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Downtown Hershey Association Completes Master Plan for Revitalization

After months of planning and research, the Downtown Hershey Association has released the **Plan for Continued Revitalization** to help guide the future vision of the downtown.

The Downtown Hershey Association (DHA) was formed in February 2013 by community members interested in creating a group committed to fostering downtown revitalization. Organized by Township resident Justin Engle, the DHA board is made up of two dozen community leaders representing small and large business, local government, civic organizations and residents. The association aims to enhance the beauty of downtown, attract new businesses and improve the quality of life for everyone with a walkable, bike-able, welcoming downtown that respects Hershey's heritage.

In July of 2013, after collecting input from other [Main Street](#) organizations, the group decided that the next step was to create a master plan to guide future downtown revitalization. In the fall of 2013, the DHA executed a procurement process and chose the Lititz-based planning firm of Derck & Edson to develop the plan. The master plan was funded by large and small business, the Derry Township Industrial Commercial Development Authority (ICDA) and the Township of Derry.

The Downtown Hershey Association worked with Derck & Edson to gather opinions of dozens of community leaders, government officials, business owners and the public at large to develop a plan that

reflects the collaborative vision of the community. In addition to individual interviews, the firm and DHA staged a large scale public meeting, held several community events and conducted an online survey.

Community members weighed in on their choices for the look and feel for signage, branding, architectural design, seating, public art, lighting, pedestrian crossings, parks and recreation, site furnishing, building styles and paving.

“The designs we created are the visual representation of what we heard thousands of people voice during our research. The drawings are not intended to portray the exact details but instead reveal the many opportunities that exist within the existing fabric of downtown Hershey,” said Chris Brown of Derck & Edson.

Brown said that the designs have already been instrumental in inspiring creative thinking in current projects and will further enhance the sense of place in downtown Hershey. Derck & Edson has already worked closely in the development process of several downtown projects, including the renovations and expansion of the Hershey Volunteer Fire Company station and the existing and future buildings that are in the design phase on the current post office site.

In addition, the Township is moving forward with initial engineering on conceptual streetscape drawings done by Derck & Edson since those improvements need to be coordinated with PennDOT’s plan to resurface Chocolate Avenue in 2016.

“These designs in the plan become the reference point for the continued revitalization of downtown Hershey. When a project starts in the downtown area, the project stakeholders will now have a clear, concise idea of the vision,” said Justin Engle, DHA Vice-Chairman and Derry Township Supervisor. “Derck & Edson’s input has been invaluable on these projects and led to a new level of collaboration and strategy never before experienced in Derry Township,” he added.

The 77 strategies outlined in the Master Plan for Continued Revitalization are focused on long-term vitality and wellness of the community and will serve to steward the legacy of Milton S. Hershey. “Many of the strategies in the plan are already in the works, which not only speaks to the passion and energy in this community, but reflects a true aspiration to make Downtown Hershey an even more amazing place to live and visit,” said Brown.

One of the strategies is to obtain 501c3 status, which the organization recently completed after a six-month process. The Downtown Hershey Association is now working toward achieving its Main Street designation, which sets the stage for many funding opportunities. Other financing for the projects will come from continued investment by the private sector, public sector grant funding, monies secured by the new Economic Development Manager (required by Main Street programs), who will work on behalf of the DHA and the Township, and through a possible Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district for the downtown. "This economic development tool can spur the types of development residents have asked for and could be finalized by April," said Engle. Additional financial support will be provided by area businesses and individuals.

"Having a robust promotions agenda is another strategy in the plan and a requirement for Main Street designation," said Downtown Hershey Association Chairperson Susan Cort. "Plans are in the works for an art show in the spring, a farmers' market and weekly music series in the summer and a community festival in the fall, all of which will create a lot of excitement downtown while showcasing what Hershey has to offer." she added.

The plan may be viewed on the Downtown Hershey Association website (www.downtownhershey.net).

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About Downtown Hershey Association: The Downtown Hershey Association (DHA) is a diverse group of volunteers made up of Derry Township residents, business leaders and government officials working to enhance the beauty of the downtown, attract new businesses, and improve the quality of life for everyone. For more information, visit www.DowntownHershey.net.

About Derck & Edson: Derck & Edson provides quality planning and design services to shape the natural and built environment in innovative and functional ways. They specialize in enhancing campuses, downtowns, and athletics. Their staff of dedicated landscape architects, civil engineers, and land planners provides the full range of design and technical capabilities necessary to carry a project through the entire design and construction process. Since the establishment of the firm in 1940, their dedication to satisfying clients' needs for function, responsiveness, economy, and creativity has produced innovative and enduring design solutions. Learn more at www.derckandedson.com.