The SCA Board of Directors should meet to review workshop proceedings and decide on the projects each Main Street committee should undertake in the coming year. The Board of Directors along with the Main Street committees can use a “Project Prioritization List” (*see page 16*) to determine whether certain committee projects should be pursued over others. In turn, the Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring committees must then complete work plan sheets for each of the projects they will undertake. Once the committees have finished their work plans, committee chairs will then forward the work plans, along with budget recommendations to the Board of Directors for review and final adoption. Work plan documents should be posted to the SCA website, published, and distributed to all committee chairs, project volunteers and other interested stakeholders. Please refer to the work planning recommendations included within the *Assessment Report (page 14-15)* for additional information.
- ❑ **Commercial District Master Plan.** Over the last year, SCA leaders and various commercial district stakeholders have discussed and advocated the need to develop a master plan for the Six Corners commercial district. At the time of the Strategic Planning Workshop, a request for proposal to secure professional planning services for the development of a commercial district master plan was being considered by the City of Chicago. If a master plan is undertaken in the next year, SCA Board and Main Street committee leaders should be mindful that roles and responsibilities of the committees would slightly change within a master planning process. For example, the Design Committee has identified the development of a wayfinding signage program as a high priority project for the coming year. Instead of developing and implementing the project on its own, the Design Committee could serve in an advisory function to the plan consultants. This would allow the Committee some flexibility to take on additional projects during the year if it so chose.
- ❑ **Training.** A well-trained Board of Directors and Main Street volunteers has a stronger likelihood of long-term success than those that are not. All Board members and volunteer should be thoroughly trained in Main Street revitalization. The SCA Board, and the Organization Committee in particular, should conduct an annual training session on the Main Street Four-Point Approach, or encourage volunteers to attend training sessions at the local, regional, and national levels. Further information on Main Street training is found in the Board of Directors and Executive Staff sections of the *Assessment Report (pages 12 and 15)*.

SAMPLE WORK PLAN: DESIGN COMMITTEE PROJECT

Committee: Design			
Committee Goal: To encourage improvements to the physical and visual features of the downtown while maintaining its historic integrity.			
Objective: III. Encourage preservation of historic resources			
Project: Restoration Workshop			
Tasks:	Responsibility:	Complete by:	Budget:
Contact State Main Street and SHPO offices for design expertise and resources	Bill Baxter	3-30-01	N/A
Develop program content, book presenters and verify dates	Bill Baxter	4-30-01	N/A
Develop a plan to promote the workshop	Mary Lind	4-30-01	N/A
Select a location and make arrangements to host the workshop	Mary Lind	4-30-01	N/A
Execute P/R plan; contact property owners, realtors, contractors, etc.	Mary Lind	6-30-01	\$300
Stage workshop per plan	Bill Baxter	7-31-01	N/A
Evaluate workshop and critique for future workshops	Bill Baxter	8-15-01	N/A
Success! Conduct workshop by 7-31-01 with at least 50 people in attendance.			

SAMPLE PROJECT PRIORITIZATION LIST

<u>Project Prioritization List</u>					
Committee:					
Objective:					
<u>Projects:</u>	<u>1) Importance to Vision/Mission</u>	<u>2) Likelihood of Success</u>	<u>3) Potential Influence</u>	<u>4) Time & Cost</u>	<u>5) Totals</u>

Scoring Criteria:

- 1 = Importance to vision/mission (most important = 1; least important = 10)
- 2 = Likelihood of success (most likely = 1; least likely 10)
- 3 = Potential for direct influence (most potential = 1; least potential = 10)
- 4 = Cost in time and money (least time & cost = 1; most time and cost = 10)
- 5 = Total Points (least points = highest priority)