The Study Area

For the purpose of gathering information and identifying the specific elements present in Kent which best capture the identity of the entire community, it is useful to define a study area within which evaluation and analysis efforts may be focused. Utilizing a limited study area will allow key ideas and strategies to be developed in greater detail. These ideas can then be used as the basis for revitalization attempts throughout the surrounding areas.

The study area is defined as the area north of Summit Street from Mantua Street on the west to Lincoln Street on the east (western edge of Kent State University) and extending north to Crain Avenue (west of Water Street), Columbus Street (from Water Street east to Depeyster), and to the north side of East Main (from Depeyster to Lincoln).

This particular study area was selected because it is representative of the wide variety of activities and physical features found throughout the city. It includes most of the Central Business District, a mixture of residential, commercial, and industrial areas, and is adjacent to Kent State University. The Cuyahoga River also runs through the study area and serves as a major focal point.

The study area is illustrated at right.
Outside Influences

Although the study area contains a wide sampling of features common to the entire city of Kent, there are several specific elements in the vicinity outside the study area boundaries which directly impact the function, character, and success of not only the focus area but also the whole city. Especially noteworthy are the retail nodes located west and east of the downtown area and the shopping center and proposed mall to the south. These commercial districts have a significant effect on the Central Business District. The presence of numerous lakes and parks in the region should also be considered as valuable resources. These elements are illustrated in the diagram at right.
Evaluation and Analysis

To enable the identification and understanding of the most useful physical characteristics existing within the study area, a series of categories, which group various elements together into themes which can then be utilized as tools for decision-making throughout the urban design process, has been established:

Graphic Physical Image

Land Use

Building Form and Mass

Vehicular Circulation and Parking

Pedestrian Pathways

Streetscape

Open Space

Historic Preservation

Each of these categories is evaluated to pinpoint the existing conditions which most significantly affect the organization, function, and character of the physical environment. Analysis of this information provides a clear understanding of those factors which are most successful in terms of providing a safe, efficient, and exciting urban atmosphere.

Author Kevin Lynch has established a method for describing images using five key elements: paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks. Each category can then be assigned a graphic symbol to represent it on an "image map." This map is an outline of the most prominent aspects of the physical setting. An image map for the Kent study area has been constructed and is shown below. Using this map as a reference, Lynch's five elements are briefly described as follows:

Image map of the Kent study area
Paths

Best described as commonly used routes of travel, paths can take many forms. They may be horizontal or vertical (elevators), they may penetrate buildings or be highly recognizable as in a tree-lined street, or they may be subtle and implied with no physical boundary such as airline routes.

In Kent the primary pathways are mostly vehicular, particularly along the Haymaker Parkway and Main Street. Dozens of secondary, pedestrian pathways can be found linking the University to the commercial and residential areas and include such routes as Water Street and Lincoln Street. There is a great deal of potential for developing stronger pedestrian pathways that unite the downtown with the University.

Edges

One of the most visible and easily identified features found in the Kent study area is the edge. Typified as a linear element, the edge is often a boundary or district change which occurs between two areas. Frequently the edge may be a barrier preventing easy access to another place, but it might also be a penetrable seam marking a clear change in character or scale of physical elements.

Nodes

When there is a focus of activity, a crossing of pathways, or a heightened concentration of similar characteristics, a node is often formed. Depending upon the relative point of view, a node may be considered very small, as in a juncture of two sidewalks, or quite large as in instances where entire districts or cities become nodes.

The heart of Kent's Central Business District, where Water and Main Streets converge, is an example of a node. Not only do two well-traveled roads cross, but also there is a good deal of activity in a setting with a distinct historical character. A very strong vehicular node occurs at the intersection of Main Street and the Haymaker Parkway due primarily to the volume of automobile traffic. The University itself also forms an unmistakable node.

The creation of a node is a valuable method for manipulating an urban setting. New links and activity centers can be generated to strengthen the fabric of the environment.
Districts

Districts can be distinguished as larger areas which display a visible degree of common characteristics. Similar building types and forms, inhabitants (ethnic communities, income groups, etc.), activities, and land uses (retail districts, industrial zones, etc.) are examples of various conditions likely to signify a district.

Within the Kent study area, there are a number of districts: Kent's downtown commercial area has been formally organized as the Central Business District; a small manufacturing district can be found along Water Street and Gougler Avenue; a residential area west of the University has been dubbed "College Park"; and a concentration of fraternity and sorority houses has created a "Greek" district.

Realizing the presence of different districts is an important part of the urban design process, as these districts are often associated with the identity of a city and can be used advantageously to strengthen and unify the community.

Landmarks

Those elements which are truly unique and become a point of reference to the observer can usually be considered landmarks. Varying widely in scale from the prominent and highly visible elements such as towers and church steeples to small but distinctive items such as a statue or a unique sign, a landmark can be any feature associated with one particular place or something which contrasts with its surroundings.

Numerous landmarks are present in the Kent landscape such as the Cuyahoga River and waterfall, the railroad station, grain silos, and the Kent State University water tower. Collectively these landmarks constitute a strong civic identity.

Summary

Evaluating the urban environment in terms of Lynch's five elements is an excellent method for capturing the image of any particular place and can be utilized throughout the design process to strengthen the identity of a city and add richness to the fabric of the environment.
Our urban landscape is shaped by a multitude of physical, historical, and socio-economical influences. These forces result in a complex mixture of development patterns and a diversity of activities forming the cityscape. By examining the location, size, and types of activities which occur, it is possible to evaluate how the uses affect each other, the community, and the built environment.

Once the various districts which are present within the study area are identified, the general types of land-use activities begin to emerge and define the character of the city. However, to pinpoint areas where possible conflicts of use occur, or to evaluate how and where new uses may be inserted into the existing urban structure, a more detailed analysis of land use is required. The creation of a graphic illustration, or "land-use map" is a common method used to locate and identify specific activities. A land-use map for the Kent study area is illustrated at right.

The system employed for visually describing land-use data on the map allows the information to be evaluated at three different detail levels: macro, meso, and micro. At the macro level it is possible to discern general land-use patterns or districts and locate the concentration of certain activities. At the intermediate, meso, level each building is classified as either commercial, industrial, governmental, civic, ecclesiastical, or residential, making clear distinctions between public, semipublic, and private uses. The final level, micro, is the most detailed. Here, each of the meso-level use categories is broken down more extensively into subcategories, and a corresponding letter designation is assigned to each building. (See key to map for categories.) At this level the composition of residential districts is also examined in great detail, distinguishing between single, multifamily, and student rental units.

A land-use map is a valuable tool to use throughout the urban design process in order to evaluate the potential for future growth and development. By referring to the map, the designer is reminded of the qualities that are present in the community and that form the physical environment, and he or she can make decisions accordingly to strengthen the image of the entire city and encourage positive growth.
Building Form and Mass

Evaluation of the two- and three-dimensional manifestations of the built environment can reveal a great deal about the urban qualities of a city and how the built environment physically affects the citizens moving about through the spaces.

At the two-dimensional level, one of the most frequently used graphic techniques for representing relationships between solid forms and void spaces is the construction of a "figure-ground" diagram. This graphic tool renders the contiguous footprint of building forms as black shapes ("figure") against a white background ("ground"). From the figure-ground study recognizable patterns emerge clearly and indicate the spatial qualities of the environment at the ground level.

Also visible are disruptions of patterns indicating discontinuities or gaps in the urban fabric. By analyzing these figurations it is possible to identify those areas which could benefit the most from infill techniques to reweave the community and strengthen links to other areas.

In the figure-ground drawing of the Kent study area, the most predominant break in the urban structure occurs along the Haymaker Parkway. Here the downtown area is severed from the residential districts, a break which has caused a devastating effect on the continuity of the city identity.

At a three-dimensional level, building forms can be evaluated for external volumetric qualities. The massing of structures creates positive exterior spaces, the quality of which is affected by the height, orientation, and scale of the building forms around them. These exterior "rooms" have a direct impact on the people and the activities which take place within them. When building mass begins to erode as buildings are torn down, the quality of positive space weakens, and the building forms themselves begin to lose identity and continuity. By identifying massing gaps and infilling them with appropriately scaled structures, the urban designer strengthens the formal manifestation of the cityscape. The best method for analyzing the three-dimensional aspects of the landscape is to construct perspectives or axonometric drawings of the actual spaces from the observer's point of view.

Since a great deal of the urban experience takes place in the exterior spaces, the evaluation of building form and mass is a necessary part of the design process and, if used effectively, leads to the creation of a very dynamic environment.
Circulation and Parking

Once the primary pathways and gathering places for pedestrians, our city streets are now crowded with one of the most pervasive symbols of the twentieth century, the automobile. Forever changing the character of the urban environment, the automobile has become an essential element of our modern society, drastically altering the manner in which we interact with the city and affecting the imagery of the cityscape.

Circulation and parking are analyzed in order to identify and summarize all conditions, extant in the Kent study area, which relate directly to the activities of vehicular movement, including the visual characteristics associated with the physical manifestation of city streets and parking areas. It is intended that this summary be utilized as a tool to identify areas for potential improvement, areas which supplement best the needs of the city and enhance the quality of the city setting.

A recent study of parking in the Kent Central Business District conducted by the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio serves as the primary source of information for evaluating existing parking conditions. Some of the key results of the study have been summarized here to provide a general description of conditions. The study should be consulted for specific information pertaining to parking in the downtown area.

Circulation

The area of Kent that falls within the study boundaries was originally organized with a basic grid system starting at the Cuyahoga River and the intersection of Main and Water streets. That arrangement provided adequate circulation patterns for over a century until the popularity of the automobile began to strain the system's capacity for handling vehicle congestion in the downtown area. That problem was partially resolved with the construction of the Haymaker Parkway by-pass just south of the Central Business District. Connecting the west side of Kent with the Kent State University Campus, the by-pass alleviated the congestion, but effectively severed the downtown area from the rest of the community, thus destroying a vital link to the campus.

Presently vehicular circulation within the study area seems to be operating smoothly. The areas with the largest potential for improvement are those directly
adjacent to the Haymaker Parkway. In these areas pedestrian activity is extremely difficult and dangerous. Providing safer pedestrian access across the parkway would re-establish a stronger link between the city center and the University and would reunite the community.

Parking

Because of the reliance on the automobile to transport people conveniently to the doorstep of their destination, parking has become critical for management of car traffic. The resultant parking lots have manifested themselves as vast carpets of dreary asphalt that are usually neglected and treated as a mere necessity. Unfortunately, Kent, too, has fallen victim to the "ugly parking lot syndrome" with many areas in serious need of attention and repair.

The largest parking lots in the downtown area are located primarily behind the main commercial blocks between Water and Depeyster streets and along Franklin Avenue. These lots account for approximately 600 parking spaces. Additional on-street parking is located along Main, Franklin, and Water streets. Outside the Central Business District, parking lots are primarily reserved for private use, such as those located at the Kent Motor Inn, Campus Center, or DuBois Book Store.

The results of the survey indicate that many merchants and residents feel that there is not enough parking near the commercial establishments. Occupancy counts, however, indicate that many lots are under-utilized most of the time and that the real issue may be the creation of better access to the lots themselves. The second most noted complaint of those surveyed indicates that use restrictions of the various lots are not clearly identified and that the restrictions themselves were not appreciated by users.

Occupancy counts indicate that the periods of heaviest use for each lot vary according to the time of day. Adequate parking is nearly always available within 600 feet of the desired destination. The lots closer to the Kent Campus, however, seem to provide less than adequate quantities of parking for the large volume of activity adjacent to the campus.

Visually almost all of the parking areas surveyed are in need of physical improvements. An exception is the downtown, on-street parking which was the subject of a very successful renovation several years ago. The survey indicates that the merchants do not seem convinced that allocating funds for visual enhancement will positively affect the downtown area, even though customers frequently comment on the poor quality and condition of parking areas.

Providing a successful parking program within the study area can tremendously enhance the public interaction with the city setting and will surely generate pride in the community and help to foster a vital urban environment.
Pedestrian Pathways

The course by which a pedestrian travels from one destination to another is considered a "pedestrian pathway." Because of the high degree of pedestrian activity associated with a university town such as Kent, these pathways become an important design consideration. The existing routes should not only be evaluated in terms of safety and convenience, but they should also be considered as a valuable means for linking and integrating the downtown community with the University. Such factors as volume, pedestrian/automobile conflicts, handicap accessibility, natural paths, and path obstructions are some of the factors which need examination in order to prepare an effective pedestrian plan.

The best way to summarize the volume of use each pathway receives is to classify them as either primary, secondary, or tertiary routes. It was found that the primary paths in the study area are located along the main vehicular routes of Main Street and Water Street. There are numerous secondary routes in the residential areas near the University, and a number of tertiary paths exist in the downtown area which are usually alleys, shortcuts, and side streets.

In terms of pedestrian/automobile conflicts, the most problematic situation occurs along East Main Street between Lincoln and Willow streets. Because of the number of commercial businesses located on both sides of the street, there are considerable driveway curb-cuts, as well as, a great deal of vehicular activity. The Haymaker Parkway also presents a dangerous conflict between pedestrians and automobiles primarily because there are no organized places to cross the road safely. This parkway severs many direct paths between the University and the downtown area, effectively creating a barrier that is impenetrable to pedestrians.

Accessibility is another factor which needs consideration when evaluating and planning pedestrian pathways. For the most part, the primary routes are accessible with sloped sidewalks at crossing areas which are mostly in good condition.

Several natural pathways exist within the study area especially along the west bank of the Cuyahoga River. Traveling these paths is an activity in itself, and the opportunity exists to link these routes into a larger, regional park system. Expanding the network of pathways to include a bicycle trail is also a very viable consideration. A trail could promote outdoor activities and draw visitors to the area.

Pathways should also be examined for obstructions which prohibit safe and direct movement. Care should be taken to avoid placing utility poles, street signs, or other objects along sidewalks where view or access may be inhibited. In several areas of Kent, such as the area along Haymaker Parkway, paths have been "created" because there are no formal sidewalks. Here quite a few obstructions, such as fences and guardrails, make travel not only inconvenient but dangerous as well. The designer should always be aware of these conditions because they usually indicate that a more popular or convenient route might be needed.

Providing a safe means of travel for pedestrians is more than a necessity, it is also a means to connect different districts effectively and build a sense of continuity within the urban setting. Most of all, pathways can be a pleasant amenity for all to enjoy.
Since so much of the urban experience takes place in exterior open spaces, streets, and pathways, very important aspects of the built environment are the visual qualities of the streetscape. Signage, landscaping, lighting, and building materials all have a significant impact on the overall appearance, character, and image of the city.

One of the most obtrusive elements of the streetscape is the multitude of signage that is usually present. Without clear guidelines to control size, type, and location, signage can quickly become a confusing, ugly, and chaotic intrusion into the urban setting. The best examples of signage are those which remain sympathetic to the adjacent architecture, especially in the Central Business District. Reflecting the historic nature of the architecture in the signage can be an excellent method for creating a sense of unity and projecting an identifiable character. Controls limiting the size of signs help to keep them in scale with the rest of the streetscape and to create a sense of balance that is essential for providing a pleasant atmosphere for the public. Signage should also be located so as not to obstruct the view of pedestrians and motorists. With a little creativity and imagination, signs can be an exciting addition to the streetscape, providing an interesting addition to the visual environment.

Landscaping is another element of the streetscape and one which should be considered a device for constructing a pleasing urban setting. With the addition of greenery, the hard edges of the city are softened and become much more inviting to the inhabitants. Trees and plantings can provide linkage with the various areas outside the city boundaries by utilizing rhythm and continuity to draw people through the area and by maintaining an overall character as well. Outdoor furniture can also be an excellent addition to the landscape, providing a place to gather and reflect on the surroundings. In addition, paving materials, awnings, window dressings, etc. can all be used to enhance the streetscape effectively by clearly defining pathways and adding texture to the setting.

Lighting, utility poles, and overhead wiring are other necessary considerations of the streetscape. Choosing lighting which is sympathetic to the character of the city can add a great deal to the quality of the urban experience, creating a sense of character and unity. Although not always possible, the best method for dealing with overhead wires and utility poles is to bury the service. Creatively concealing these items with landscaping can also be very successful.

When close attention is paid to these and the many other elements present in the streetscape, the urban setting can be a more exciting visual experience, thus enhancing civic pride.
Open Spaces

Exterior open spaces are a very vital part of an urban experience. Open spaces are used as gathering places, pathways, spots for quiet repose, and transitional spaces which link areas together. These spaces compose the stage for our social existence. Analyzing open spaces leads to an understanding of how they can be modified to provide an exciting setting for human interaction.

The framework for analyzing open spaces is based upon a hierarchy of spaces devised by author Roger Trancik, *Finding Lost Space: Theories of Urban Design* (Van Nostrand Reinhold Company) which defines five types of urban voids: entry-foyer, inner-block void, primary network of streets and squares, public parks and gardens, and linear open space systems. These five elements will be used to evaluate the open spaces in the Kent area for function and aesthetics.

**Entry-Foyer**

The entry-foyer space establishes the important transition or passage from personal domain to common territory. It is a gateway that announces the arrival to a "place." The Main Street Bridge over the Cuyahoga River is an important Kent landmark which serves as a gateway to the Central Business District, enhancing the quality of arrival into Kent. Other, similar gateways can be found at the crest of the hill on East Main Street, and at the intersection of the Haymaker Parkway and South Water Street.

On a smaller scale, many businesses and private homes contain exterior foyers and courtyards which are more private in nature. Many are overlooked, but with a small amount of attention these areas could be quite exciting as transitional spaces.

**Inner-Block Voids**

The inner-block void is a type of semi-public space which is most commonly found as an internal courtyard or plaza. An excellent example of an inner-block void is the Rockwell Hall atrium connecting the Kent State University Fashion Museum and the Shannon Rodgers and Jerry Silverman School of Fashion Merchandising, located on the northwest corner of the campus. The space succeeds aesthetically and functionally as a semi-private gathering area.

A prime example of an underdeveloped inner-block void is the enclosed vacant lot located between the "Loft" and the "Subway" buildings on Franklin Avenue. Whether or not building mass fills this space in the future, it is a highly feasible location for open space development at the present time. Another type of open space, largely ignored, is the internal area of many residential blocks. Many of these areas could be developed as semiprivate community green spaces.

**Primary Network of Streets and Squares**

Functioning as corridors within the city, the primary streets create an unusual type of exterior space linking different places and having high concentrations of activities. With the accentuation of focal points and view corridors, these spaces can be used as directional tools for moving people through the environment, or the spaces may be developed as focal points in themselves. For example, both Main and Water streets have strong visual corridors prompting movement to the other end, and the alleyways in the down-
town area have a great deal of potential for development as small pedestrian malls. Such spaces would not only be interesting and pedestrian friendly, they could also create possible revenues where currently inactive driveways exist.

There are presently no strong examples of squares or plazas in the study area, but a few sites have qualities that make them good locations to create such spaces: the northwest corner of Main and Water streets, the junction of Summit Street and Lincoln, and many of the vacant parking areas. Transforming these areas into quality places could foster a sense of civic pride.

**Public Parks and Gardens**

Usually parks and gardens are the first type of places which come to mind when considering open space. These areas bring nature into an urban setting by softening the edges of the built environment.

Kent can encourage visitors by taking advantage of its identity as the "Tree City" and by maintaining a city filled with beautiful green streetscapes and parks. The existing Riveredge Park and the areas surrounding it also have much more potential for development. By enhancing this natural resource, the city could benefit physically and economically.

**Linear Open Space**

The last element to be considered, linear open space, defines those spaces which relate to pathways, rivers, railways, etc. Many examples of this type presently exist in Kent, but the predominant spaces are along both sides of the Cuyahoga River and the Haymaker Parkway. Enhancement of the areas would reinforce them as vital urban places. New paving and landscaping along some of the city streets has already proven to add to the quality of the urban experience.

**Summary**

This analysis of open spaces in the proposed study area has highlighted existing resources which possess a great deal of potential to improve the quality of life in Kent. Assessments of the values of these places within the city has initiated a focus toward concrete goals, objectives, and strategies.
Much of the character of the city of Kent stems from a rich layering of historical influences most clearly represented in the architecture and various landmarks present. To evaluate the conditions in terms of historical value and preservation viability, it is necessary not only to consider cosmetic, visual factors, but also to take into account the socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological influences of the community as well.

Through the identification of the existing historic district, the acknowledgment of previous preservation efforts, and an understanding of the traditional methods of preservation planning, a proposal can be created which integrates these ideas and seeks to involve the active participation of the community.

One of the first steps in creating a preservation strategy is to establish a history of place. By conducting interviews with members of the community, researching historical records, and studying examples of other preservation efforts, a comprehensive foundation for planning can be developed. Once data have been collected, a set of design guidelines may be formed which take into account the many aspects of community and civic involvement, as well as the physical factors required to maintain a cohesive character and identity for the entire city.
Defining Goals and Objectives

Having now completed an in-depth evaluation and analysis of many of the physical manifestations and conditions present within the study area of Kent and having gained a general understanding of some of the social, economic, and historical influences which have helped to shape the current environment, it is now possible to identify and outline specific goals and objectives which best provide a framework for accomplishing a comprehensive revitalization effort.

In addition to the information gathering process just completed, several public brainstorming sessions were conducted to allow the community to participate actively in the urban design process. From those sessions a list of concerns, wishes, goals, and ideas was formed. That list, coupled with the information acquired from the evaluation and analysis process, facilitated the compilation of an extensive set of very detailed and specific objectives and ideas. In order to establish an organized structure for addressing the multitude of urban design issues within the study area, the list of objectives and ideas was divided into seven different general categories. A general goal statement was then defined which best summarized the objectives within each category:

I. To improve the economic vitality of the area

II. To improve the identity and image of the area

III. To provide the safe, effective movement of pedestrians & vehicles

IV. To improve linkages between the downtown and the University

V. To utilize open spaces more effectively

VI. To utilize existing structures more effectively

VII. To preserve and enhance the history of Kent

In the next chapter the objectives of each goal will be examined, and a series of design proposals and strategies will be illustrated to provide a basic set of ideas to initiate a viable civic revitalization.