



# HERMITAGE TOWN CENTER

## A Community Vision

prepared by  
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for  
The City of Hermitage  
and  
The Mercer County Regional Planning Commission

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(ITE MANUAL FOR URBAN THOROUGHFARES)	

**PREPARED FOR**

**THE CITY OF HERMITAGE  
AND  
MERCER COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Hermitage Town Center project is a community-based planning project, sponsored by the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission and the City of Hermitage. The goal of the project is to develop a master plan for the area that will lead to the establishment of a memorable town center for the City of Hermitage; one that creates a unique identity based on a walkable, mixed-use community. The project is focused on the intersection of Rt. 18 and Rt. 62 (State St.), but will extend out beyond that to a wider area in an effort to foster connections to the surrounding neighborhoods. The project was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation as a follow-up to the Rt. 18 North study completed in 2001 that preceded the widening of the road through the center of Hermitage.

### planning process

The first phase of the project involved setting up the project framework and the local steering committee. Project boundaries and goals were agreed upon during several meetings with the steering committee, which was comprised of local stakeholders, members of MCRCP, the City of Hermitage staff and the Hermitage City Council. The project goals were defined by the steering committee as:

- Establish Hermitage as a memorable destination with a recognizable and unique character.
- Create a common public space at the heart of the community.
- Define gateways and entries that clearly delineate a downtown district with a sense of arrival and place.
- Focus new development efforts to create walkability within the downtown through streetscape improvements that create connectivity between the various pieces of the downtown area.
- Use landscaping and other amenities to create visual buffers along the major streets and roads.

After these goals had been defined during the first steering committee meeting the project team began to meet with a variety of other community stakeholders including local and regional developers and landowners. As the team began to develop its preliminary planning proposals a series of community meetings were scheduled, culminating in a planning “charrette”, to solicit public input to the plan. The continuous comment and feedback of the stakeholders and committee members helped to shape the final form of this plan and report.

### a guidebook

This planning document is intended as a guidebook for a future vision for the City of Hermitage. It is not expected that every recommendation or design proposal will be followed exactly as articulated in this document, but if the goals stated above, and the design principles that follow are adopted as guiding community values, then this project will have accomplished a great deal.

The design proposals in this document are presented as a set of components for a successful town center – the more of them that are implemented, the more successful that center will be, although there is a certain critical mass of these elements that will be necessary to achieve the stated goals. But it is not necessary that they all be implemented, and not necessarily all at once. Some of these proposals could be completed tomorrow with the necessary funds and public will, others are presented as targets of opportunity that should be seized upon as the opportunity presents itself.

A combination of public and private investments will be needed to realize the vision presented here, but public infrastructure improvements, particularly in the landscape and pedestrian improvements in the public right-of-way should be viewed as public investments that be leveraged to stimulate private investment. By showing the way through the creation of a strong and attractive public image for the community and creating opportunities for pedestrian linkages, these investments will pay off when the private landowners follow suit.

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

The following design principles reflect the vision for Hermitage developed in collaboration with the steering committee and the community stakeholders. These principles are intended to establish a framework which will be used to guide and mold future development and allow Hermitage to grow into the type of place envisioned. These design principles, and the set of design components illustrated in the following pages should be used to guide both private and public development initiatives as redevelopment opportunities present themselves. While it is to be expected that there will be divergences from the specifics of the plans presented here, following these principles will give shape to a community that conforms to the project goals.

### **create a sense of place**

Hermitage looks like many newer small cities in the United States. Strip malls, big box stores and even bigger parking lots line the main streets. An automobile- dependant society often creates anonymous and generic communities. Interesting streetscapes, an inviting pedestrian environment and controlled new development will create a *place* to call the center of town instead of just a geographic center.

### **develop public spaces for the community and to attract others**

Towns need places to gather its residents and allow them to come together as a community. These places are typically at the heart of the town. Not only do these public spaces serve important functional needs, but they also create a visual center for the community and visitors alike, helping to establish a recognizable and visible image of the city.

### **the intersection of Hermitage Boulevard and State Street is the heart of Hermitage**

The crossroads of the two major arterial streets in Hermitage was identified by the stakeholders as the center of town, which should be the focus and heart of this project. However, it's current form does not establish an image of any significant place other than a congested traffic intersection.

### **connect the pieces together**

Similar to many towns that grew up under modern zoning codes, Hermitage is very separated in terms of land uses. Residential, business and retail areas are located in separate parts of the city, creating an environment that requires an automobile in order to get from one part of town to another. Additionally, the roadway system is overly dependent on the major arterial roads to serve all transportation needs and there are few secondary or tertiary streets to establish a street network that can dissipate the traffic away from Rt. 18 and Rt. 62. New connections, both vehicular and pedestrian need to be made.

### **promote walkability**

People enjoy being able to walk between destinations when that walk is convenient, pleasant and interesting. This is clearly apparent in historic towns and cities, and through the popularity of new developments that mimic historic shopping districts ("lifestyle centers" and "town centers"). Hermitage needs to build the infrastructure necessary to foster a pedestrian environment.

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

### **establish mixed use**

The true key to establishing a walkable community lies in creating a mixed-use environment that places living, working, shopping and recreating in the same environment, thus eliminating the requirement that all travel be by automobile. Until Hermitage can foster these types of development patterns streetscape and pedestrian improvements will be useful and necessary, but there will never be the wholesale change to the pattern of land use that will create a truly pedestrian-oriented community.

### **calm vehicular traffic**

Creating a walkable community recognizes the need to de-emphasize the dominance of the automobile. Pedestrian amenities and traffic calming go hand in hand to establish a pedestrian community. Slowing traffic in congested areas, developing narrower pedestrian intersections, creating visual and physical buffers between traffic and the pedestrians, establishing a more fine-grained street network, all of these elements and more will be needed to assert a new balance between the needs of the pedestrian and the motorist.

### **use all elements of the town to reflect a unique character**

Many elements of urban design contribute to the unique character of a town. It is the combined set of elements – the landscape setting, buildings, streets and sidewalks, signage, even the infrastructure such as utility lines – that are a part of the historic development of the place. Each of these elements should be viewed as an opportunity, if treated properly, to enhance a unique character that is Hermitage's.

### **leverage creative solutions for perceived problems**

Big box retail stores are already present in Hermitage and more are interested in building there. We must develop design and development standards that make this form of development less unsightly and designate appropriate locations for this kind of development. Finding ways to integrate them into the fabric of the new town design will make these necessary parts of our everyday lives amenities as well.

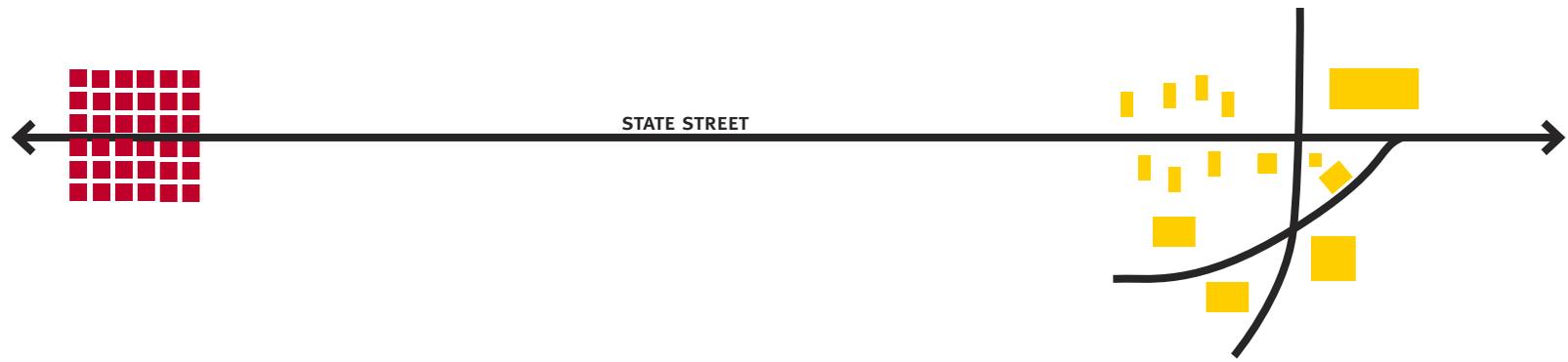
### **using this report**

This report is organized into several sections. The first ones: **HISTORIC CONTEXT, EXISTING CONDITIONS, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES** present a review of the planning team's analysis of the current conditions in Hermitage. The following sections: **DESIGN CONCEPT** and **COMPONENTS** describe the overall concept for realizing the goals and principles described and the toolbox of elements that can be applied to realize the vision articulated through them. **A PLAN OF THE VISION** reflects the potential result from comprehensively applying the concept and the components. It is important to understand that the final result of the Town Center project is likely to be quite different from this, but that this plan reflects the significant potential result of carrying out these initiatives.

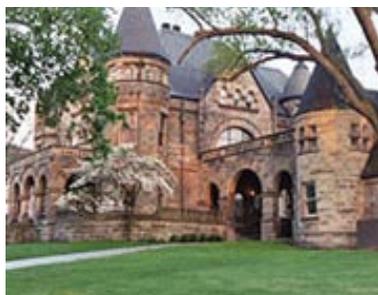
**IMPLEMENTATION** is an important concluding section to the report. It illustrates recommended phasing of public initiatives that should be used to leverage and create incentives to private redevelopment of the surrounding area.

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

Hermitage began as a suburb of Sharon. Over time, Hermitage has become the larger and more successful of the two cities as businesses have adapted to the automobile culture and relocated to the vehicular strip. Both of the cities are centered around State Street, but in Sharon, it is the home to the historic, walkable, retail core of the city. State Street loses its character, density and sidewalks, even as it gains more commercial activity as it approaches Hermitage and Rt. 18.



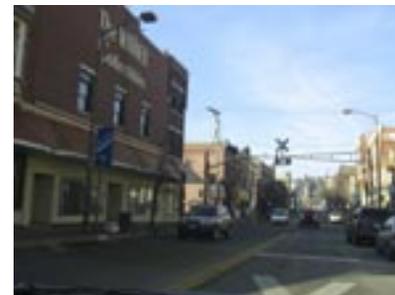
AERIAL VIEW OF STATE STREET FROM SHARON TO HERMITAGE



BUHL MANSION ON STATE STREET



HISTORIC IMAGE OF STATE STREET, SHARON



CURRENT CONDITION OF STATE STREET, SHARON

**EXISTING  
CONDITIONS**

**NEW DEVELOPMENT**  
The construction of the new Super Wal-Mart has generated further small commercial development in the vicinity



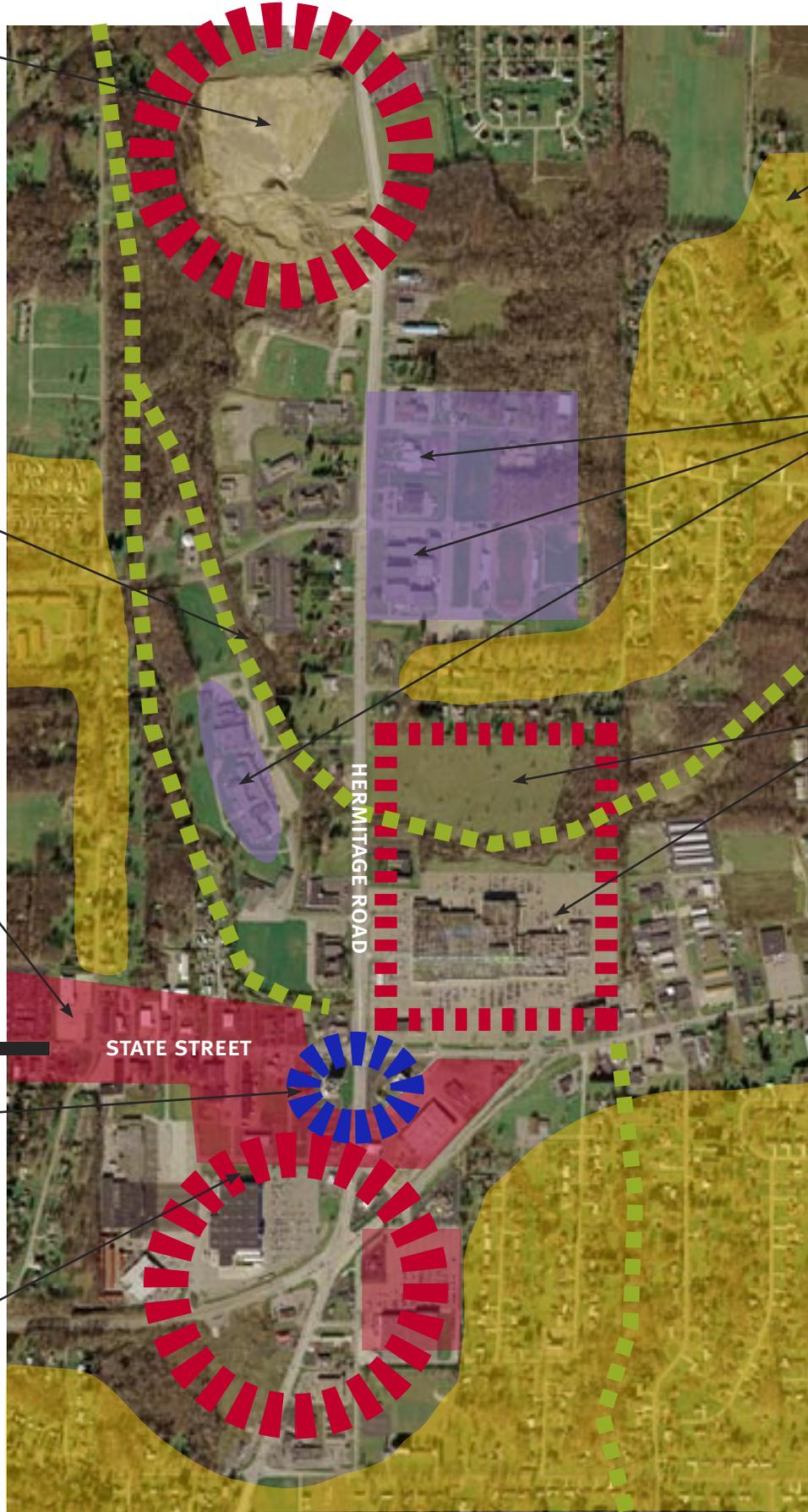
**STREAM CORRIDOR**  
There is an opportunity to create a trail running between the center of Hermitage to the Shenango Valley Dam

**OLDER STRIP RETAIL**  
A section of older strip retail could be due for redevelopment over the next few years



**EMPLOYMENT CENTER**  
FNB Bank has three large office buildings at the intersection of Hermitage Boulevard and State Street

**BIG BOX RETAIL**  
Some existing big box is located along the Shenango Valley Expressway, one of which is currently being redeveloped for more big box retail. Other sites along the Shenango Valley Expressway are being looked at for further big box development



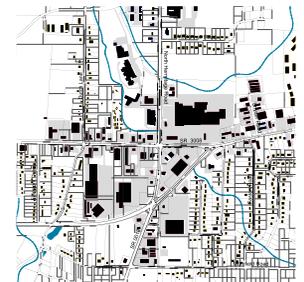
**EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS**  
Shown in yellow, the existing residential areas don't come close to the center of town



**CIVIC FUNCTIONS**  
Schools and the City Building provide a civic presence to the town center



**LARGE PARCEL OPPORTUNITIES**  
The Shenango Valley Mall site and the large open parcel to the north provide a unique opportunity for large-scale development



**PARKING LOTS**  
The intersection of Hermitage Road and State Street is the heart of development in Hermitage. Unfortunately, this also means that it is currently a collection of large, unlandscaped parking lots