



CITY OF KENT STRATEGY REPORT

Great Quality of Life,
Job Growth,
Recreational Sports,
Cultural Programs, and
Community Pride ...
...don't just happen.

They are the product of
good planning, meaningful
citizen input and hard work.



Strategic Community Building: Bicentennial Plan Phase 2

From 2007 to 2017, the Kent Bicentennial Plan provided a blueprint for infrastructure projects that led to \$150 million in new investments in downtown Kent, redefining the downtown landscape and campus community connections. Emerging from this unprecedented decade of physical transformation, Council moved into Phase 2 of the Bicentennial Plan, shifting emphasis from the physical infrastructure to the pursuit of the *social and cultural* goals included in the Bicentennial Plan.

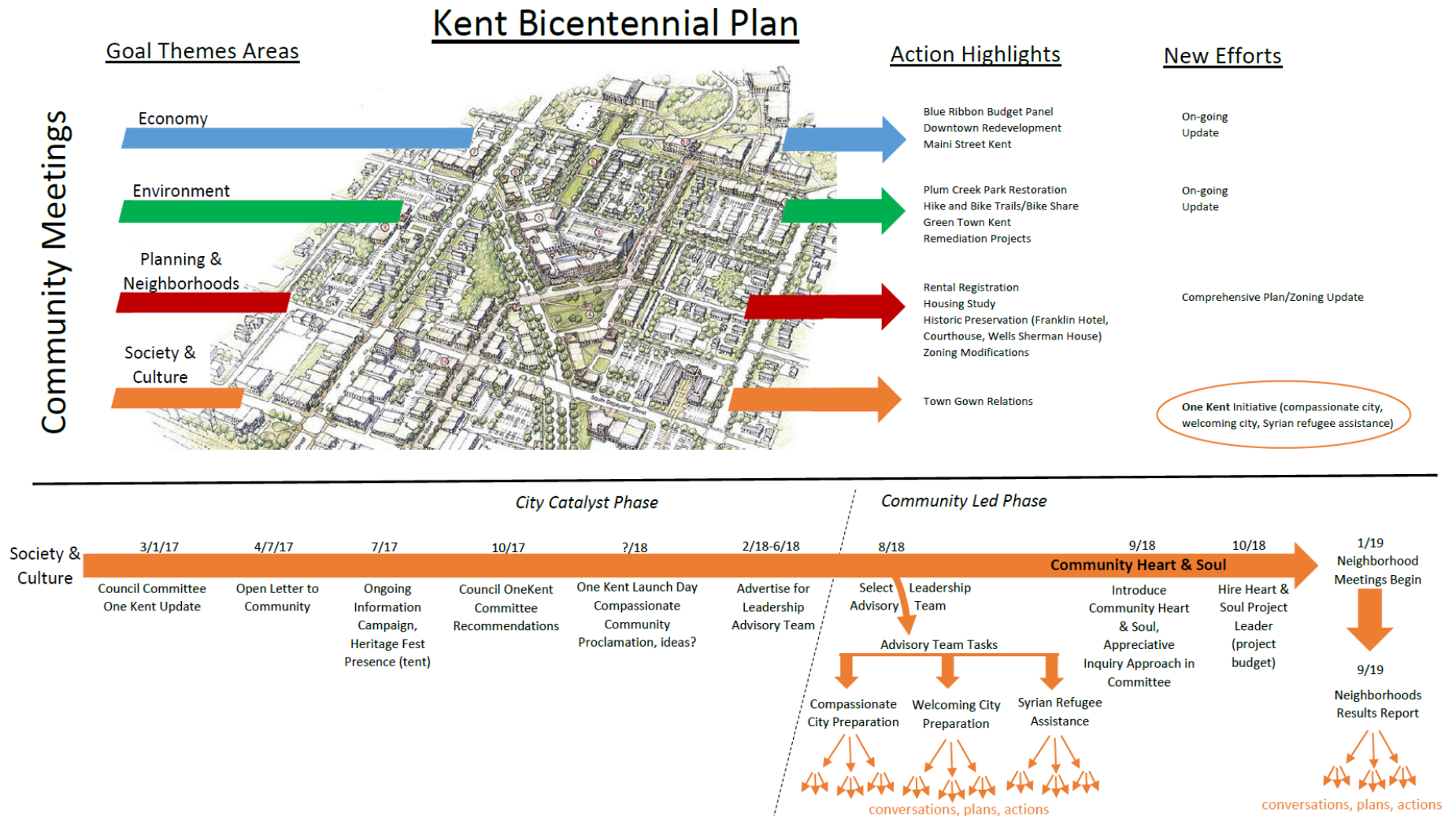
The dramatic reshaping of the physical infrastructure created a community inflection moment, with Council seeking a way to gather residents around the ‘community table’ and have conversations for how to best integrate the new “hardscape” with Kent’s “connective tissue” -- its community culture and values. Council asked staff to explore methods to build grass root capabilities, to look introspectively, share candid and personal observations, and help map out where they want Kent to go over the next 10 years as they co-author the blueprint for the execution of the community-building phase the Bicentennial Plan.

In the years leading up to 2017, Council had staff working on a number of social, neighborhood, and multi-cultural initiatives, including: passing legislation prioritizing social equity; adding gender identity and sexual orientation to protected class status; making it unlawful to discriminate in employment, housing or public accommodations; passing resolutions and posting open letters expressing support for immigrants, the LGBTQ community, victims of gun violence, black lives matter, senior citizens, and health equity; and re-affirming Kent’s leadership commitment to be a “welcoming and compassionate” city.

To better organize and accelerate the social and cultural output goals in the Bicentennial Plan, Council convened a subcommittee of Council members to work with staff to make recommendations for how to increase emphasis on the community building elements of the Bicentennial Plan. The subcommittee met over the course of 3 months in 2017 and unveiled the new “One Kent” initiative with the purpose of advancing projects that ensure Kent residents have opportunities to “live our values through community.”

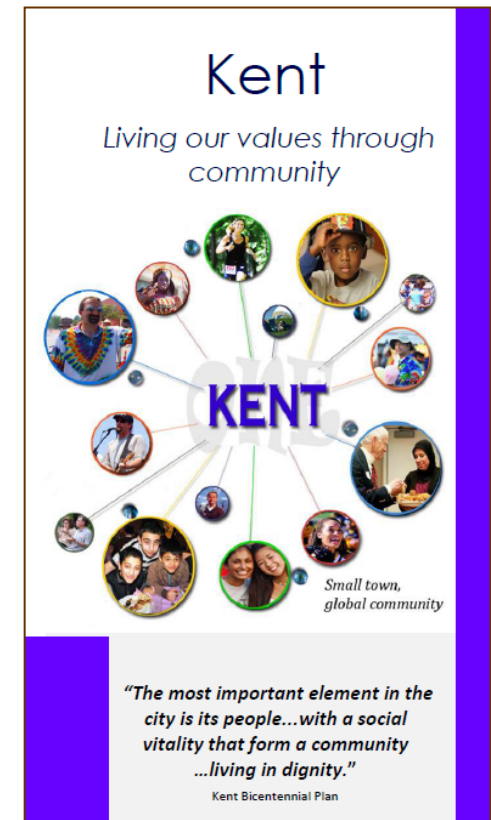
The “One Kent” initiative was rolled out in 2018 along with a renewed focus on neighborhood enrichment and a community wide zoning code update focusing on optimizing livability and quality of life elements that directly impacted residents and the neighborhoods where they live.

Where the first phase of the Bicentennial Plan focused on the local economy and the built environment, the second phase emphasized neighborhoods, society and cultural goals in setting the stage for community building work for 2020-2030. The graphic below illustrates the shifting emphasis in the Bicentennial Plan goals that led to the new “One Kent” initiative.



“One Kent” initiative was built around the premise that Kent’s most valued asset are the eclectic mix of people that call Kent home. The goal was to highlight Kent’s people, inspire community conversations, launch new community-based projects, and find ways to secure Kent’s status as a welcoming and compassionate City.

“One Kent aspires to be meaningful community building work. It’s a great opportunity for the community to participate in an ambitious effort to celebrate the people, places, and faces that make Kent a hometown we’re proud to share.”



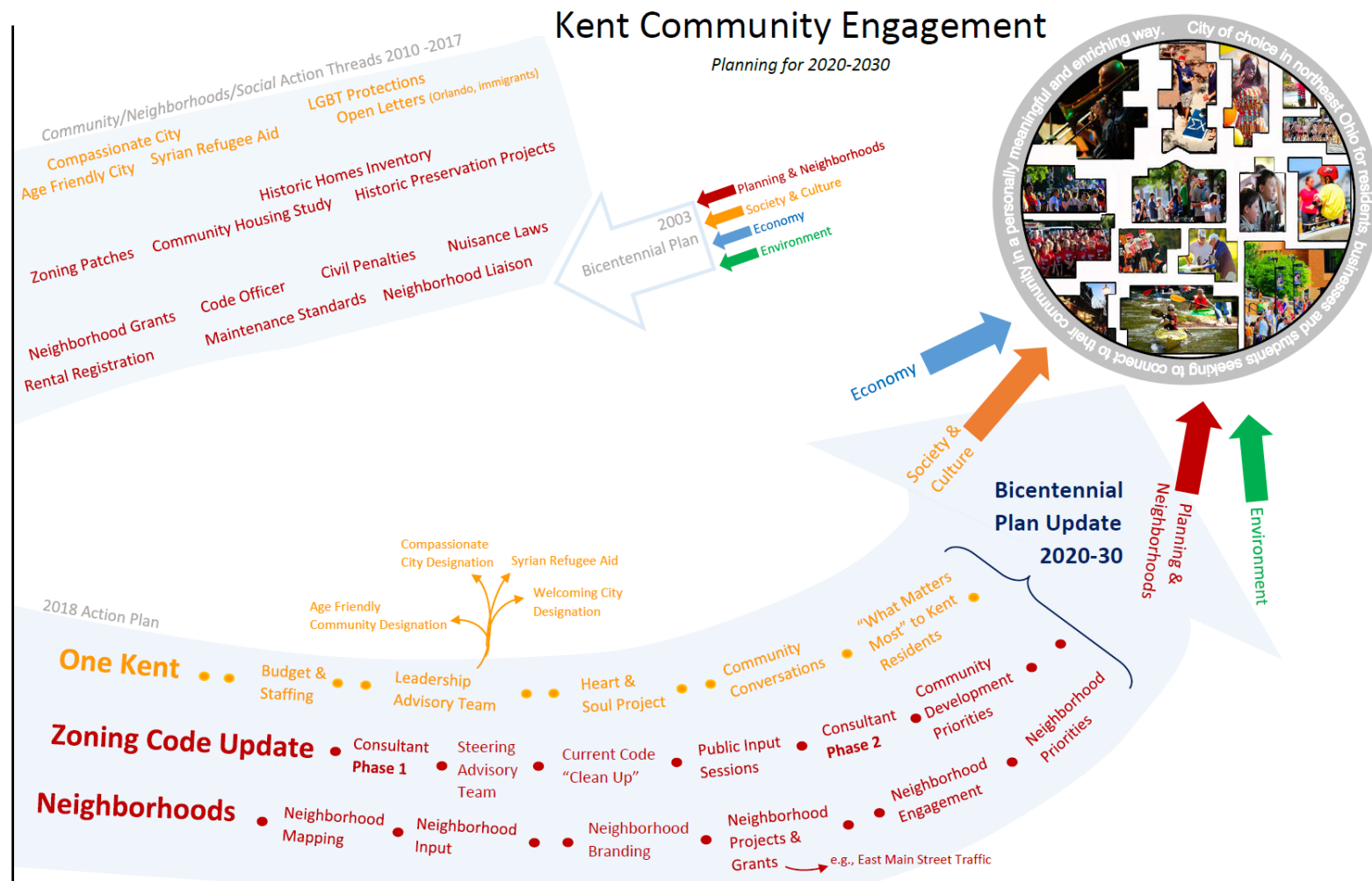
Neighborhood Enrichment Part 2: The staff had been operating under the umbrella of Neighborhood Enrichment since 2007 to improve the quality of life in City neighborhoods. The early efforts were focused on adding tools to the "toolkit" to be able to more effectively intervene on the neighborhood's behalf to control public nuisances, health hazards, and lifestyle choices that threaten the quality of life enjoyed in City neighborhoods.

The next phase of neighborhood work beginning in 2018 focused on affirming a sense of place and pride in neighborhoods to drive more neighborhood-based planning and projects because stronger neighborhoods make for a stronger community.

Zoning Code Update: The City's zoning code is a means to translate community priorities into prescriptions for development. The City's zoning code had not been updated in 20 years so in 2017, the City began a top-to-bottom update of the zoning code to create a legally sound framework to make sure the most current community priorities were reflected in the requirements of the zoning code.

There isn't a "one size fits all" zoning code, it's a tool that can be used to support a range of community outcomes and zoning code is not inherently "good" or "bad" -- but it can be judged by how well it strikes the right balance between private property rights and public interests that fits the times and temper of the community and the facts of law.

The graphic below shows how the One Kent, Neighborhoods and Zone Code update fit in the context of the Bicentennial Plan.

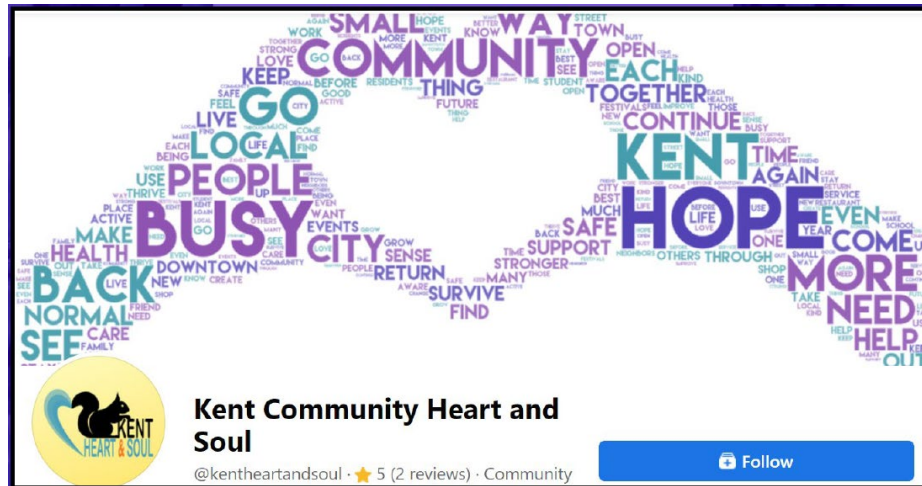


Kent Heart & Soul Community Building/Planning Project: In the course of ramping up the One Kent initiative, staff discovered a community-based planning model called “Community Heart & Soul” that had been used in over 100 communities in 19 states, including Ohio. Heart & Soul had a proven methodology and successful track record for tapping into the members of a community to work together to build the future of their community.

In June 2018 Council passed a resolution affirming Kent's launch of a Community Heart & Soul project and small group planning meetings began with financial and technical assistance provided directly from the Heart & Soul Foundation.

Community Heart & Soul is a community-wide effort to promote community conversations to assist City leadership understand what matters most to all residents, built on the guiding principles to “involve everyone, focus on what matters and play the long game.”

In accordance with the guidance of the Hear & Soul experts, the Kent project was to be led by local resident volunteers (not city staff) and the volunteers created project mission/vision statements, a social media page, and put a call-out to residents to join up, and with city administrative support team meetings began in 2019.



By design, the Heart & Soul community building projects are multi-year, with 4 distinct phases and 11 steps by which the volunteer effort organizes, plans, trains, collects data, integrates the data and develops a list of action steps to fulfill the aspirations identified by residents in the project that is shared with city leaders.



Kent's Heart and Soul project gained momentum and completed many of the steps thanks to the contribution of over 700 hours of volunteer time from 2019-2021 but efforts to start the personal resident interviews in small groups were derailed with the arrival of COVID19 and the prohibition on public gathering. As COVID became more manageable by 2022, the volunteers tried to reboot the project in spring 2022, but that was unsuccessful and Kent's Heart & Soul project became a victim of the pandemic.