



# 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.



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VISION

TO BE THE CITY OF CHOICE IN NORTHEAST OHIO FOR RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND STUDENTS SEEKING ENRICHING COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME.

MISSION

TO CREATE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND LIFESTYLE OPPORTUNITIES IN A SAFE, VIBRANT AND DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT THAT CONNECTS PEOPLE TO THEIR COMMUNITY IN A PERSONAL WAY.

STRATEGIC VALUES	FINANCIAL HEALTH	ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	NATURAL RESOURCES	EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE	SAFE COMMUNITY	STRONG DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOODS	CITY/UNIVERSITY SYNERGY	GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE
KEY RESULTS	1. BALANCED BUDGET 2. DIVERSIFIED REVENUE BASE 3. GOOD BOND RATING 4. ADEQUATE RESERVE FUNDS	1. NEW JOB CREATION 2. VIBRANT DOWNTOWN 3. EFFECTIVE NETWORK OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP 4. CONSISTENT PRIVATE REINVESTMENT	1. PRESERVE NATURAL RESOURCES 2. PROMOTE ECO-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES 3. GOOD PARK /TRAIL SYSTEM	1. MODERN URBAN AMENITIES WITH SMALL TOWN CONVENIENCES 2. ENTERTAINMENT, ARTS & CULTURE OPPORTUNITIES 3. SHOPPING/DINING CHOICES	1. PEOPLE FEEL SAFE 2. HELP ARRIVES FAST 3. FIRST RATE TALENT & TECH	1. INCREASING RATE OF OWNER OCCUPIED HOUSING 2. PROMOTE PROPERTY MTCE. & REINVESTMENT 3. NEIGHBORHOODS ARE ENGAGED	1. FREQUENT COLLABORATION 2. JOINT PLANNING 3. LEVERAGE ASSETS & RESOURCES	1. COST SAVING INNOVATIONS 2. SERVICE IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES 3. CITIZEN FRIENDLY
KEY MEASURES	1. REVENUES > EXPENSES 2. MAINTAIN 65% INCOME TAX SHARE FROM PRIVATE SECTOR 3. MINIMUM \$7 MILLION RESERVE BALANCE	1. INCOME TAX GROWTH 2. NUMBER OF NEW BUSINESS STARTS/CLOSE 3. TARGET \$750,000 PRIVATE REINVESTMENT PER YEAR	1. ENERGY SAVING/YR. 2. SIDEWALKS, TRAILS REPAIRED/BUILT PER YEAR 3. RIVER CLEAN UP	1. COMMUTE TIME 2. NO. OF REC PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS 3. NO. OF ARTS & CULTURE EVENTS DOWNTOWN	1. LOW INCIDENCE OF SERIOUS CRIME 2. FAST RESPONSE TIMES	1. INCREASING % OF OWNER OCCUPIED 2. NUMBER OF HOUSING CITATIONS ISSUED	1. NUMBER OF JOINT INITIATIVES 2. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVE OBJECTIVES MET	1. CITIZEN SATISFACTION WITH CITY SERVICES 2. SAVINGS/YEAR 3. NEW SERVICE INITIATIVES/YR.

STRATEGIC FOCUS 2025 - 2026	1. ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	2. ENVIRONMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE	3. GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE
KEY ACTION STEPS	1. RE-ENGAGE THE KENT CONVENTION AND VISITOR'S BUREAU AND HOST A NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2. IMPLEMENT AND TEST MODIFICATIONS TO DOWNTOWN EVENTS TO OPTIMIZE BALANCE BETWEEN EVENT CROWD SAFETY, STREET CLOSURES AND ACCESS TO DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES 3. ASSIST IN THE REPURPOSING AND REUSE OF THE FORMER HUNTINGTON BANK PROPERTY 4. AMPLIFY "EXPERIENTIAL" ATTRACTIONS OF DOWNTOWN, PUBLIC ART, PUBLIC SPACE, AMENITIES, MUSIC, RECREATIONAL, ETC. 5. CODIFY DESIGN GUIDELINES INTO ZONING CODE, FAST TRACK VOLUNTARY HISTORIC PROPERTY DESIGNATIONS	1. IDENTIFY A VIABLE PUBLIC-PRIVATE SOLAR ARRAY PROJECT 2. IDENTIFY A FUNDING STRATEGY TO STABILIZE AND EXPAND KENT PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES, PROGRAMS, AND FACILITIES 3. FINALIZE A "MUNICIPAL ENERGY MANAGEMENT PLAN" AS PART OF KENT'S CLIMATE ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION 4. INSTALL AND OPERATE THE NEW ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS AT KENT CITY HALL 5. PILOT CITY SPONSORED NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED EVENTS TO ADVANCE NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY AND PRIDE 6. PURSUE WELCOMING CITY/FRIENDLY CITY/OTHER NATIONAL MULTICULTURAL DESIGNATIONS	1. "GO LIVE" WITH THE NEW COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SOFTWARE MODULE, PURCHASE NEW HEALTH DEPARTMENT RECORDS MODULE 2. PURCHASE/INSTALL/TRAIN ON NEW CITY PAY AND ATTENDANCE AUTOMATED MODULE 3. INITIATE CITY SERVICES OUT OF THE NEW CITY HALL 4. FILL NEW VACANT BUDGET ANALYST/COLLECTIONS POSITION 5. PILOT TEST OF 12-HOUR SHIFTS FOR KENT POLICE TO BETTER ATTRACT AND RETAIN POLICE OFFICERS 6. FINISH DATA MIGRATION AND INITIATE THE NEW UTILITY BILLING SOFTWARE OPERATION

STRATEGIC PROJECTS 2026-28	FINANCIAL HEALTH	ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	NATURAL RESOURCES	EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE	SAFE COMMUNITY	STRONG DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOODS	CITY/UNIVERSITY SYNERGY	GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE
KEY INITIATIVES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SECURE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCE FOR PARKS AND REC.</li> <li>2. PREPARE SAFETY FORCES OVERTIME REDUCTION PLAN</li> <li>3. IDENTIFY SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCE TO EXPAND SAFETY FORCES STAFF</li> <li>4. WEST SIDE FIRE LEVY RENEWAL (2025-2026)</li> <li>5. OBTAIN EXTERNAL FUNDING FOR UTILITY CAPITAL PROJECTS</li> <li>6. SECURE FULL FUNDING FOR SR43 (DAVEY TREE) TRAFFIC CIRCLE</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. EAST MAIN STREET PROJECT</li> <li>2. SR43 RIVERBEND/ DAVEY/CITY/SCHOOL TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENT PROJECT</li> <li>3. RIVER STREET / GOUGLER CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT STUDY</li> <li>4. CITY GATEWAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN</li> <li>5. SUPPORT AND RECRUIT SENIOR HOUSING PROJECTS AND SERVICES</li> <li>6. ASSIST INFILL DEVELOPMENT AND RE-DEVELOPMENT, E.G., ALLERTON SITE, HUNTINGTON BANK, STAR OF THE WEST</li> <li>7. REFRESH THE DOWNTOWN, UPDATE DAN SMITH PARK, AMPLIFY EXPERIENCES, INTEGRATE NEW AMENITIES, E.G., SPLASH PAD, ICE RINK, ARTS, PLAYGROUND, FOUNTAIN, BOCCIE COURT. ETC.</li> <li>8. SECURE PARTNER/FULL FUNDING FOR COLLEGE/FRANKLIN PARKING LOT REDESIGN</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. CLIMATE ACTION PLAN EXECUTION</li> <li>2. INITIATE A PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR A SOLAR ARRAY</li> <li>3. MAIN STREET TO STOW STREET HIKE &amp; BIKE TRAIL PROJECT CONSTRUCTION</li> <li>4. AKRON WATER EASEMENT HIKE &amp; BIKE TRAIL PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND OBTAIN FUNDING</li> <li>5. SECURE LONG TERM RAW WATER WELL CAPACITY</li> <li>6. COMPLETE THE DOWNTOWN LED STREET LIGHTING STUDY/PLAN</li> <li>7. REPLACE SEWER LINE ADJACENT TO CUYAHOGA RIVER</li> <li>8. CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT ENERGY EFFICIENCY</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DEVELOP A PLAN FOR A SENIOR COMMUNITY CENTER PROJECT</li> <li>2. SR261 TRAILS/ PEDESTRIAN/BIKE IMPROVEMENT</li> <li>3. PARKS &amp; REC MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION</li> <li>4. SR59 CITY PARTA KSU/ TOWNSHIP CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT PROJECT</li> <li>5. DAVEY INSTITUTE ARBORETUM, TRAILS, TRAINING FACILITY</li> <li>6. COMPLETE A PEDESTRIAN/BIKE CONNECTIVITY PLAN FOR STOW STREET, MOGADORE ROAD, AND TANNERY PARK</li> <li>7. PURSUE WELCOMING AND COMPASSIONATE CITY DESIGNATIONS</li> <li>8. DEVELOP PROPERTY OWNER BEAUTIFICATION RECOGNITION AWARDS</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. CITY PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING CENTER PLAN</li> <li>2. EAST MAIN STREET PROJECT</li> <li>3. FIRE STATION LOCATION STUDY</li> <li>4. PARAMEDICINE EXPANSION</li> <li>5. SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS PLAN IMPLEMENTATION</li> <li>6. ASSIST IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW KENT "SAFETY TOWN"</li> <li>7. SECURE FUNDING FOR NEW CITY ENTRYWAY CAMERAS</li> <li>8. EXPAND THE SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAM TO MORE SCHOOLS</li> <li>9. SECURE FUNDING TO EXPAND THE CITY SIDEWALK SNOW CLEARING BOUNDARIES</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. REVISIT KSU/CITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING INCENTIVE</li> <li>2. MANAGE THE RENTAL LICENSING PROGRAM (ONGOING)</li> <li>3. ADVOCATE STRATEGIC HOUSING REDEVELOPMENT (FROM HOUSING STUDY) (ONGOING)</li> <li>4. SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD EVENTS TO IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY AND PRIDE</li> <li>5. SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD BASED PROJECTS TO IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY AND PRIDE, E.G., ENTRYWAY SIGN, LANDSCAPING, POCKET PARK, ETC.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. JOINT AFFORDABLE HOUSING INCENTIVE</li> <li>2. SPORTS TOURISM INITIATIVES AND EVENTS</li> <li>3. NEW KSU ART PARK AT WILLOW &amp; HAYMAKER</li> <li>4. CITY/KSU GREAT LAWN ACTIVATION PLAN</li> <li>5. EAST MAIN STREET PROJECT</li> <li>6. SR59 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT BETWEEN HORNING AND SR261</li> <li>7. SR261 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT BETWEEN SR59 AND SUMMIT</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. EXPAND CITY AUTOMATION</li> <li>2. LOCATION STUDY FOR PARKS &amp; REC OFFICE AND HEALTH DEPARTMENT</li> <li>3. EXPLORE DAY STREET CLOSURE FOR CITY HALL PARKING</li> <li>4. EXPAND PARTICIPATION IN AREA JOB FAIRS</li> <li>5. IMPROVE CITY'S COMPETITIVENESS IN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION</li> </ol>

## NOTES


STRATEGIC THREATS 2025-2028	FINANCIAL HEALTH	ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	NATURAL RESOURCES	EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE	SAFE COMMUNITY	STRONG DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOODS	CITY/UNIVERSITY SYNERGY	GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE
EXTERNAL CHALLENGES & RISKS (STATE, NATIONAL) BOLD = TOP RISK	<p>1. NATIONAL FUNDING PRIORITY CHANGES, GRANT UNCERTAINTY, (RISK \$10K-\$200,000)</p> <p><b>2. PROPOSED STATE FUNDING CHANGES AND CUTS, E.G., ELIMINATION OF INSIDE MILLAGE, FLAT TAX, ETC. (RISK, \$2-\$3 MILLION)</b></p> <p>3. IMPACTS OF TARRIFF CHANGES, INFLATION ON LOCAL BUSINESSES AND CITY COSTS FOR MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT, AND CONTRACTS. (RISK \$50K TO 250K)</p> <p>4. HIGHER ED FUNDING CUTS, KSU TO CUT \$10-\$12 MILLION/YR 3 YEARS. INCOME TAX HIT \$30-\$40,000/YR</p>	<p><b>1. MAJOR INVESTMENTS IN PEER CITY DOWNTOWNS, INCREASED COMPETITION</b></p> <p>2. PEER CITY ACCESS TO INTERSTATE, RAIL, AIRPORT, PRIVATE MAN. PADS SITES</p> <p>3. MANUFACTURING NEEDS LARGE PADS - 100K SQ FT TO 1M SQ FT BUILDINGS SURROUNDED BY 100 TO 400 TRUCK BAYS</p> <p>4. OHIO 35/50 FOR TAX BURDEN NATIONALLY</p> <p>5. KENT IS BETWEEN INTERSTATES, LOGISTICS DISADVANTAGE</p> <p>6. NO PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PAD SITES LARGE ENOUGH TO MEET INDUSTRY CRITERIA</p> <p>7. KENT IS BUILT OUT, ONLY 3 INDUSTRIAL ZONED PROPERTIES, ONLY 1 REAL PROSPECT (CARTER LUMBER)</p> <p>8. FEW KENT SMALL MAN. SITES NEED REMEDIATION, POOR ECONOMY OF SCALE, COST DISADVANTAGE</p> <p>9. RISING NEIGHBORHOOD RESISTANCE TO NEW BUSINESS ACTIVITY (NIMBY) ESPECIALLY TRUCK TRAFFIC</p>	<p><b>1. RE-PRIORITIZATION OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA, REDUCED FUNDING, LESS TAX INCENTIVES, LESS</b></p> <p>2. RE-PRIORITIZATION OF STATE ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA, REDUCED FUNDING, LESS TAX INCENTIVES, LESS</p> <p>3. CLEVELAND IS AN AIR QUALITY NON-ATTAINMENT AREA THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACTS AIR QUALITY IN KENT</p>	<p>1. THE AGING DEMOGRAPHIC AND NEED FOR SENIOR SERVICES.</p> <p>2. PEER CITIES' RISING INVESTMENTS IN DOWNTOWN LIFESTYLE AMENITIES.</p> <p><b>3. PEER CITIES' RISING INVESTMENTS IN PARKS AMENITIES, E.G., AMPHITHEATER, SPLASH PADS, ETC.</b></p> <p>4. SPILLOVER OF NATIONAL POLITICAL AND CULTURAL POLARIZATION, RISING ANIMOSITY AND INCIVILITY, CREATING COMMUNITY ANXIETY AND STRESS.</p> <p>5. HIGHER ED CUTS REDUCING KSU ABILITY TO CO-SPONSOR COMMUNITY CULTURAL, ARTS, AND ENTERTAINMENT</p>	<p>1. INDICENTS OF POLICE DISTRUST RISING IN U.S.</p> <p>2. RISING INCIVILITY AND COMMUNITY STRESS/FRICTION.</p> <p><b>3. FEWER PEOPLE ENTERING POLICE AND FIRE CAREERS</b></p> <p>4. PROPOSED NATIONAL AND STATE MANDATES TO COMPEL CITY POLICE TO SERVE ICE FUNCTIONS.</p> <p>5. EXTRA DEMANDS OF PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES IN A COLLEGE TOWN</p> <p>6. FIRE SERVICE REVENUE/PAYMENT CHALLENGES IN FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP</p> <p>7. FIRE APPARATUS AGE AND HIGH REPLACEMENT COST</p>	<p><b>1. PROPERTY RIGHTS AND LAWSUITS LIMIT ABILITY TO USE LEGISLATIVE OR REGULATORY MEASURES TO PRODUCE BETTER BALANCE IN OWNERSHIP VS. RENTALS</b></p> <p>2. DECLINE IN COLLEGE AGED DEMOGRAPHIC LEADING TO OVERSUPPLY OF STUDENT HOUSING, RESULTING IN HIGHER VACANCIES AND LESS INVESTMENT IN THE OLDER RENTAL PROPERTIES LEADING TO A SPIRAL OF DECLINE</p> <p>3. AGING HOUSING STOCK AND HIGH % OF TRANSIENT RENTALS PRESENTS MAINTENANCE STANDARD CHALLENGES, DIMINISHED PRIDE IN OWNERSHIP.</p> <p>4. RENTAL CREEP HAS INCREASED IN TRADITIONAL OWNER-OCCUPIED NEIGHBORHOODS.</p> <p>5. LIMITED HOUSING MARKET, AFFORDABILITY ISSUE AND INTEREST RATES ARE RISING</p> <p>6. LOW LEVEL OF NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY AWARENESS</p> <p>7. HIGH PERCENTAGE OF WORKING FAMILIES LEAVES LESS TIME FOR BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS</p> <p>8. SCHOOLS' OPEN ENROLLMENT= LESS INCENTIVE TO LIVE (OWN) IN KENT.</p>	<p>1. STATE FUNDING CUTS DIMINISHING KSU RESOURCES</p> <p><b>2. STATE TAKING A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN UNIVERSITY MISSION, CURRICULUM, AND PRIORITIES COULD REDIRECT KSU AWAY FROM TOWN GOWN</b></p>	<p>1. INCREASING DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT.</p> <p><b>2. INCREASING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL POLARIZATION.</b></p> <p>3. DECLINE IN CIVILITY IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE</p> <p>4. GENERATIONAL VALUES AND EXPECTATION DIFFERENCES, IMPACT ON CITY SERVICES</p> <p>5. INCREASINGLY ASKED TO MEDIATE BETWEEN NEIGHBOR DISPUTES</p> <p>6. CONTINUITY OF CITY COUNCIL LEADERSHIP, 7 / 10 NEWLY ELECTED, LEARNING CURVE, INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE</p> <p><b>7. ATTRACTING AND RETAINING STAFF, PAY RATE, TIME OFF, COMPENSATION PACKAGE; LACK OF SUCCESSION OPPORTUNITIES, LIMITED CAREER MOBILITY</b></p> <p>8. NEED FOR MORE AUTOMATION AND UPGRADES</p> <p>9. INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES WITH THE PUBLIC</p> <p>10. STAFF CAPACITY CONCERNS</p>
INTERNAL CHALLENGES & RISKS (KENT SPECIFIC) BOLD = TOP RISK	<p>5. LABOR SHORTAGE RISING COSTS, MARKET COMPETITION PAY &amp; COMPENSATION Fix \$100K-\$250K</p> <p><b>6. UNDERSTAFFED, HIGH OVERTIME STAFF BURNOUT SERVICE RELIABILITY Fix \$500K TO \$3M</b></p> <p>7. HIGH NEEDS, LOW RESOURCE CITY, HIGH POVERTY RATE LIMITS ON CAPACITY TO PAY MORE FOR CITY SERVICES</p>	<p>10. DOWNTOWN IS SMALL BUSINESS DEPENDENT, HIGH CHURN</p> <p>11. OLDER COMMUNITY = OLDER INFRASTRUCTURE.</p> <p>12. KENT HAS AN AGING HOUSING STOCK WITH HIGH % (65%) OF RENTAL UNITS.</p> <p><b>13. MOBILE/REMOTE WORKERS WANT QUALITY OF LIFE AMENITIES, GREAT PARKS AND RECREATION.</b></p> <p>14. GAPS IN HOUSING OPTIONS, LIMITED YOUNG FAMILY, ACTIVE SENIOR, &amp; LARGER HOMES.</p>	<p>4. UNCERTAIN LONG TERM RAW WATER WELLS' CAPACITY</p> <p><b>5. DETERIORATION OF SEWER LINE ADJACENT TO CUYAHOGA RIVER PIPE FAILURE CONTAMINATION RISK, HIGH COST SOLUTIONS</b></p> <p>6. HERITAGE DAM PUMP AND WATER AERATION SYSTEM FAILURE</p>	<p>6. STAFFING CAPACITY ISSUE FOR PARKS &amp; REC, (40% BELOW AVERAGE FTE/POP.)</p> <p><b>7. UNFUNDED MASTER PARKS AND REC PLAN</b></p> <p>8. NO SENIOR CENTER OR SENIOR SERVICES</p> <p>9. OPERATING FUNDING SHORTFALL IN PARKS AND RECREATION, (16% BELOW AVE.)</p>	<p><b>8. POLICE AND FIRE STAFFING SHORTAGES AND EXCESSIVE RELIANCE ON OVERTIME</b></p> <p>9. CHALLENGES OF ATTRACTING AND RETAINING PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYEES, PARTICULARLY POLICE</p> <p>10. LACK OF FUNDING FOR A MODERN PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING FACILITY</p>			



AWARDS, RECOGNITION & RATINGS	FINANCIAL HEALTH	ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	NATURAL RESOURCES	EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE	SAFE COMMUNITY	STRONG DISTINCT NEIGHBORHOODS	CITY/UNIVERSITY SYNERGY	GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE
	<p>1. GFOA EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT FINANCE AWARD 1985-2023</p> <p>2. CITY AA2 BOND RATING (2<sup>ND</sup> HIGHEST MUNICIPAL CREDIT RATING)</p> <p>3. OHIO STATE AUDITOR'S DISTINCTION AWARD 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2020-2024</p>	<p>1. CITY RECEIVED THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION EXCELLENCE AWARD 2018 FOR THE L.N. GROSS PROJECT</p> <p>2. KENT RECEIVED THE 2015 GREATER OHIO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP AWARD</p> <p>3. HERITAGE OHIO BEST PUBLIC – PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP AWARD 2014.</p> <p>4. HERITAGE OHIO SPIRIT OF MAIN STREET AWARD</p> <p>5. OHIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARD</p> <p>6. INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SILVER EXCELLENCE AWARD</p> <p>7. AMERICA IN BLOOM SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD</p> <p>8. DOWNTOWN MIXED-USE PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARD</p> <p>9. FINALIST, TEAM NEO, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLUS AWARD FOR ASSET CREATION</p>	<p>1. KENT WATER VOTED BEST IN NATION</p> <p>2. KENT HAS 38 YEARS AS A NATIONAL TREE CITY AWARD WINNER</p> <p>3. CITY RECEIVED RECOGNITION AS BIKE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY</p> <p>4. KENT HAS WON AWARDS FOR BEST-IN-CLASS WATER QUALITY AND STORMWATER PROJECTS, PLUM CREEK STREAM RESTORATION, AND KENT DAM REMOVAL</p> <p>5. NATIONAL TREE CITY AWARD WINNER 1985-2024</p> <p>6. DOMINION OHIO COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD</p> <p>7. AMERICA IN BLOOM BEST STREETScape LANDSCAPING AWARD</p>	<p>1. KENT WAS A SELECTED AS THE "BEST COLLEGE TOWN" IN OHIO IN 2015</p> <p>2. KENT WAS A NATIONAL FINALIST FOR BEST HOMETOWN USA</p> <p>3. KENT WAS SELECTED AS THE "BEST HOMETOWN" IN OHIO IN 2023</p>	<p>1. KENT PD IN FULL COMPLIANCE WITH 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PD BEST PRACTICES</p> <p>2. KENT LEVEL 2 ISO RATING (1 BEST-10 WORST)</p> <p>3. KSU RANKED AS THE 11<sup>TH</sup> SAFEST CAMPUS IN NATION</p>		<p>1. KENT WAS A SELECTED AS THE "BEST COLLEGE TOWN" IN OHIO IN 2015</p> <p>2. KSU RATED AS THE MOST AFFORDABLE COLLEGE IN OHIO</p> <p>3. KSU 1 OF ONLY 7 UNIVERSITIES IN OH TO RECEIVE R1 RESEARCH DESIGNATION</p> <p>4. KSU BIKE FRIENDLY UNIVERSITY CAMPUS BRONZE AWARD 2023</p> <p>5. LARRY ABERNATHY INTERNATIONAL TOWN GOWN EXCELLENCE AWARD.</p> <p>6. OCMA, OHIO PARTNER'S IN EXCELLENCE AWARD</p> <p>7. NATIONAL FINALIST FOR THE CONNECTED COMMUNITY CAMPUS AWARD</p> <p>8. EXCELLENCE IN PLANNING AWARD</p>	<p>1. OHIO 2018 OUTSTANDING HIGHWAY PROJECT AWARD FOR THE SUMMIT STREET PROJECT</p> <p>2. OUTSTANDING HIGHWAY PROJECT AWARD FOR THE FAIRCHILD BRIDGE PROJECT, 2014</p> <p>3. OUTSTANDING NEW SHORT SPAN BRIDGE AWARD FOR FAIRCHILD BRIDGE</p> <p>4. ICMA, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP EXCELLENCE AWARD FOR THE BICENTENNIAL PLAN PROJECT</p>


# Strategic Partnership Press Coverage

## The New York Times




February 5, 2013

### A Partnership Seeks to Transform and Kent



### Kent, Kent State in a city-university partnership

## THE PLAIN DEALER



### Can Kent, Ohio, become 'the next Ann Arbor'?


By Jim Nichols, The Plain Dealer  
on November 26, 2009 at 9:37 PM, updated November 27, 2009 at 7:45 AM


KENT, Ohio -- Folks constantly voice Ann Arbor aspirations around here.

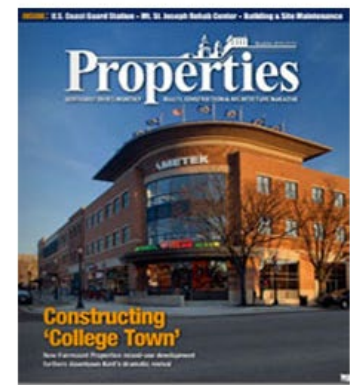
## Kent, Ohio: Region's Rising College Town

## Forbes

In Pictures: The Most Affordable College Towns








## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL


Four Decades Later, Kent State Turns a Page




### Downtown Kent, Ohio, rising Phoenix-like as businesses coalesce


Published: Thursday, November 26, 2009, 9:47 PM Updated: Friday, Nov

By Jim Nichols, The Plain Dealer




## Akron Regal Street BUSINESS






### Kent's new college town is remaking joining it to Kent State University

Published: Friday, October 13, 2012, 4:00 PM updated: Saturday, October 13, 2012, 11:50 AM



## NEWS Channel 5 abc

HOME NEWS WEATHER TRAFFIC



# Strategic Priorities Report Card 2025-26













Grading Scale - A (Excellent) to F (Failing)

Trend Arrows (rising, flat, declining)


Arrow Color Code: Green (good) Yellow (caution) Red (alert)

Arrow Fill: Solid (strong trend) Striped (uncertain trend)

## Strategic Goals

	2025 Rating	Last 5-Yr. Trend	3 Yr. Forecast	Next 5-Yr. Trend	Highs/Lows Comments
<b>Financial Health</b> Ensure that Kent is a prosperous, fiscally strong and financially well-managed City.	A		B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Historic highs in taxes/reserves;</li> <li>- State tax changes and full staffing needs outpace those revenues.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Growth</b> Pursue job expansion, retention and attraction to diversify the jobs & careers available to Kent residents across all skill levels.	A-		B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Davey Tree \$110 million in new investment;</li> <li>- No projects that large forecasted</li> </ul>
<b>Community Development</b> To facilitate and attract property investments, increase home ownership, and work towards quality housing options for all income levels.	B+		B-		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Davey Tree annexation and Court upheld rental inspections;</li> <li>- Court challenges remain.</li> </ul>
<b>Superior Quality of Life</b> To enhance lifestyle choices through the physical and social environment.	B-		B-		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Completion of Parks Master Plan;</li> <li>- Master Plan is unfunded and Operations are underfunded.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Safety</b> To be an exceptionally safe City.	B-		B-		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full compliance with 21<sup>st</sup> century national police standards;</li> <li>- Staff shortages and vacancies.</li> </ul>
<b>Communities Within the City</b> To strengthen the quality and enhance the value of neighborhoods.	B-		A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1<sup>st</sup> Year of new position had positive reviews in neighborhoods with rising expectations for more.</li> </ul>
<b>City and University Synergy</b> To expand collaborative opportunities that enrich the university community experience.	A		A-		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full funding for East Main Project</li> <li>- State higher education funding cuts, redesign of state universities.</li> </ul>
<b>Government Performance</b> To provide the best service at the lowest cost possible.	B-		B+		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- \$1 million in new tech upgrades;</li> <li>- Polarization/fracturing impacts at local level among constituents.</li> </ul>

# Strategic Priorities Narrative 2025-26

 **Financial Health** – Financial strategies are how we convert our financial assets into outcomes and optimize financial health. They are the choices we make about what to do with our money, what not to do, and how to best allocate what we have for maximum effect. Strategies force us to be smarter, more disciplined, and more focused on what’s important.

Despite concerns over rising inflation, increasing cost of materials/supplies, and wage pressure, the City’s financial position is presently sound. Record balances in reserve funds and successive years of income tax growth have put the City in a position of being able to consider responding to critical needs in staffing levels for the first time in 25 years.

The City has an opportunity to use its improved financial position to invest in its most impactful asset -- the employees that provide City services. As a service business, 75% of the City’s Operating Budget expenses are related to employees that directly serve the public and gains made in employee attraction, retention and performance translate into more effective and enhanced city services in the community.

In 2023, the City began to focus on the need for more competitive wages, agreeing to the largest wage increases in the City’s history – 8%, 4%, 4% for 2024, 2025 and 2026 respectively. In 2025, the City is shifting focus to staffing levels, recognizing the need to augment staffing levels to meet the current demand for City services, particularly in Police, Fire, and Service.

Along with experimentation with alternative work schedules, flexible work hours, and partial remote work, the investments in wages and staffing levels is targeted at reducing employee burnout, cutting back the reliance on overtime, and improving the City’s ability to compete with peer cities in pay and compensation for a shrinking and mobile labor pool that values pay and time outside of work equally.

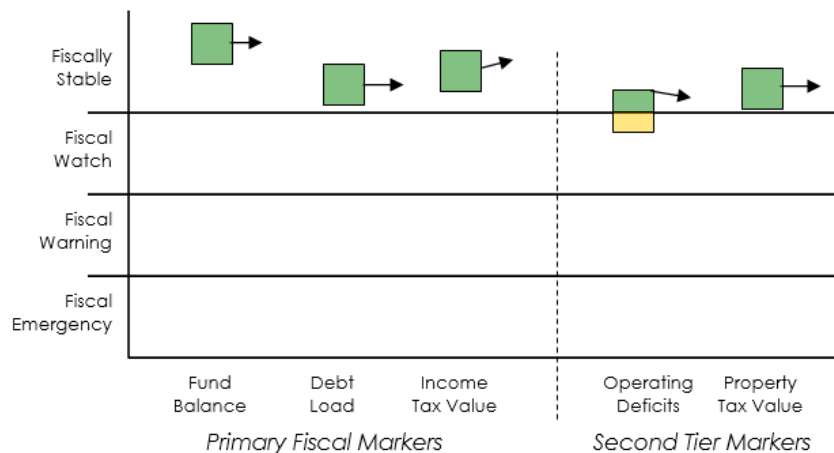
**Fiscal Health Tracking:** Municipal budgets are complex with multiple revenue streams, unique spending restrictions and detailed accounting requirements that make simple explanations of fiscal conditions somewhat difficult to provide. At the bottom line, revenues must meet expenses but in practice it turns out that there are multiple bottom lines and different ways of calculating them so fiscal reports often raise more questions than they answer.

City staff manage the financial accounts that comprise the City budget and they make sure that the fiduciary obligations assigned to each type of fund, including enterprise funds, grants, levies, capital, and tax accounts, conform to their specific auditing standards.

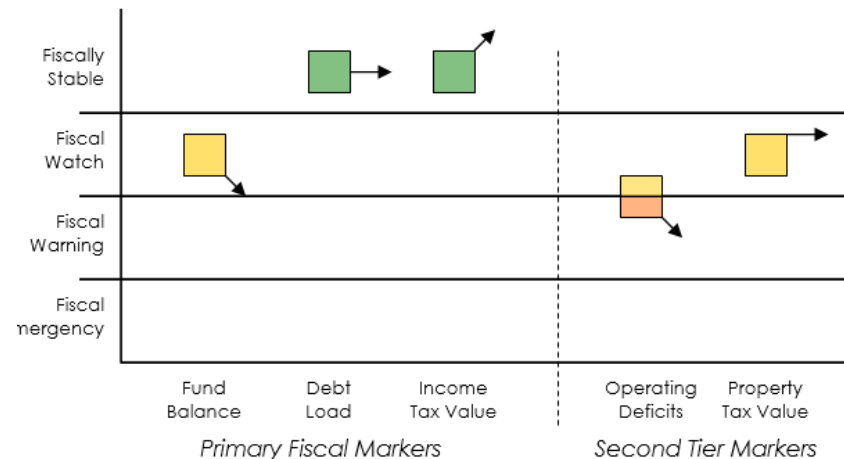
Since most of City business activity occurs at the line-item level, most of the City's financial systems are managed at the line item as well. However, it is equally important to communicate the broader state of fiscal conditions in order to support policy level management of fiscal health.

The key to understanding the City's overall fiscal health is understanding the relative balance between fiscal indicators of financial stability, risk and capacity for growth. The vital statistics for fiscal health include reserve fund balances, debt load, income taxes with a second tier of fiscal markers that include operating cash flow and property tax values.

### Composite Fiscal Health Index 2025

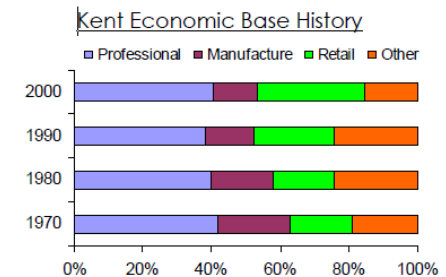


### Composite Fiscal Health Index 2012



In 2025, the City is positioned in the Fiscally Stable category as reserve/undesignated fund balances are at record highs, debt load is within the preferred range, and income taxes have had back-to-back years of growth. The record levels of reserves have allowed the City to make sizable investments in staff/technology/facilities which on an annualized basis has lifted annual spending slightly above annual revenues resulting in a planned operating deficit in a given year (not recurring). Property taxes make up less than 10% of the City's revenues but City assessed property values are at an all-time high.

Per 2022 ACS 5-year U.S. Census Bureau data, five occupations across diverse industries in Kent combine to account for over 75% of the City's employment base: educational and health services (29%), food services and entertainment (19%), retail (11%), administrative and professional management (11%), and manufacturing (9%).



The total labor force is 15,000, with an unemployment rate below state and national averages.

Representing a range of industries, the City's top income taxpayers have remained stable over the past ten years, with all organizations remaining substantially the same since 2014.

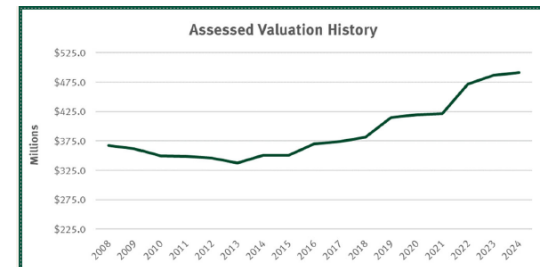
Top Ten Income Tax Withholders		
2014		2023
1. Kent State University		1. Kent State University
2. Kent City Schools		2. Kent City Schools
3. Davey Tree Expert Co., Inc.		3. Davey Tree Expert Co., Inc.
4. City of Kent		4. City of Kent
5. Land-O-Lakes		5. Smithers-Oasis Company
6. Smithers-Oasis Company		6. Land-O-Lakes
7. Klaben Ford Lincoln Mercury		7. Klaben Ford Lincoln Mercury
8. Ametek, Inc.		8. Ametek Technical & Industrial
9. Ametek Technical & Industrial		9. Mac Trailer Enterprises Inc.
10. Mac Trailer Enterprises Inc.		10. Davey Resource Group
<b>Total City Withholdings</b>	<b>\$12,333,820.00</b>	<b>Total City Withholdings</b>
		<b>\$15,431,385.00</b>

Source: 2023 ACFR, Table 8 on page S18; 2014 ACFR, Table 18 on Page S23

Statistically, the income tax contributions from the top ten employers comprised 83% in 2014 and 78% in 2025, suggesting increased diversification in the economic base over the last 10 years.

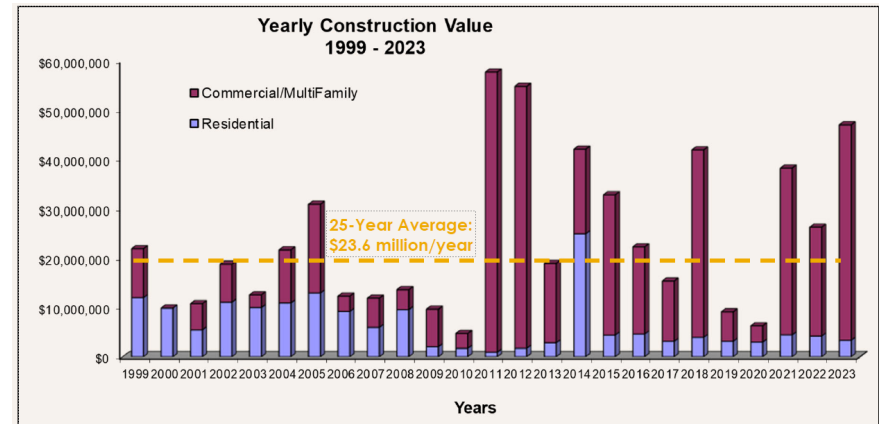
Between 2008 and 2023, the City's average annual growth in property values has been over 1.5%. In the update and reappraisal years it's nearly 2.75 times that percentage, at 4.12%. Less than 8% of the City's revenues come from property taxes.

Following a 12.02% increase with the 2022 triennial update, the City's assessed value grew 4.19% cumulatively through the next two years (collection years 2023 and 2024), lifting the City's total assessed value to a new peak.



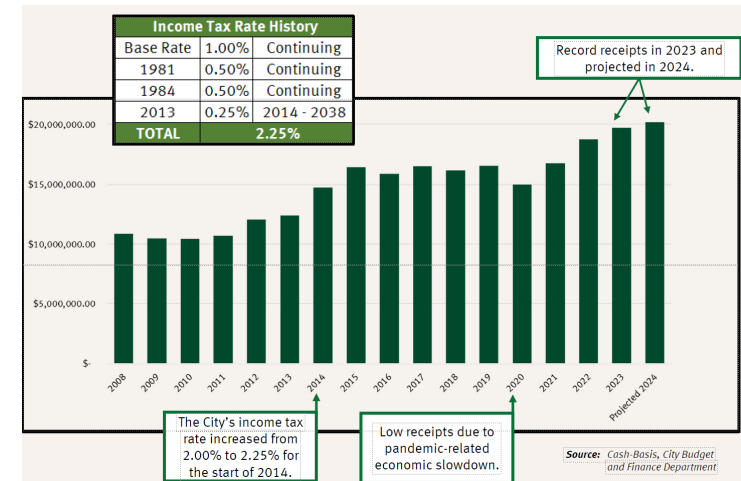
Following the 5th highest investment total in 2021, inflation, interest rates, and supply chain challenges led to a modest decline in construction investment in residential, multifamily and commercial properties in 2022, returning investment totals to the 20-year average of \$23 million.

In 2023, construction demand produced \$46,972,659 in new investments, the 3rd highest investment total in the last 25 years. However, in 2024, construction investment stalled, resulting in a drop in total reported investments to \$15,000,000.

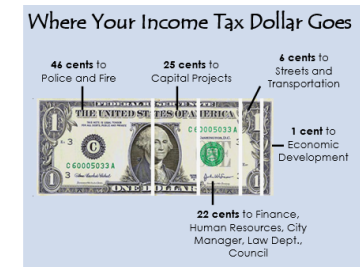


The City's income tax history over the last 8 years parallels national business cycle trends, characterized by uneven growth and unexpected volatility followed by bursts of recovery. After a precipitous drop in income tax revenues in 2016, the City enjoyed a modest tax rebound in 2017, followed by another dip in income taxes in 2018, that was in turn followed by another modest rebound in 2019.

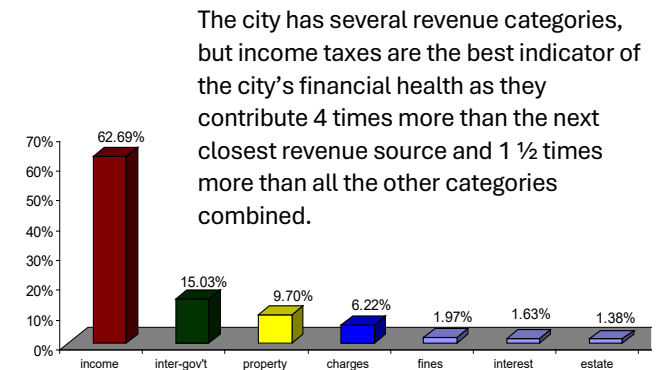
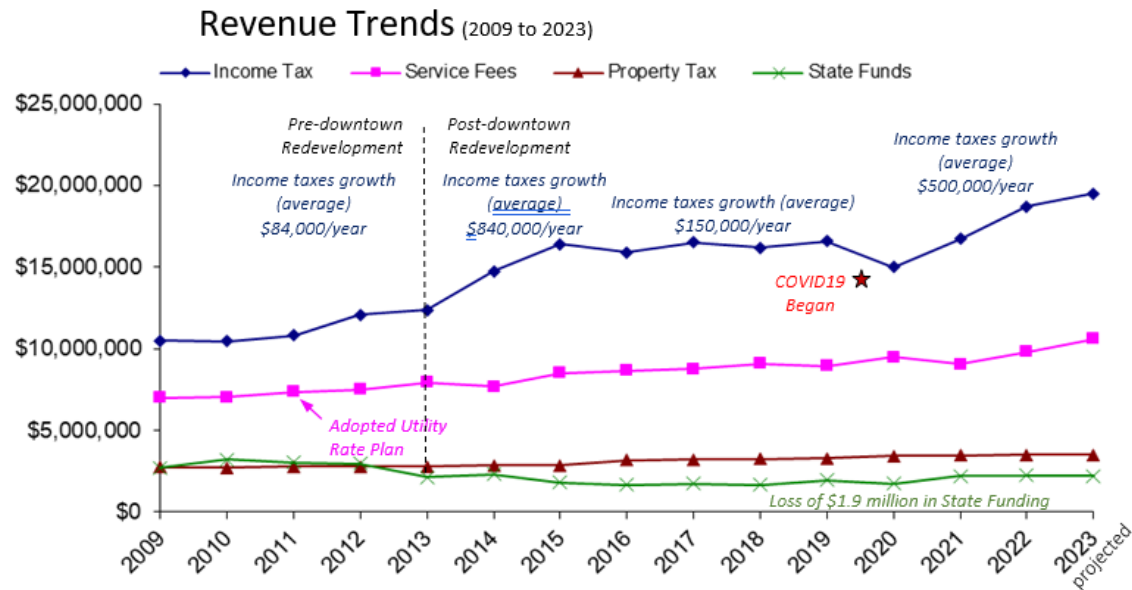
In 2020 the arrival of COVID19 disrupted all business cycles, and the City was fortunate to close out the year with a comparatively flat 1.77% decline which was followed by a modest 2.3% increase in 2021, and then a significant increase of 11.5% in 2022 a 5.3% increase in 2023, and a 4.3% increase in 2024. Since 2014, the City's income tax receipts overall have increased 25%.



The last permanent new income tax increase in Kent was approved by the voters in 1984 (41 years ago). The voters approved a temporary .25% tax increase in 2013 which was dedicated to the construction of the new Police Station, and it expires when the debt is scheduled to be paid off in 2038.



As noted in the chart below, other than income taxes, the other revenue categories had been flattening out (and in some cases declining) prior to the financial disruption created by COVID19. COVID19 hit income taxes the hardest due to job losses -- and with income taxes comprising over half of the City's total revenues, the recovery of those income tax losses in 2021 and growth in 2022 and 2023 has been critical to keeping pace with the recent historic rise in inflation.

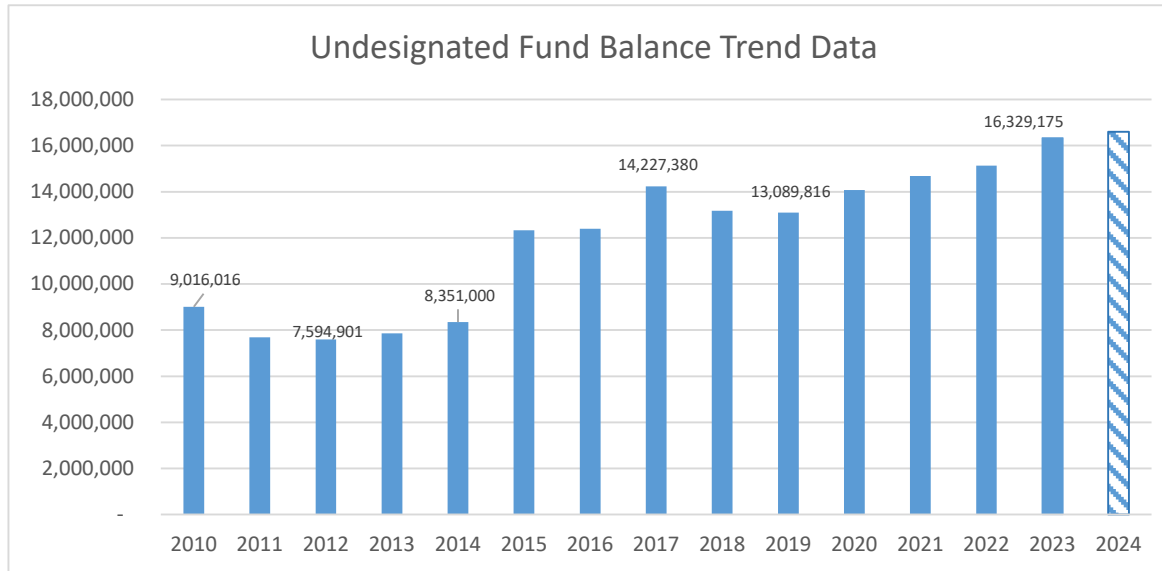


The City has utility enterprise funds to support the operating and capital needs of utility related services and projects.

Enterprise Funds (2023 Cash Basis)					
	Beginning Balance	Receipts	Expenditures	Ending Balance	Balance as a Percentage of Expenditures
Water	\$ 3,653,041	\$ 5,012,537	\$ 4,902,030	\$ 3,763,548	76.78%
Sewer	\$ 3,748,684	\$ 6,156,567	\$ 5,579,287	\$ 4,325,964	77.54%
Storm Water Drainage	\$ 2,080,286	\$ 1,128,202	\$ 1,054,098	\$ 2,154,390	204.38%
Nonmajor-Solid Waste	\$ 969,600	\$ 384,356	\$ 514,340	\$ 839,616	163.24%
<b>Total Business</b>	<b>\$ 10,451,611</b>	<b>\$ 12,681,662</b>	<b>\$ 12,049,755</b>	<b>\$ 11,083,518</b>	<b>91.98%</b>

Source: Cash Basis Reporting, City of Kent Budget & Finance Department

Leading up to 2017, the City's priority was to rebuild undesignated reserve balances. Beginning in 2018 the City began allocating portions of those reserve balances to provide supplemental funding for priority service and capital needs that had been deferred. As a result, the trend line (below) shows a peak in 2017 and slight decline through 2019 -- followed by increases resulting primarily from the pandemic funding and unexpected growth in income tax revenues in 2022-23.



There are two components to the city's reserve: 1) A cumulative surplus built from years when revenues exceeded expenses and; 2) A specially designated "managed reserve" fund, that was established by policy in the 1980s to ensure that the city always maintained a minimum amount of cash to uphold its fiduciary obligations, i.e., keep enough cash in reserve to pay its bills at any given time.

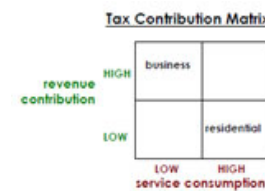


The surplus reserve is used for unanticipated fiscal needs and is also the source of cash for the city's "pay as you go" capital projects.

**2025**

With income tax contributing approximately 90% and property taxes 10% of the local tax revenues, business growth is economically more beneficial than residential growth. Businesses are also low consumers of city services when compared to residential properties.

1 minimum wage job generates as much City tax revenue as a \$120,000 home.



Type of Land Use	Fiscal Impact on City
Research Tech Park	+++
Office Park	+++
Industrial	++
Commercial Retail	++
Restaurant Bar	+
Open Space	+
Garden Apartments	--
Mid Rise Apartments	-
Condominiums	-
Rental Homes	--
Single Family (owned)	-

**B- Forecast Rating:** (B-) There is an uncomfortable amount of uncertainty over Federal and State mandates, funding cuts, and erosion of local authority, but the City seems to have adequate reserves to absorb/react to the unpredictable Federal and State directives for the immediate future.



**Economic Growth** – Over the last 15 years, the City and its partners launched a series of pivotal development projects to leverage Kent’s economic assets, accelerate economic growth, and mitigate the impacts of \$1.3 million in revenue losses from State cuts in local government funding.

These projects and investments were outputs of the **first tier** of the City’s economic strategy to leverage and magnify University economic opportunities as producers and consumers of economic value in Kent with a focus on downtown revitalization and transformative infrastructure projects to create a **“platform for growth”** and drive future economic expansion, laying the foundation for a sustainable economy.

The “platform for growth” concept is part of a commitment to broader economic restructuring -- with innovation replacing conventional manufacturing, favoring entrepreneurship, collaboration, and close ties between the business community and academic research. The City has made these guiding principles of its economic strategy, investing in building the resource networks and physical infrastructure capable of amplifying the generative capacity of the university and fulfilling the role as Kent’s greatest competitive economic advantage.

The competitive advantage of a college town includes not only the buying power of the University, faculty and students for local goods and services, but also the lifestyle amenities commonly found in vibrant college towns. The athletic, theater, music, cultural diversity, international exposure, diversity and eclectic interests shared in a small town with “right-sized” public spaces cumulatively create a brand personality that distinguishes Kent from any other community in northeast Ohio.

It is that Kent lifestyle that is celebrated in the year-round festivals and events that draw visitors from all over Ohio and surrounding states, bringing dollars from outside of the community into the Kent economy. Downtown businesses report record sales days coinciding with those events, and those same events are enjoyed by Kent residents raising the perceived value of quality of life in their hometown. It is that favorable value proposition that has been found to help attract people to live and do business in Kent when they could choose to work almost anywhere in the new mobile economy – making the Kent lifestyle a critical component of Kent’s platform for growth.

One of the threats to the City’s strategy to use the downtown to amplify the attraction of the college town experience, has been the significant investments made by peer cities to (re)create their downtowns which has narrowed the gap between Kent’s downtown and neighboring cities. These cities may not have a university, but they’ve made significant investments in outdoor amphitheaters, splash pads, community centers, park facilities, etc., which are credible threats to Kent’s downtown

for customers and businesses. The rise in peer city competition has led the City to double down on supporting Kent's downtown, recalibrating parking, and refreshing festivals and events, public art, music, and evaluating how to enhance the Kent downtown experience for families by adding more park and interactive features, following on the success of Dan Smith Park.

The decline in KSU student population and higher education funding is a threat that is closely monitored and evaluated. While Kent State University's proportional tax contributions declined over the last decade, the "platform for growth" strategy has had some early wins with growth in Kent's corporate sector as Davey Tree, Smithers Oasis, the auto dealerships -- combined with a reenergized small business sector -- has outpaced KSU losses producing net growth in the City's tax base with greater diversification. Private sector diversification has helped spread the financial risk across more industries and reduce the City's financial exposure to unforeseen market disruptions in any one sector, including higher education.

The **second tier** of the City's economic strategy focuses on having the resources, tools, infrastructure, programs and support services ready on demand to "grow the base" of Kent's existing businesses. Existing businesses account for over 80% of net job growth and the City has been hyper-focused on Kent's existing businesses to facilitate their growth through a wide range of economic incentives, infrastructure and business assistance. The recent projects at Davey Tree, Smithers Oasis, Klaben Auto, and Ametek, had extensive City involvement, creative financing, and City legislative support.

The **third tier** of the City's economic strategy focuses on conventional new business attraction, with a particular focus on small-to-mid-sized businesses due to the limited amount of land tracts or industrial property available in Kent. The key in this tier is integrating Kent's few vacant properties and buildings into regional and state business property search programs, optimizing property availability and site readiness, marketing, and networking with commercial real estate agents. The lack of green space to build, the extent of legacy contamination on the few existing industrial properties, rising opposition to developing vacant/unused properties and prospective traffic impacts, and the lack of access to the Interstate, present challenges but the City will continue to be opportunistic to connect interested parties with property owners and facilitate deals wherever possible.

**Lifestyle as an Economic Engine, Kent's X-Factor:** Competition for the best and brightest talent is a demographic reality and as companies scramble to attract and retain that talent, the community that offers the best work/life balance will have the edge. As a center of civic life, the arts, and commerce, Kent is rich in the raw material of the new economy where human and creative capital is a driver of economic performance. Kent gives work an edge by putting living first.

Building an entrepreneurial ecosystem and raising Kent's innovation quotient, the City is aiming to use Kent's periphery culture to be a catalyst for a sustainable small business economy, keeping a supply of new businesses in the pipeline. Given Kent's desire to be a small business-based economy, and the high failure rate of small businesses (70% within the first 5 years), cultivating the next generation of new businesses is critical for sustaining a small business-based economy.

Leading edge culture can be a driver of innovation and Kent seeks to make innovation more probable by enabling risk-takers to test their ideas and new business models within the security of an enthusiastic and skilled support net cast by the university, the City, and fellow entrepreneurs (e.g., City Entrepreneur in Residence program).


Kent is fortunate to have Kent State University as a periphery culture producer, bringing in a new class of idea generators every year. Student cycling serves a critical role in keeping the culture fresh and current with the rapidly changing tides of culture. Universities, by their diverse nature, their constant flow of new people, provide the raw materials for the periphery to flourish.

Kent's lifestyle leverage is built on the premise that innovation and business growth enjoy a competitive advantage in places where the specialties of research, technology, commerce and culture are given opportunities to converge. The goal is to create shared physical spaces (public and private), e.g., downtown, public parks, open spaces, KSU incubator and DI Hub, etc., where people will gather, ideas will cross-pollinate, and innovation becomes a way of life and doing business.

Kent State University has full occupancy at their 44,000 square foot Centennial Park incubator facility , and the opening of KSU's \$44 million Design Innovation HUB (DI HUB) in 2020 introduced another 78,000 square feet of collaborative workstations, maker workspaces, classrooms, innovation labs, 3D printing rooms, Burton D. Morgan entrepreneurship zone, classrooms, training and event venues to facilitate cross disciplinary design and development, and accelerate the expansion of the innovation ecosystem. Three privately owned coworking spaces are also available in Kent.

In 2022, Kent State became one of only 7 universities in Ohio to be recognized as a prestigious R1 research university, achieving a research milestone with potential for early-stage spin-off businesses and commercialization in Kent.

**B- Forecast Rating:** (B-) There has been a sustained effort by the State to reshape public higher education and although KSU remains one of the highest performing public universities in Ohio, there is a degree of uncertainty over what further legislative actions may be on the horizon that could impact a critical partner in the City's economic performance. Given KSU's present good financial standing, we don't anticipate any immediate restructuring of KSU's role in Kent.

 **Community Development** – Kent is an historic community with charming older neighborhoods, but they come with aging infrastructure and an aging housing stock – which when combined with the disproportionately high percentage of rental units (58%) typical of a small town with a large university – requires extra attention and investment in property maintenance, repair and restoration.

**High Needs, Low Resources Community Challenge:** The extra investment needed to sustain an aging infrastructure translates into higher City costs for the public infrastructure and higher homeowner costs for private property, yet Kent has a comparatively low tax base and low family income (2<sup>nd</sup> highest poverty rate for peer cities in Portage County and Summit County) -- creating the challenging dynamic of being a *high needs* but *low resources* community.

The high needs/low resources challenge is exacerbated by the rental business interest in Kent properties, which keeps housing prices above market rate and supply limited, leading to bidding wars and sale agreements before properties are even listed in select neighborhoods. At less than 9 square miles in area, every location in Kent is relatively close to campus which means rental interest, and rental creep, is a potential risk in every neighborhood.

As a community that is effectively “built-out” (no ‘developable’ greenfield sites remaining for new subdivisions) the housing market is largely geographically capped so new investments tend to be in-fill projects, and restoration and repurposing of existing structures. That geographic cap has added further to the price pressures of home ownership in Kent, keeping the market tight and prices above average. In the most recent real estate valuation, Kent property values increased at a greater rate than the Portage County average.

The multi-factored price pressures stretches home ownership options for many families in Kent, outpacing their ability to pay, which in turn creates more opportunities for rental businesses to increase their holdings in Kent, increasing the already disproportionate rental market share as landlords are able to use rent payments and business write-offs to absorb the higher costs of entry into the market.

The lower cost of property along Kent’s borders in the adjacent townships has contributed to a home building boom with another 300-400 homes/condominium/townhome housing units being built at the borders of the City in Franklin and Brimfield townships, with another 85 single family detached homes being constructed at the former KSU golf course property.

The higher entry costs into the Kent housing market seems to also translate into less funding for upkeep, repair and maintenance of structures and properties, lowering the standard for neighborhood aesthetics and pride in ownership.


To counter these adverse home ownership factors, the City adopted a series of neighborhood preservation, protection, and maintenance assistance initiatives. From adding staff devoted to neighborhood safety, adding exterior and interior maintenance standards, adding rental registration and inspection, limiting the number of renters per structure, limiting rental units to designated Zoning districts, providing low income grant and loan funding, offering a free loan program for maintenance tools, maintaining an inventory of local assistance resources, facilitating volunteer repairs in neighborhoods, upgrading public infrastructure in at risk neighborhoods, to hosting neighborhood events that foster neighborhood identity and pride, the City has used its services and programs to increase owner occupied housing and strengthen neighborhoods.

In 2016 the City partnered with KSU to commission a comprehensive housing study and that data has been a template for private sector investment consolidating student housing in newer congregate living complexes and slowing the conversion of single-family homes in neighborhoods into student rentals. The study also identified a need for more active senior living/assisted living housing in Kent and although a proposed KSU Inter-generational Project was deferred in 2019, 2 new private senior living projects have been approved in 2024-25, as well as several new similar projects in the neighboring townships adding a potential 300 new senior housing units to the Kent housing market.

In creating the new Community Engagement Coordinator position, the City increased the focus on neighborhoods as a community asset, launching new programs, e.g., neighborhood movie night, neighborhood yard awards, etc., to better organize latent neighborhood assets, amplify Kent's small-town lifestyle amenities and inspire more home ownership.

Kent is one of only 80 cities in Ohio to have completed the requirements to be a "certified local government" for historic preservation. In achieving that certification the City has adopted and committed to national historic preservation standards to preserve, protect, and increase awareness of our Kent's unique cultural heritage which has included projects to relocate the Wells/Sherman house, restoration of the old Franklin Hotel, restoration of the train depot and the post office properties.

**B -** Uncertainty Factor: (B-) A number of the City's most effective neighborhood protection initiatives created to limit rental businesses has been challenged in the courts. The City's rental inspection program has been ruled constitutional but the "no more than 2 unrelated tenants" restriction is up for review by the Supreme Court. While optimistic, it is unclear how the Supreme Court will rule on this limitation which if lost could be a setback for neighborhoods.



## Natural Resources

– Kent’s investment in preserving and celebrating the natural environment has been a community priority for nearly a century. The adoption of the Climate Action Plan in 2023 was the latest addition to Kent’s environmental legacy that spans decades of volunteer, business, University, and City projects and programs.

Living green is more than a label in Kent, it’s an integral part of the Kent lifestyle. It’s a cornerstone of the Kent brand; it’s what the community values, supports, and how it’s known.

It’s a promise to honor the legacy of the Cuyahoga River that runs through downtown Kent with walking trails, interpretive elements, parkland, and recreational opportunities including kayaking, canoeing, tubing, and fishing. A promise to surpass the City’s sustainability goals. A promise to make the community’s carbon footprint smaller each year through new solar, geothermal and energy conservation projects. A promise to protect and restore the local ecosystem through land conservancy and well-head protection. A promise to uphold the City’s Green Building Ordinances and prevent the encroachment of development into environmentally sensitive areas.

Kent is known for its natural resources and local beauty. Preserving and adding to this beauty is one of the fundamental tasks of the Service department. Every day Public Service crews sweep debris from streets, remove litter from roadsides, clean wastewater and monitor the quality of the City’s watershed to protect the region’s human and natural resources.

Kent’s green roots and brand stretch back over a century and run deep in the local corporate community. John Davey, founder of the Davey Tree company, started the first tree care company in Kent that today has grown into the largest tree care and green service company in the world. In 2024-25 Davey Tree completed construction of a new one-of-a-kind, 200-acre, \$80 million environmental training facility at their new SEED Campus adjacent to their world headquarters.

Smithers Oasis, the world’s largest floral product company, has its headquarters, research, and manufacturing facilities in Kent. Mix in Kent’s local natural foods coop, the Haymaker Farmer’s market, and a network of area organic farmers that serve area restaurants and hues of green can be spotted across the Kent landscape.

With a national walk score rating of “very good” Kent is in the top 2% of cities in Ohio for walking and biking to work and top 10% in public transit use. With the expansion of Kent State University’s bike share and electric scooter program off campus, and the City’s multi-million-dollar infrastructure improvements to upgrade Summit Street, East Main Street, the expansion of

the Portage Hike and Bike trail, the introduction of an accelerated sidewalk repair option, and the addition of City sidewalk snow clearing on high volume sidewalks, alternative transportation mobility is on the rise in Kent.

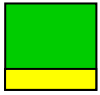
The Kent Dam project received national acclaim for being at the forefront of river restoration and the City's aggressive trail building has made the rejuvenated river a staple of outdoor recreation opportunities in Kent. In 2024, the original dam pumps failed but staff are researching options to find an affordable replacement that will honor the legacy of the dam, support restoration of river quality, and promote public enjoyment of the river.

In 2024, the City created a new full-time Sustainability Coordinator position that plans, coordinates and tracks the City's progress towards its environmental goals and implementation of the Climate Action Plan.

As a largely built-out community, land is at a premium, and repurposing sites that have legacy contamination issues is an integral component of the City's environmental strategy. The City has partnered with private landowners and local businesses to take the steps necessary to eliminate public and environmental exposure risks and remediate sites so that they can be returned to productive and safe use, e.g., West River World Auto, Triangle Cleaners, Jerry's Cleaners, Lake Street industrial properties, Depeyster/Erie Street property, former Davey Drill site, and the Mogadore Road site.

**Natural Points of Pride:** From Kent's 19 parks, miles of hike and bike trails, the \$20 million transit center downtown, walkable neighborhoods, and an award-winning river restoration project, Kent's green thumbprints can be found all over town. The Kent Bog nature preserve is a living relic from the Ice Age; it's the southernmost stand of Tamarack in the continental United States. The Cuyahoga River is one of only 7 National Heritage Rivers. Kent's drinking water was voted the best tasting water in the country. Kent is in the center of a regional park and trail network that includes the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (33,000 acres), West Branch State Park (5,400 acres of parkland and 2650 acres of water for boating, fishing, swimming), Quail Hollow State Park (700 acres with horseback riding, hiking, biking, picnic), Summit County metro park system (14,300 acres), Towner's Woods park (175 acres); and Kent's own 250 acres of parkland.

**B** Forecast Rating: (B) Kent has built an impressive inventory of environmental programs and assets, but many of those programs were underwritten by State and Federal grants. With the shifting funding priorities away from environmental programming at the State and Federal level, the momentum and sustainability of these efforts is uncertain.



**Quality of Life** – The eclectic mix of music, arts, natural beauty, historic downtown, Kent State University, and international business presence in a small-town setting creates a lifestyle that is the Kent community signature. With its tree-lined streets, sidewalks, neighborhood schools and parks, Kent offers a great mix of downtown commerce and living options, neighborhood parks, medical care facilities, and charming turn-of-the-century homes with easy access to the modern conveniences of new suburban centers.

Quality of life is the central theme of the City's mission statement:

*"To make Kent the city of choice in northeast Ohio for residents, businesses, visitors and students seeking to connect to their community in a personally meaningful and enriching way. "*

Kent has a particular demographic and cultural focus on people, with the goal of being right-sized for living. Kent retail stores are largely locally owned, and Kent's music venues, pubs and eateries are small, intimate, and conversational. Kent is people-scaled in a way that is emulated but rarely reproduced, proving that a city doesn't have to be big, to live big.

Where some communities seek depth within a narrow range of lifestyles, Kent goes wide, celebrating the edges of convention – and everything in-between. From downtown redevelopment to industrial growth, Kent seeks to showcase these elements and leverage them in a winning economic formula that has been built by the people that live, work, learn, and play in Kent.

As the home of Kent State University, Kent residents enjoy the highest educational values and all of the benefits of living in a university city. The community is home to an internationally diverse population -- Kent is in the top 7% in diversity in the state of Ohio -- an aspect that is celebrated by residents.

Kent is one of only 40 Main Street Communities in Ohio, which makes available significant local and state resources for historic restoration and redevelopment projects in Kent. Main Street Kent co-sponsors dozens of community events downtown in partnership with Kent's arts, cultural, business and sports groups that attract thousands of students and families into downtown all year long.

In 2008 Smart Travel magazine ranked Ohio #3 out of the 50 states as the best places to view fall foliage and autumn colors in the Original Tree City can be spectacular. In 2010 Forbes magazine ranked Kent as the 8<sup>th</sup> most affordable place to live in America. In 2015 Kent was selected as the best college town in Ohio, and in 2023 Kent was runner-up in a national "best hometown" competition. These 3<sup>rd</sup> party accolades provide external validation of Kent's quality of life advantage.

With the Haymaker Farmers Market and Beckwith Orchards open seasonally, residents and local restaurants enjoy a wide variety of locally grown and produced foods from farm to table.

Outdoor activities, like biking, skateboarding and kayaking, are staples of the Kent community. Within a 20-minute drive, there are over 50,000 acres of National, State and local parks offering extensive recreational opportunities from rock climbing, class III river rapids, snowboarding, expert mountain bike trials, downhill and cross-country skiing, boating, fishing, horse trails and even jet skiing to partake in.

One of the great benefits of being in a university city is the amount of educational resources that are available. These resources aren't limited to just the traditional areas of the curriculum -- they include lifelong learning opportunities in outdoor pursuits like bouldering, wilderness orienteering, camping, backpacking, and kayaking – as well as a full complement of Division 1 men's and women's athletic teams to cheer for.

In 2024 Kent Parks and Recreation completed a Master Plan that provides a roadmap to meet the recreational needs of Kent's diverse population and enhance the quality of life for Kent residents by providing access to high-quality park and recreation amenities. There are numerous running clubs and local races (3K, 5K, full and marathon) in and around Kent. Two-wheeled racers also have plenty to choose from, with a great selection of road bike races, mountain bike races, club and group rides, and special cycling events like the annual 175-mile Pedal to the Point fundraiser ride.

Kent opened its skateboard park on Admore Drive in 2010 to a standing room-only crowd of boarders. Kent Parks and Recreation, in partnership with Crooked River Adventures of Kent State University, offers a canoe/kayak livery operation that includes all rental equipment and transportation.

**The Parks and Recreation Department Dilemma:** From a planning, budgeting and operations perspective, the fact that Kent Parks and Recreation has its own dedicated levies, and an independent Parks Board, has contributed to an organizational anomaly bifurcating Kent Parks and Recreation from the rest of the City departments and administration. The City Charter is unclear on whether Parks and Recreation is under the direction of the City Council and the City Manager like all of the other department heads, or just the Parks Board.

This organizational anomaly has become a potential threat/concern as Parks and Recreation is facing budgetary shortfalls for operations and the master plan projects, and the department may need to go to the voters to increase their levies or ask the City for a general government subsidy to make up the growing funding gap.

The dilemma is determining whether Parks and Recreation is “enough” of a full City department (with accountability within the City administration) to justify allocating general fund tax dollars to offset their shortfalls, or is it more accurately a quasi-City department with limited City administration oversight/accountability and therefore general fund tax dollars may be borrowed but not gifted to make up the budgetary shortfall.

The City already provides administrative/overhead support for Kent Parks and Recreation (estimated value between \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year) but it has not historically provided direct financial support (other than loans for Parks and Rec to purchase property).

Parks and Rec services contribute to several of the City’s strategic goals, e.g., quality of life, economic development, natural resources, so there is a strategic basis to allocate general tax dollars to underwrite a portion of the Parks and Rec funding shortfall -- but with the extension of general tax funding there is typically an expectation of a higher degree of accountability/oversight for the use of those funds than exists under the current organizational structure.

**The Bottom Line:** Kent has many exceptional assets like the Cuyahoga River, a great school system, terrific parks, abundant trails, low crime, low cost of living, etc., but other communities can offer those too. It’s when you throw in 25,000 students and the amazing multi-cultural mix that comes with them that you’ve got a game changer. Get that mix right, and give people of all ethnicities places to gather, mingle, learn, live and learn together, and Kent’s quality of life is incomparable.

A- Forecast Rating: (A-) The Kent lifestyle and commitment to quality of life runs deep in the community, and Kent’s natural assets are well established, but sustaining that focus in an increasingly politicized and polarized era will require renewed emphasis on what’s most important in Kent. The lack of sustainable funding for Kent Parks and Recreation has created a ceiling on recreational programs and services at a time when neighboring communities are increasing investments in those services to enhance quality of life, outpacing Kent and narrowing the quality-of-life advantages that Kent offers.



## Safe Community – Police, Fire, Public Service, Health Department

**1. Police Department:** City of Kent Police employees work to ensure Kent is a safe place to live and that effort has helped keep Kent's crime rates below national and state averages -- particularly for violent crimes which have been on the decline for the last decade. Kent Police respond to an average of 20,000 calls and make between 1,500 to 2,000 arrests per year.

Kent is a full-service police department with a state-of-the-art dispatch center, car/bike/foot/K9 patrols, records division, detective bureau, juvenile services, detention bureau, jail (12-day facility, 4 cells), parking/animal compliance officers, impound, and gun range.

Training is an essential component of public safety and the Police Department (40 hours of in-service training per year), and it includes a combination of internal training (certified instructors on staff, online) and specialized external training at academies, seminars, and workshops. External training topics include leadership development conferences, sexual assault investigations, internal investigations, force investigations, advanced roadside impaired driving enforcement, first aid & CPR, K9 training, duty and care in suicidal situations, de-escalation, and special weapons and tactics.

Officers are also required to complete online training scenarios that briefly highlight department policies and procedures, e.g., law updates, arrest search & seizure, school threats, domestic violence, officer wellness, report writing, missing persons, cultural diversity, and ethics and professionalism.

Kent is small enough that personal relationships between Police Officers and residents can have a beneficial impact in anticipating, preventing, and responding to crime. Kent Police Officers spend time at community festivals, sporting events, school dances, neighborhood block parties, and other places where members of the community gather.

From casual conversations to neighborhood meetings, the Kent Police use foot and bike patrols to interact with the public before problems arise so that when public safety is at risk, there's an understanding for how to work together to keep the community safe. Safe communities know how to look out for one another, especially those that are most vulnerable like children, disabled or elderly.

The City and Kent City Schools partner to fund a School Resource Officer (and K9) who works onsite at Roosevelt High School during the school year. The School Resource Officer is also available to respond to issues or concerns at Stanton Middle School, as well as the four elementary schools in Kent.

The School Resource Officer is a fully trained veteran Police Officer who provides immediate response capabilities, security, and support for student, teacher and parent safety. Kent Police patrols also drop-in and walk through City schools as part of their patrol assignments. On average, Kent Police Officers perform 30 drop-in school visits each week. The Kent Police Department also hires and trains School Crossing Guards to assist with the safe arrival and departure of students each day.

Kent Police and Emergency Medical Services personnel are assigned to work large school functions and sporting events at Kent City schools and Kent State University.

Kent Police is the only police department in this area that offers an Explorers program, which allows youth to learn about law enforcement careers. Students from Maplewood, Southeast, Stow, Kent, Field, and Ravenna schools participate in classes which offered hands-on opportunities to participate in various officer-led scenarios.

In 2024 the City partnered with Kent City Schools to complete a “Safe Routes to School” plan that will be used to guide future investments to enhance public safety in and around City Schools and adjacent neighborhoods. The City is also partnering with Kent City Schools, Rotary, and Kent Junior Mothers to develop a new “Safety Town” park that will be used to teach children how to safely navigate city streets, sidewalks, crosswalks, etc., in a fun and active public space.

Kent Police and Fire employees provide a range of training events in the Kent City Schools, including ALICE training, Project ChildSafe (firearms safety) and lockdown, evacuation and fire safety education.

Beginning in 2011 the Kent Police Department has sponsored an annual Citizen’s Police Academy to provide residents a chance to get an inside view of what it’s like to put on the badge and keep Kent safe as a City Police Officer. Academy students review criminal law, case law, court processes, parking and traffic enforcement, drunk and drugged driving enforcement, criminal investigations, use of force, crime prevention, and specialized police functions. Students also get to experience a “ride-along” with a Police Officer and test Police equipment.

In 2023, the City invested \$250,000 to purchase the equipment and software to outfit all Officers with body cameras, increasing transparency and accountability, and enabling Kent Police to achieve full compliance with national standards for best practices in policing outlined in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing protocols.

Kent State University provides security/police functions on campus, but they eliminated their medical and fire support services in the 1990s. In 2020, Kent State University was ranked as the 11<sup>th</sup> safest campus in the nation.

Kent is fortunate to have a local network of mental health and social service agencies active in the community, and Kent Police work and train with those personnel for crisis intervention and mental health related safety problems. Kent provides a prescription drop-box service for the safe disposal of unneeded prescription drugs and syringes.

Elevating community policing, transparency, public education and outreach has been critical to sustaining the trust of the public during a time when national distrust, politicization and polarization has threatened to undermine public safety. The revitalization of downtown Kent has led to many new community events and festivals which created more opportunities for Kent Police to interact and protect the public.

The challenge is keeping up with all the new and expanded opportunities, duties, and changes in tactics -- which require more time to perform with the same level of staffing that has been in place for 20 years. Add-in the rise of mental health instability underlying public safety incidents – requiring a tactical shift toward de-escalation and treatment rather than arrests, along with increasing requests for Police to assist in resolving a rising caseload of neighbor-to-neighbor civil disputes – and it's challenging for staff on patrol to keep up with the elevated safety expectations.

Hiring more staff requires adequate funding and a labor pool to select from but Police departments across the country have experienced more officers leaving the field with fewer applicants interested in replacing them –creating a hyper competitive job market, pushing compensation packages to record levels, and leaving many of the smaller, less resourced communities with extended position vacancies and an excessive reliance on overtime.

Overtime is expensive, but it is also adding to morale problems due to burnout – which is compounded by the generational difference in the younger talent pool that values personal time as much as their compensation, so they do not wish to work the overtime hours that previous generations desired to work.

In 2025-26, City staff are presenting options to increase Police staffing by 3 new Patrol Officers, at a cost of \$400,000/year to restore better balance between the safety needs and staff available to perform that work.

**2. Fire Department:** The Kent Fire Department is a full-time department that operates 3-shifts 24 hours a day at 2 fire stations, with 18 pieces of fire apparatus, and 33-line employees that provide fire and emergency medical services (EMS) to the City of Kent, Franklin Township, Kent State University and the Village of Sugarbush Knolls. The department also provides fire inspection services, fire safety education in Kent Schools, and specialty response teams for swift water/dive team rescue, hazardous material response, urban search and rescue (USAR), and SWAT medical team response.

In 2023, Kent Fire introduced new part-time paramedicine services, focusing on providing medical services/advice/referral to underserved members of the community, e.g., homeless, drug addicts, mental health sufferers, elderly, etc. Kent is one of the first cities in the region to add paramedicine and has become a model for how early intervention can help reduce acute care needs for at-risk individuals, improving their health and care while reducing the need to call the Kent Fire department for routine assistance and care.

Kent is proud to maintain a national ISO Public Protection Classification of level 2, rating Kent in the top 3% of best fire safety services in the country. The ISO rating is based on a comprehensive review of the safety infrastructure, staffing, training, equipment, apparatus, response time, coverage, etc. to determine how well the fire department is able to protect the community. Kent's high rating provides peace of mind and keeps insurance costs low for residents and businesses.

Kent Police and Fire have active mutual aid agreements with neighboring cities and Kent State University to serve as back-up for extra assistance during times of high call volume or major incidents. In 2010 a study was performed to explore developing a fire district and combining neighboring departments into a single fire district. The study recommended maintaining existing local departments and pooling resources through mutual aid to achieve similar efficiencies and economy of scale.

The City has an equipment replacement fund to pay for the purchase of new med-units and fire trucks, but the prices have increased so rapidly that the fund is experiencing a shortfall and life safety vehicle purchases have been delayed until sufficient funds can be secured. Kent State University and the Franklin Township have agreed to share the costs of the replacement of fire apparatus, with contributions ranging from 25-30% of the total cost but the City has been unsuccessful in seeking grant funds to make up the remaining deficit, which raises concerns over aging equipment performance.

The biggest threat to fire safety is securing funding to increase staffing and keep pace with the rise in call volume. The majority (roughly 70%) of 911 calls are for emergency medical assistance, and with advances in modern medicine people are living longer and extending the years that at risk individuals may need to call for medical assistance.

The department has seen 180% growth in annual 911 calls while staffing has only been able to be increased by 10% (1 employee) due to decades of funding constraints.

The disconnect between staffing/funding capacity and service demands has led to excessive reliance on overtime, which similar to the Police department imbalance is expensive and detrimental to morale, worker health, and job performance – which when dealing with life safety services for the public is critical.

In 2025-26, City staff are presenting options to increase Fire staffing by 3 new EMS/Fire employees, at a cost of \$400,000/year to restore better balance between the safety needs and staff available to perform that work.

**3. Service Department:** The City's Service Department crews are on the front-line of emergency preparedness and response. Through wind and snowstorms, floods and homeland security risks, Service employees play a critical role in protecting public health and safety and restoring "normalcy" following catastrophic incidents.

The Service Department doesn't wait for emergencies; the crews work every day to prevent emergencies. Before the introduction of water and wastewater treatment plants, more people died from dysentery contracted through foul water than any other cause of mortality. Kent's utility plants operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to eliminate that risk.

With hundreds of miles of streets, sidewalks, and water and sewer pipes, it is hard to grasp the extent of the reach of Service department services – until something goes wrong. Every day dogs are walked, buses arrive at school, moms and dads drive to work, and visiting grandparents count on City streets, sidewalks, and bridges to get them safely to their destination. From the morning shower to the bedtime cup of water, Kent's public services are depended upon to keep everyone safe.

When it comes to infrastructure, time, weather and daily usage, has a way of turning assets into liabilities and the City's \$160 million investment in infrastructure loses value and effectiveness every day. The City's Capital Improvement and Utility Rate Stabilization plans were developed to provide a framework to maintain investment grade infrastructure on a constrained budget -- and the Service Department services and projects are the largest components of the Capital Plan.

Service Department projects in the Capital Plan have produced significant public safety gains, including a 300% increase in street maintenance/sidewalk funding, the \$18 million Summit Street improvement project, \$20 million in upgrades at the water and wastewater plants, and the \$25 million East Main Street project.

Over the years, the Service department has taken on numerous new duties, but their staffing levels remain unchanged. The redevelopment of downtown raised the standard for public spaces, increasing the demand for Service department services to maintain and enhance the downtown, e.g., downtown flower beds, hanging flowerpots, litter collection, pedestrian safety, lighting, festival and events, environmental regulations, neighborhood expectations, etc., and those services were absorbed by existing staff.

Structurally, the Service Department has had too few employees to have “designated crews” for select job functions and as a result the same employees perform multiple functions; and each time more duties are added, the employees are spread across more functions, and less time can be devoted to any single category. That mission creep has led to an increased focus on triaging work priorities in a more “crisis” reactive mode, jumping from one problem to the next, rather than performing preventative maintenance.

Similar to the Police and Fire departments, overtime has become a routine course of business to keep pace with expanded duties and rising expectations, but it is expensive and can lead to reduced morale and burnout, diminishing work effectiveness.

In 2025-26, City staff are presenting options to increase Service department staffing by 3 new employees dedicated to street maintenance, at a cost of \$400,000/year to restore better balance between the safety needs and staff available to perform that work.

**4. Health Department:** Public health is a state government function and local Health Commissioners are considered agents of the State of Ohio. The authority for performing health inspection, charging fees, securing funding, enforcing regulations, rules, etc., are established by state law, and local departments serve as agents of the state. Local governments have the ability to expand and refine the application of the state health code locally, and Kent has chosen to do that.

As the State of Ohio has pushed for consolidation of city health departments into county health departments or health districts, the City of Kent is one of 25 cities remaining (out of 111 health agencies in Ohio) that have been able to maintain a state-accredited local Health Department.

The public health needs resulting from hosting a large public university with an internationally diverse population, and the high value placed on public health in Kent, led the City to invest in maintaining a “City Health Department” in order to provide a greater attention and service in support of public health locally than may be available in county or regional health districts.

The Kent Health Department is broadly responsible for protecting and promoting the health and well-being of the people within Kent, including offering a range of services targeted at preventing disease, responding to emergencies, and ensuring access to essential health services.

The categories of public health programs in Kent include:

- Disease Prevention and Control: investigate outbreaks, monitor health trends, and implement strategies to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases and other health threats.
- Health Promotion: provide education and resources to the public on healthy behaviors, such as nutrition, physical activity, and disease prevention, empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their health.
- Environmental Health: responsible for ensuring safe food and water, managing waste and sewage, and regulating other environmental factors that can impact public health.
- Emergency Preparedness and Response: preparing for and responding to public health emergencies, such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and bioterrorism.
- Access to Care: provide direct healthcare services, such as immunizations, family planning, and prenatal care, and connect individuals with the healthcare services they need.
- Enforcement of Health Regulations: enforce laws and regulations related to public health, such as those governing food safety, sanitation, and disease control.
- Community Engagement: work with community partners, including healthcare providers, schools, and community organizations, to address public health issues and improve population health.
- Data Collection and Analysis: collect and analyze data on health status, disease patterns, and risk factors to inform public health interventions and policies.

Examples of Public Health services provided in Kent include:

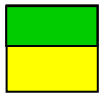
- Immunizations: Providing vaccines for children and adults.
- Food Safety Inspections: Inspecting restaurants and other food establishments.
- Communicable Disease Control: Investigating and managing cases of infectious diseases.
- Maternal and Child Health Programs: Providing services for pregnant women, infants, and young children.

- Environmental Health Services: Ensuring safe drinking water, proper sewage disposal, and control of environmental hazards.
- Health Education and Promotion: Offering programs on topics such as healthy eating, physical activity, and disease prevention.

The Kent Health department is vital to the health and well-being of residents, visitors, and students but similar to the Police, Fire and Service departments, the rising expectations and expanded duties have stretched staff capabilities and required increasing City General Tax funding contributions (\$400,000/year) to keep the state funded programs and services solvent. Maintaining the state accreditation is challenging and costly and without state funding increases, the long-term sustainability of current programming is in question.

**The Bottom Line:** Kent's public safety departments are outperforming their staffing levels, providing high levels of professional and comprehensive life safety services that have met or exceeded national averages in outcomes, earning the support of the local community, but the staffing/funding shortages is a threat as it is expensive and taking a toll that is unsustainable. The proposed staffing increases of 3 new line employees in Police, Fire and Service departments represent the next step to ensure the continuity of safety services desired by the community – the question is how many new employees can the City afford or how to come up with the \$1.2 million needed annually to fund the full cohort of 9 new employees.

**B** **Forecast Rating:** (B) Public safety is a top administrative priority but the solutions are large and financially challenging despite Kent's relatively sound fiscal position. The need to add close to \$1.2 million in annual pay/compensation for 9 new hires would be the largest staffing increase in at least the last 30 years. Even in stable financial times, that's a big ask, particularly as it competes with other legitimate staffing needs, e.g., need for new employees for more technology services staffing. The ultimate prioritization of these needs will be decided by City Council, and whether the solution will be phased-in, reduced, absorbed with existing revenues, or requires asking for voter approval of a public safety related tax increase is uncertain.



## Strong Neighborhoods

With the increased mobility of workers in the post-Covid economy working remotely, neighborhoods have become economic development, quality of life, community safety, and social assets -- and Kent is working to ensure Kent's neighborhoods are up to the task of being desirable enough to be the location of choice in northeast Ohio.

Kent's Service department is in the business of building community, both literally and figuratively. Public Services crews construct and maintain the roads, sidewalks and bridges that allow Kent residents to get from point A to point B safely, quickly and conveniently. This same infrastructure provides opportunities to connect Kent residents with one another. City sidewalks and parks are public spaces that create opportunities for face-to-face contact and social interaction, turning a collection of buildings into a neighborhood.

In 2010 Forbes magazine ranked Kent at the 8<sup>th</sup> most affordable community in the country which when combined with Kent's abundant lifestyle amenities, e.g., vibrant downtown, festivals, events, walkability, dining, arts, entertainment, etc., translates into a high ranking for livability but strong neighborhoods are the key to bringing all those parts together to create a place people are proud to call home.

Neighborhoods are special places that are full of memories of first steps, first days at school, and endless summer afternoons. Kent's neighborhoods are as diverse and surprising as the people that live in them. Each neighborhood brings a look, a style, and a personality all its own – offering unique places to do call home that are as diverse as the people that live in Kent.

**Kent's Neighborhoods:** The South End Neighborhood holds a special place in Kent history as it was home to many of the early trades-workers that built Kent into the largest rail yard between Chicago and New York. The rail yards have come and gone but the neighborhood remains a culturally vibrant community with some of Kent's most diverse groups sharing neighborhood churches, parks, and back yards. Quiet streets and affordable homes in walking distance to the Cuyahoga River, community parks, shopping, downtown Kent, and the Kent State campus make the South End a timeless destination.

Steeped in tradition, the historic Davey Neighborhood is home to many of the most notable homes in Kent. Built in the mid-to-late 19th century, these homes exemplify a charm that never goes out of style. Majestic trees, glimpses of former historic brick streets, and classic period architecture mix to create a neighborhood that is unequalled in personal touches and

tradition. A neighborhood school, and a short walk to the river trails and downtown, has put the Davey Neighborhood at the top of the list for most desired locations for Kent families of all ages.

Nestled along the eastern edge of the Kent State University campus the historic Vine Street area is full of classic “college town” blocks offering a great mix of rental and owner-occupied properties that are home to an internationally diverse mix of faculty, students, and residents that enjoy small town charm with a global village feel. Tucked between Kent State University and the University Shopping Plaza, this neighborhood is ideal for people that want to live where they can walk to the store, to campus, or to nearby downtown Kent.

The West River neighborhood offers an eclectic blend of homes with something for anyone that values affordability and convenience. The homes are right sized for busy lifestyles in a neighborhood that offers residents easy access to miles of hike and bike trails, views of the Cuyahoga River, a neighborhood doctor’s office, a local law office, the Kent Free Public Library, a neighborhood restaurant, and a vibrant downtown all within walking distance. It’s contemporary living done the old-fashioned way.

Prominently located along the banks of the Cuyahoga River, Riverbend is a premier suburban styled neighborhood with natural and architectural beauty in abundance. Convenient neighborhood kayaking and canoe access to the river and a trailhead connection to the Portage Hike & Bike Trail, provides residents with unparalleled outdoor recreational opportunities out their back door. This remarkable cul-de-sac community is across the street from Kent Roosevelt High School, making it a top choice among families with school-aged children.

University Woods lives up to Kent’s fame as “the original Tree City” thanks to yards full of mature oaks, maples and evergreens, exceptional landscaping, and quality home construction with a contemporary housing stock and slightly larger lots for growing families and yard enthusiasts. University Woods makes sure all the elements that make a neighborhood special are in place with street trees, lighting, and sidewalks adding up to a great dog-walking, neighbor-chatting, bird-watching place to call home.

University Heights is a showcase for Kent’s famous tree-lined streets, mature landscaping, and well-maintained homes in a quiet neighborhood that has been the choice of university faculty and families for decades. The short walk to campus makes the commute to work feel like a walk in the park with the occasional deer sighting and plenty of Kent’s iconic black squirrels to

round out the neighborhood's natural habitat. Best of all, the remarkable tree canopy provides summer shade and unbeatable fall foliage.

The blocks within the Crain to Main neighborhood are some of the most active and vibrant in the city. With downtown Kent at one end of the neighborhood and Kent State University at the other, there's always something going on right around the corner. The streets closest to campus tend to be home to more college students while the north side of Crain Avenue attracts more families and retirees. There's something for everyone in the Crain to Main neighborhood which is why it has been so popular for so long.

Forest Lakes is one of Kent's larger neighborhoods offering a great selection of home styles and sizes featuring panoramic views of neighboring farms and lakes. This close-knit community welcomes newcomers at its annual neighborhood block parties and holiday celebrations. Lush lawns, the sounds of kids playing, and the tranquil lake setting make this neighborhood a keeper.

The Fieldstone neighborhood is all about families and raising kids in a community that believes a neighborhood is more than the sum of its houses; it's an extended family that is there to lend a hand, pitch in, and share stories between backyards. This suburban style neighborhood offers an assortment of homes on meandering cul-de-sacs -- and the neighborhood park is the place to be on Saturday mornings as moms and dads cheer for their T-Ball, lacrosse, and soccer stars.

The Lakes of Franklin Mills is a planned development that specializes in right-sized lots and homes designed with busy modern lifestyles in mind. The extra attention to details sets this neighborhood apart and its smaller footprint homes leave more time to get out and enjoy the neighborhood park, walking trail, skatepark, and natural water features. Convenience, amenities, and thoughtful design make this a neighborhood where lifestyle matters.

The White Oaks neighborhood offers a distinctive mix of custom-made homes thoughtfully incorporated into a natural setting that features some of Kent's favorite woodlands and scenic wetlands. Surrounded by natural beauty, the neighborhood is designed with walkers in mind and its easy connections to area trails allow residents to walk to their heart's content. In addition to family sized homes, pockets of condominiums and ranch style homes make this a wonderful inter-generational community.

The Lake Street neighborhoods give residents plenty of options to get into a home at affordable prices. This quiet corner of town is a great place to find a bungalow, a rental home, a starter home or to downsize into a house size that fits a casual lifestyle. It's a neighborhood that celebrates simple pleasures with walks along the adjacent Portage Hike & Bike trail, barbecues on back yard patios, or relaxing on the front porch.

The West Side of Kent blends traditional City blocks with a couple of Kent's larger apartment complexes to create a community all its own. Located along the Stow-Kent border the West Side offers the best of both worlds -- easy access to Kent's locally grown eating and entertainment options, and a short drive to Stow's shopping centers featuring all the favorite national chains. To recover from all that shopping, the West Side is also home to Al Lease park where there's plenty of room to toss a frisbee, soak up some sun, and recharge.

Even with its own elementary school, Fred Fuller Park, the Portage Hike and Bike Trail, and the Cuyahoga River all sharing an address with the Longcoy and Middlebury Road neighborhoods, this part of town remains one of Kent's best kept secrets. Who knew that when it comes to quality of life at great prices, these neighborhoods show up at the top of the list? Quiet, tree-lined streets give a nod to the country roots of these neighborhoods that enjoy easy access to anywhere in Kent without sacrificing livability.

The homes along Hudson Road showcase contemporary living on traditional City lots, blending the best architecture from each era with the latest in lifestyle amenities. These are homes with a personality and architectural character from a time when porches, front stoops, and corner stores were where neighborhoods were born. That's still true today and being within walking distance to Kent's Middle School and High School complex, these homes are perfect for anyone looking for a nostalgic Friday night of high school football under the lights.

**Neighborhood Enrichment:** Recognizing the importance of strong neighborhoods core community values of livability, quality of life, safety and prosperity, the City adopted a Neighborhood Enrichment program in 2007. The program created a framework supporting a multi-faceted approach to enriching Kent neighborhoods and restoring the social and economic vitality of at-risk areas in Kent.



The core components of the Neighborhood Enrichment program have been enacted and refined over the course of the last decade, including adding staff devoted to neighborhood safety, adopting exterior and interior maintenance standards, adding rental registration and inspection, limiting the number of renters per structure, limiting rental units to designated Zoning districts, providing low income grant and loan funding, offering a free loan program for maintenance tools, maintaining an inventory of local assistance resources, facilitating volunteer repairs in neighborhoods, upgrading public infrastructure in at risk neighborhoods, to hosting neighborhood events that foster neighborhood identity and pride.

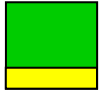
In 2025, the City created a new Community Engagement Coordinator position to increase the focus on neighborhoods as a community asset, launching new programs, e.g., neighborhood movie night, neighborhood yard awards, etc., to better organize latent neighborhood assets, and to amplify the small-town pleasures that are found in Kent's neighborhoods.

The Kent community is 1 of only 62 communities nationwide that has a "Neighborhood Bridges" program. Neighborhood Bridges is a local network of volunteers that coordinates and directs community resources to provide support and care for children and families in need.

The Kent Time Bank is a unique local organization that facilitates the connection and exchange among community members to match individual/family/group needs with member services, skills and resources to build stronger neighborhoods and community.

**The Bottom Line:** Kent has a larger variety of neighborhood styles to choose from (turn of the century, suburban, downtown, etc.) than many of its peer cities but the price pressures, high rental rates, and low neighborhood identity has led to an uneven sense of neighborhoods. Certain neighborhoods have developed strong neighborhood ties and pride, while other more transient rental areas have struggled to match those neighborhoods.

**B -** Forecast Rating: (B-) A number of the City's most effective neighborhood protection initiatives created to limit rental businesses has been challenged in the courts. The City's rental inspection program has been ruled constitutional but the "no more than 2 unrelated tenants" restriction is up for review by the Supreme Court. While optimistic, it is unclear how the Supreme Court will rule on this limitation which if lost could be a setback for neighborhoods.



## City/University Synergy

Over the course of the last 100 years, the City of Kent and Kent State University can point with pride to many examples where town-gown partnerships provided a means to work through community challenges and achieve uncommon results to common town-gown problems. In the first decade of the 21st century, the City and University began to shift the focus of town-gown relations from serving as a stabilizing factor in the community to applying town-gown in a leadership role to advance community goals.

This change in the focus of the town-gown mission elevated town-gown to a matter of strategic priority, redefining town-gown to become the community's greatest asset and a source of competitive advantage.

The strategy shift first gained traction in 2009 as the City, the University, and a list of community partners rallied around the shared goal of re-energizing downtown Kent through the downtown revitalization project. The remarkable level of collaboration that emerged in support of the downtown project, and the unprecedented results it produced, illustrated a newfound source of strategic strength in partnership.

**Collaborative Commitment:** In order to lead with that strength, and harness the capacity of collaboration, the City and the University have made public declarations and written agreements affirming each organization's commitment to put Kent's collaborative resources to work towards the fulfillment of the community's aspirations. These commitments launched a series of transformative investments (\$150 million) in community projects including the downtown revitalization, the Esplanade, Summit Street redesign, East Main Street project, as well as numerous joint operational programs and services.

Broadly, the objectives of the collaborative commitment include:

- Showcase the abundant assets of the City's university community that make Kent a great place to live, work, play and learn.
- Embrace the university-city brand and leverage the social and cultural opportunities for community enrichment and personal growth.
- Promote lifelong learning opportunities and the value of education at every phase in a person's life.

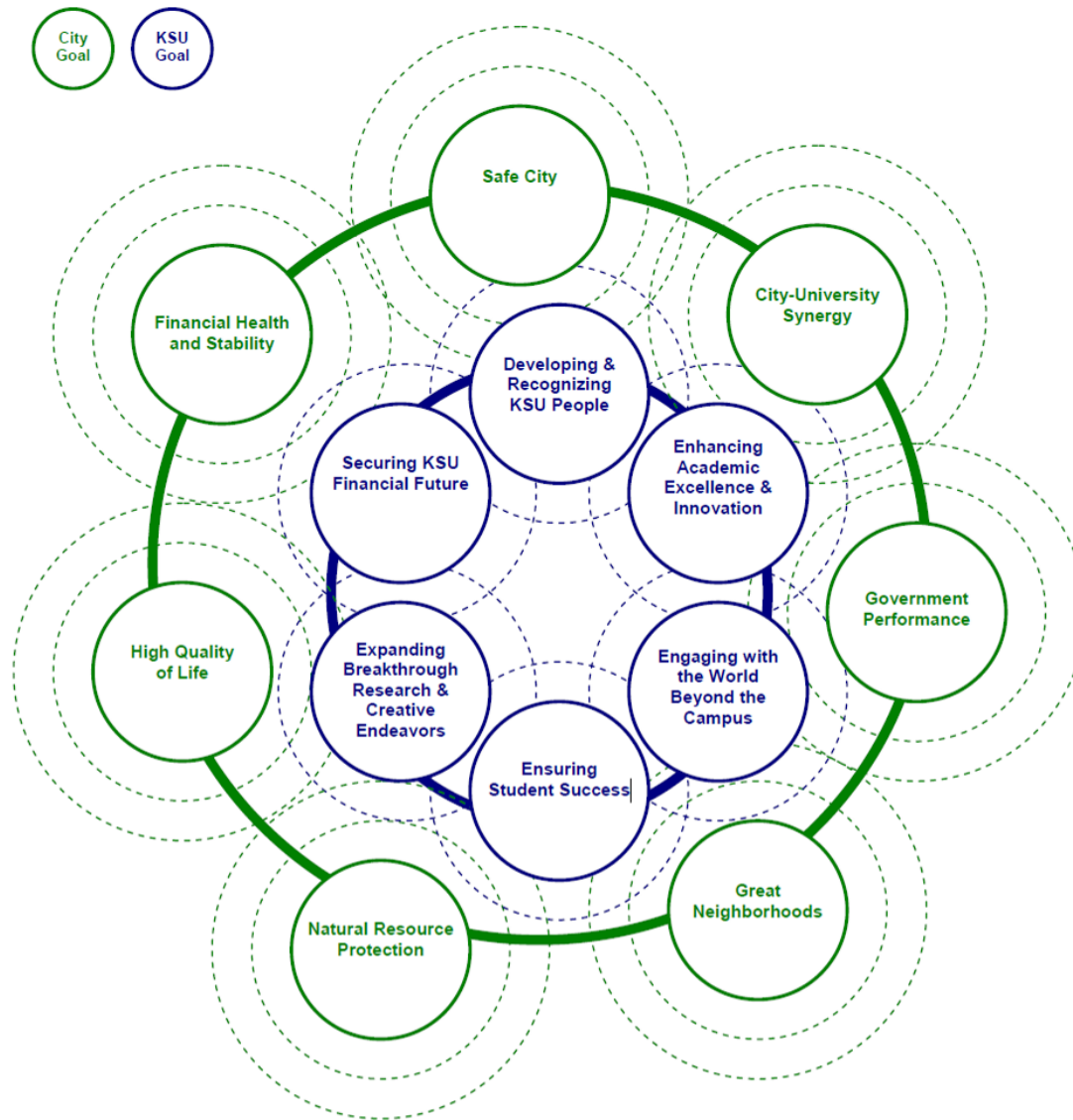
- Create public spaces that attract diverse populations for engagement and interaction.
- Communicate Kent's town/gown vision to current and potential residents, visitors and members of the media.
- Ensure public health and safety, encourage positive civic behavior, strengthen City neighborhoods, and become a "home away from home" for students and visiting faculty.
- Live up to the promise of being a vibrant university city, stimulating economic growth, facilitating entrepreneurship, and working to hire and buy local as much as possible.
- Create opportunities for education to extend beyond the campus borders and into the Kent community.
- Make investment decisions jointly through collaborative planning with senior leadership from each organization represented on key policy committees.
- Partner to create opportunities for students and residents to engage in personal exploration and self-discovery, offering lifestyle choices that engage passions, stretch limits and reveal talents.

**Collaborative Strategic Framework:** The goal is to build a shared strategy platform that leads to greater strategic engagement and effectiveness by identifying, assessing, and linking unifying strategic themes and targeting those areas of greatest mutual strategic value and opportunity. This strategic canvassing is a process that produces a listing of priority actions that aim to optimize the partnership yield and accelerate the achievement of organizational goals.

The intent is to operationalize the strategic opportunities that emerge from the strategic planning process into action steps that can be tracked, measured, and reported.

# Collaborative Strategic Framework

The concept of using an overlay of organizational strategic priorities to identify areas of mutual interest and opportunities is illustrated below:



**Collaborative Outcomes:** The revitalization of downtown Kent was the first transformative project born from the collaboration between the City of Kent and KSU, winning the 2012 Economic Development Association Project of the Year, winning the Inaugural International Town/Gown Award, winning the Community Partnership award, and was featured in the Wall Street Journal, NY Times, and Cleveland Plain Dealer as a national example of a college town on the rise.

Working collaboratively, the City, and KSU worked with PARTA to secure a \$20 million TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant from the Department of Transportation for the construction of the new multimodal facility in downtown Kent.

Working collaboratively, the City and University partnered to acquire land, remediate the site, and finance a \$16 million Kent State University Hotel and Conference Center featuring 94 rooms and amenities.

Working collaboratively, the City and University partnered to acquire land, plan and design the space and extend the campus esplanade into downtown Kent, providing a physical link between the campus and the community, leading to the construction of the new \$117 million College of Architecture and Environmental Design building along the esplanade adjacent to the downtown.

Working collaboratively, the City and University partnered to plan, engineer and finance the \$14 million redesign of 1.2 miles of Summit Street adjacent to the campus. The project included a new landscaped boulevard, with many features to make Summit Street safer for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. Enhancements included the addition of two roundabouts, more sidewalks, bike lanes, roadway lighting, a left turn lane from Summit Street to Terrace Drive and the relocation of Campus Center Drive to align with the Student Green.

Working collaboratively, the City and University partnered to plan, engineer and finance the \$25 million redesign of .75 mile of East Main Street adjacent to downtown and the campus. The project included a new landscaped boulevard, with many features to make East Main safer for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

Working collaboratively, the City and University performed a campus area traffic safety assessment that resulted in upgrades in signage, striping, and related pedestrian, cycling and vehicle infrastructure.

Working collaboratively, the City and University sponsored a free (including free skate rentals) downtown community ice rink in 2021 and 2022 that was enjoyed by approximately 15,000 skaters each season. At a cost of \$400,000 a year to operate, the City and KSU ended the project in 2023 due to fiscal shortfalls.

**City/University Coordination:** In recognition of the need for ongoing coordination and communication between the partners, the City and KSU staff have standing meetings among various staff groups to stay current, plan, and respond to matters that impact both the City and the University. Staff at these monthly meetings include the mayor, city manager, city planner, finance staff, student services, police chief, PARTA, Kent Area Chamber of Commerce, and Main Street Kent. The City and University also have a sub-group of police, fire, code enforcement, student services to discuss public safety specific issues, and the City Manager meets with the KSU President monthly.

The City and KSU community relations staff routinely visit local businesses to network and inform business owners how to gain access to university business and expand their student customer base. Kent State offers local businesses the opportunity to be a vendor for on-campus food and they host food truck events featuring local businesses on campus. KSU has also expanded the “flash pass” food program allowing students to use their meal plan card at businesses off campus in Kent.

The City and KSU have jointly participated in a holiday gift card program where employees were given \$25 gift cards to spend at participating businesses in downtown Kent, adding approximately \$20,000 in new local spending.

KSU has arranged for internship opportunities in City administrative offices and local Kent businesses.

In 2012 the City and University shared the costs to install (and maintain) a new \$25,000 electronic community message board at the intersection of Haymaker Parkway and Water Street in downtown Kent.

In 2012, the City and KSU shared the costs to create a new position to better track and manage student/neighborhood related issues. Over time, that position became a full-time staff person within student services at KSU and a new town/gown leadership position was created by the university dedicated to the full breadth of matters related to town/gown success.

The City and KSU partner to perform “neighborhood canvassing” with the purpose of identifying and preventing issues in neighborhoods surrounding KSU. Participating staff go door to door in Kent neighborhoods to educate students on

responsible citizenship. Educational pieces are distributed that explain how to have a "smart party," with content such as ways to avoid being a nuisance to neighbors and safety precautions. Four canvassing efforts are strategically conducted throughout the academic year based on student events in the Kent community.

The university's Community Relations supervises all Portage County Municipal Court (Kent Branch) and the university's Office of Student Conduct ordered community service. The community service sanction is intended to be an educational experience for the student with a positive outcome to a less than acceptable act. The Community Relations office ensures that the students fully complete their time in accordance with the policies of the two referring agencies.

The Kent Police Department (KPD) and the Kent State University Police Department (KSUPD) enjoy a cooperative working relationship, which has proven to be mutually beneficial. There are several special events that require KSUPD's assistance and cooperation to ensure a safe and tactically sound operation. The end of KSU's spring semester sparks college parties in residential areas, e.g., "College-fest". These unsanctioned block parties are advertised and attended by college age participants and can lead to large crowds, noise and safety concerns. An appropriate police presence is needed to keep these events safe which requires the pooled resources of the City and University police departments.

Halloween and St. Patrick's Day are other large scale unsanctioned events that draw crowds and require diligent planning and presence for public safety. Other special events include sanctioned parades and road races that involve dual areas of responsibility and jurisdiction. Many of these events cater to the Kent State student population such as the Homecoming Parade, Bowman Cup 5K Race, and The Black Squirrel 5K Race.

City and University police routine train together on various disciplines and enforcement tactics. These co-training opportunities include using campus locations to practice defensive tactics, active shooter Incidents and Alert Lockdown Inform Counter Evacuate (A.L.I.C.E.) instructor training.

The City and University police have adopted "joint patrol districts" in neighborhoods that have a large number of student rental units. These areas include the Crain to Main triangle North of campus and the Lincoln, Summit, DePeyster, Main St. square to the West of campus. The joint patrol agreement allows University officers to patrol, initiate, enforce, and report incidents in these areas without needing to wait for a mutual aid call.

The City and University police collaborate in several ways in the areas of communications infrastructure, dispatch services and records management. For over thirty years, both departments have dispatched police services on a shared VHF radio frequency. Each department owns and maintains interconnected portions of the same two-way radio system that provides radio and emergency warning siren coverage over the entire city.

Since 2006, Kent police have shared the University's computer-aided dispatch and records management platforms as well. This shared software platform allows officers from both departments instant access to the activity and databases of the other department via their dispatch centers, and desktop and vehicle mounted computers. The shared platform also allows either dispatch center to serve as a fully capable emergency backup for the other, should one suffer a catastrophic failure or natural disaster.

University students assist Kent Parks and Recreation Department with annual family Halloween celebration and annual sports facility use/events.

Students assist Kent Parks and Recreation Department with annual two-day city art fair as children's game and recreation station greeters, etc.

Hundreds of KSU students assist with annual leaf raking, yard clean-up projects for seniors in the city. In addition, students from the University construction technology major assist with ramp building and minor home repairs.

Students provide an afterschool tutoring program at the Junction, a community center serving students living in poverty.

Students volunteer each Saturday at local construction sites and at the Habitat Re-Store in Kent. In addition to volunteering, Habitat KSU conducts a major fund-raising effort (fashion show) to benefit Kent's Habitat for Humanity and each fall partners with students from the fashion design school.

The University central kitchen provides 160 hot dinner meals each week (year-round) to those in need, serviced by Kent Social Services. In addition, nutrition education lessons and cooking lessons are provided to clients.

Each Saturday KSU students volunteer at the Kent Farmer's Market. They provide cooking demonstrations using local produce and products and provide nutrition guidance. In addition, the students assist local farmers with gleaning excess produce during summer months – this produce is then used to feed local individuals in need.

Through the Super Service Saturday program students provide service to a variety of Kent non-profits including Kent Social Services, Habitat for Humanity, Freedom House, Coleman Professional Services, Longcoy Elementary School, Stow Glen

Retirement Village, Miller House, KentWay and more. In addition, staff and students from University residential communities are paired with local non-profits to engage in ongoing service relationships.

KSU partners with the City's local storm water program to engage in river-clean-up days 3 times each year.

**The Bottom Line:** Kent and Kent State University have developed a national reputation as a “best in class” example of a town/gown partnership, from a \$100 million dollar portfolio of transformative infrastructure projects, to routine day-to-day coordination in responding to concerns, and a new emphasis on the synergistic potential resulting from expanding and multiplying the University's economic and service impacts for the betterment of the Kent community. This synergy is built on the belief that the City and University do their best work together, and the more that they do together, the better they get at it.

**B** Uncertainty Factor: (B) There has been a sustained effort by the State to reshape public higher education and although KSU remains one of the highest performing public universities in Ohio, there is a degree of uncertainty over what further legislative actions may be on the horizon that could impact a critical partner in the town/gown partnership. Given KSU's present good financial standing, we don't anticipate any immediate restructuring of KSU's role in Kent.



## Government Performance

**Organizational Context:** The City of Kent is a full-service city that was incorporated in 1867. The City is governed by its charter, which was first adopted in 1963, and has been reviewed every 5 years and amended by the voters over time. Under the Ohio constitution, the City may exercise all powers of local self-government to the extent it is not in conflict with applicable State laws.

Kent's charter provides for a Council-Manager form of government and legislative authority is vested in a nine-member Council. A mayor is elected by the voters and serves as President of Council in a ceremonial capacity. All of the officials are elected for four-year terms. The mayor and three Council members are elected on an at-large basis. The six remaining Council members are elected from their respective wards within the city. City Council appoints members to City boards and commissions. The City's chief executive and administrative officer is the City Manager who is appointed by the majority vote of Council.

The City provides a full range of municipal services. These services include police, fire, emergency medical assistance, public health care, recreation programs (including parks), transportation programs, water production, sanitary and storm sewers, trash and recycling (contracted), planning and zoning, and general administration.

The City of Kent is a professionally managed city with 190 full-time employees and 50 part-time employees. As a service organization, 75% of the city's budget is personnel related costs.

**City Service Population:** With a resident population of 27,720, Kent is the largest city in Portage County (out of 4 cities) and is the 54<sup>th</sup> largest city in the State of Ohio.

With a 2024 undergraduate enrollment of 25,530 students at the Kent campus, and 34,012 students region-wide, Kent State University is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest public university in Ohio (behind Ohio State and the University of Cincinnati).

By average age (24.1 years), Kent is ranked as the 4<sup>th</sup> youngest city in Ohio -- behind Miami University's Oxford (21.3 median age), Ohio University's Athens (21.5), Bowling Green (22.5), and Oberlin (22.9).

Approximately 8,000 Kent State alum live in Kent, representing roughly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the resident population.

**City Service Objectives:** The City's administrative objectives include:

- Deliver exceptional public services with a high level of customer service.
- Commit the entire organization to achieve customer satisfaction
- Utilize the latest technological improvements to improve customer information, communication and interaction, e.g., online payment of bills, credit card payments, meter reading, web site, etc.
- Make sound business decisions using data and customer input.
- Develop and institute performance metrics to measure progress towards objectives.
- Create a culture of continuous improvement; provide training in quality improvement techniques.
- Strive to leverage technology to improve productivity and do more with less operational resources.
- Be strategic and market driven in planning and managing public services.
- Work towards full cost accounting of utility services and enterprise funds with rate-based user fees.
- Create an atmosphere of innovation, risk taking and tolerance for failure as an occasional price for improvement.
- Benchmark City operations against best practices to ensure the delivery of the best services at the lowest possible cost.
- Create a culture where things are done right the first time, every time.
- Develop innovative ways to make participation in local government activities possible for all residents and foster a sense of engagement among the citizenry by communicating a common identity, actively seeking insight into the needs of the community and aligning City services with customer expectations.

**Strategic Planning:** Strategic planning is Kent's method for engaging the community to work together to figure out where it wants to go, what paths can take it there, and how to know when it arrived.

It's a customized process to inventory assets, resources, conditions and opportunities, and integrate them into a winning formula for Kent. There are no right or wrong answers in strategic planning, just different directions unique to the Kent community.

The measure of success is not in the complexity of the plan but in its fit and ability to be put to work. This isn't planning for planning sake; it's planning with the purpose of getting something done. Getting things done depends upon rallying local resources and community leadership for the common purpose of the future of our hometown – and that's what a good strategic plan does.

Strategic planning starts with our mission, vision and values. From there, as a community we set goals and identify strategies that we think can achieve those goals. The City staff then develops action plans (who will do what and when) to implement those strategies, and lastly the City Council funds those action plans (people and dollars) through the annual budget process.

Being strategic is as much about choosing what not to do as it is choosing what to do. With so many diverse public services the City's mission can be a mile wide – which means we have to work extra hard to stay focused, fight against mission creep, and make sure everything we do is aligned with the goals of our community all of the time.

Aiming and sustaining the path towards our true north isn't easy. Not a day goes by when our alignment isn't challenged by unforeseen circumstances. We struggle with learning how to say no to good opportunities that may not be the best fit with our immediate strategic objectives.

Most people understand that trying to do everything for everyone is the fastest way to get nothing done but that level of strategic discipline is tough to muster in public service. Who are you going to say no to? To some extent, everything is important to someone, but we have to use our strategic plan as a filter to keep focused only on what's most important.

It's a tool for us to manage our way towards progress rather than relying on dreaming and hoping for the best. Someday, Tomorrow, and Eventually are the worst times to start planning – and that's why we make sure planning is a part of what we do everyday.

Everyday planning requires disciplined thought to plan the work and disciplined action to work the plan. Achieving this level of discipline takes practice – it's not a special session at an annual retreat, it's a year-round job.

Planning is not about predicting the future; it's about preparing for the future. It's having a strategy for all seasons. It's contingencies, options and back-up plans for when the real world doesn't follow the script. It's believing that the best way to survive a crisis is to avoid it altogether.

It's reconciling future and present needs, balancing fiscal pressures, and protecting the public welfare -- all while maintaining the public trust. With nothing short of our future at stake we plan to rise to meet these challenges every day.



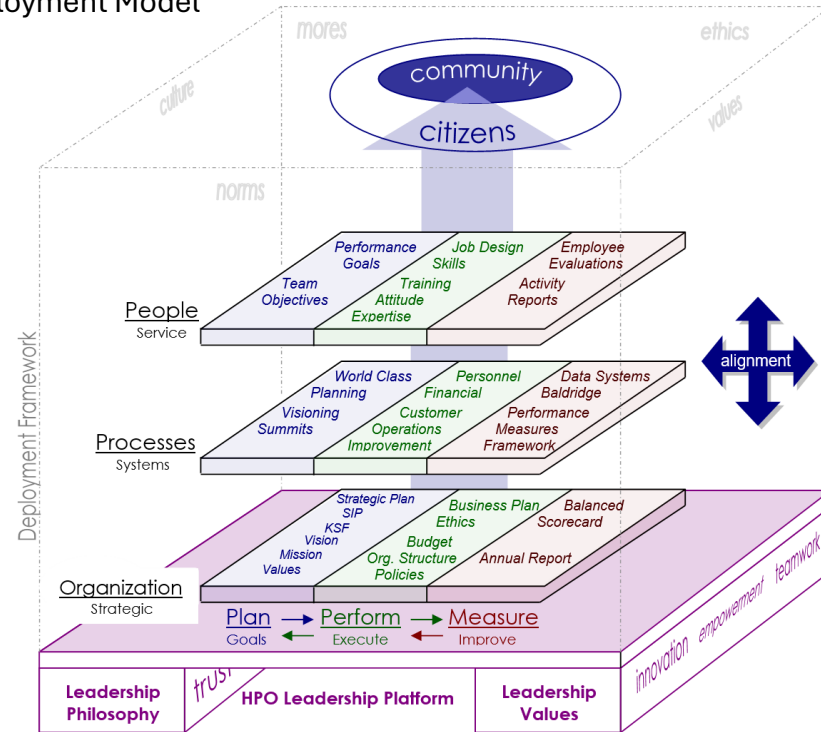
**Strategic Deployment Model:** The municipal organization for Kent consists of diverse business units (i.e., Police Department, Fire Department, Public Service, Finance, Human Resources, etc.) that operate across a wide range of independent service areas. Each city department contends with the pressures of expanding service areas, increasing service demands and rising performance expectations while competing for limited organizational resources. In this dynamic environment it is easy for the organization to lose focus, but the achievement of the city's mission ultimately depends upon a centralizing vision that is capable of sustaining alignment of purpose across all levels of the organization.

Strategies, plans and tactics may change but organizational direction must remain anchored by the City's vision and that vision must serve as an organizing principle for decisions made throughout the organization every day. Sustaining that focus is the principal function of leadership, and in today's municipal environment, leadership has become a part of everyone's job. Leadership talent and responsibility are not bound by rank, and leadership opportunities exist at every level of city government, so the City has worked hard to expose employees to leadership concepts and to develop a framework that facilitates leadership efforts by everyone in the organization.

Leadership theory is only as valuable as the action it produces, and in that spirit the City created a "Strategic Deployment" Model to provide employees with a framework where theories can be put to work. The Model offers a visual representation of how the city's leadership philosophies, business strategies, management systems and job duties combine to create an environment where the employees and the organization can succeed. The Model is designed in a 3-dimensional format to reflect the depth of perspective that employees must maintain in order to be effective leaders in today's multi-layered organizational reality.

The Model provides cross-sectional views inside the organization to illustrate how the disparate services, organizational layers, and employee activities are in fact bound together by shared values, common purposes and consistency of practices. The deployment framework is intended to infuse the work culture with a bias for action, where employees are empowered with both the knowledge and authority necessary to make the right decisions for their work units and the organization as a whole. The framework is available for employees to use to engage the full capacity of the organization so that it is capable of simultaneously recognizing and responding to changes in the service market without losing focus on strategic community priorities.

## Kent Strategic Deployment Model



High performance doesn't just happen – it is the by-product of employee talents being maximized in an organizational environment that serves as a catalyst for growth and improvement. In raising the bar on performance successful organizations have demonstrated an uncommon resilience that reflects the influence of superior leadership deployment strategies.

In order to drive performance to higher levels in Kent, the city is working to cultivate a leadership ethic built around employee empowerment, collaboration, trust, teamwork, innovation, and employee initiative. It is believed that the heights reached in organizational performance is in direct proportion to the depth of supporting values systems – and in organizational terms that translates into spending time to instill the values, culture and work environment that was capable of elevating performance.

Residents understandably want the best of both worlds – they want to keep all that is good about their community and lose the bad. The art of progress in communities is to preserve order amid change and to likewise preserve change amid order. Governance is at its best when it can frame the discussions to produce an understanding of what the common good and common bad look like and then affect the necessary strategic actions to fulfill the community objectives.

**Strategic Performance Management Framework:** The academic influence of Kent State University, combined with an educated and engaged public, led to the preparation of numerous community-based strategic planning documents, including the national award-winning Kent Bicentennial Plan, as well as the 1994 Strategic Development Plan, Vision 2020 Report, the Green Corridor Empowerment plan, and the more recent downtown revitalization plan.

In order to ensure systemic progress towards community goals, and the effective execution of these plans, the city administration developed a strategic performance management framework that is designed to align city services, projects and resources with the objectives identified by the community, and adopted by city leadership, as strategic community priorities.

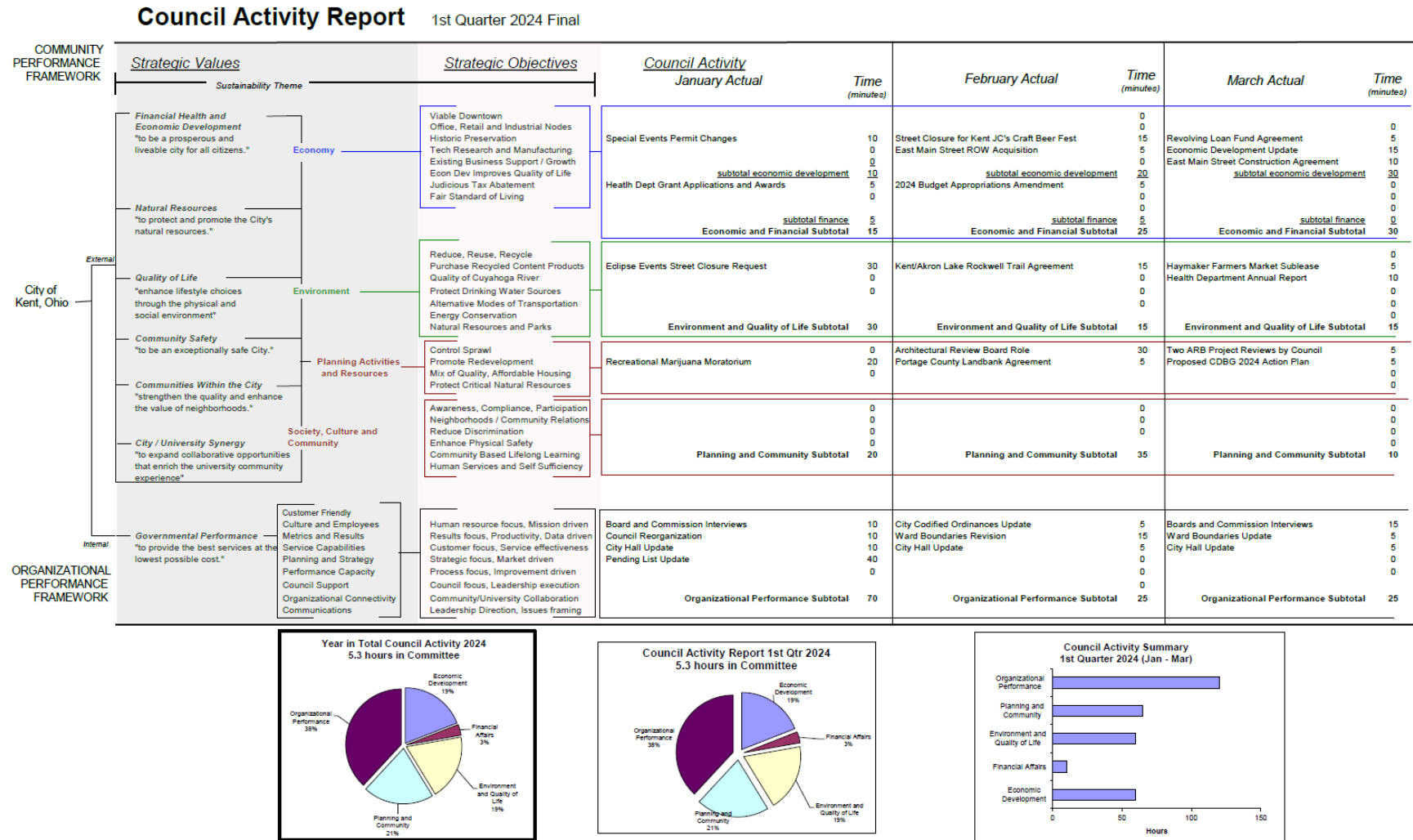
The framework tracks the organizational focus each month, quarter and year, outlining progress made towards the achievement of strategic objectives. With so many competing responsibilities within the reach of the City's mission, this tracking framework provides a means to ensure that the City's resources are staying focused on the primary goals of the community.

The categories within the strategic framework emerged from hundreds of hours of community meetings, council meetings, survey data, market analysis and staff input. The broad strategic categories/priorities include:

*the community  
priorities defining  
who we are, where  
we are going, and  
knowing when we  
have arrived.*

- Financial Health and Economic Development  
"to be a prosperous and livable city for all citizens"
- Natural Resources  
"to protect and promote the City's natural resources"
- Quality of Life  
"to enhance lifestyle choices through physical and social environment"
- Community Safety  
"to be an exceptionally safe city"
- Communities within the City  
"to strengthen the quality and enhance the value of neighborhoods"
- City / University Synergy  
"to expand collaborative opportunities that enrich the community experience"
- Governmental Performance  
"to provide the best services at the lowest possible cost"

The core priorities are the organizing principles upon which the elements of the strategic framework were built, as illustrated below:



These reports are compiled quarterly and published/presented annually in the City Manager's Strategic Performance Report to City Council. The full update includes statistical analysis, trend and trajectory evaluation, outcomes inventory, comparative assessment, and short and mid-term forecasts for the subsequent 1-5 years.

At the macro-level, the historical trend data illustrates Council's ability to shift across priorities within the City's overall strategic plan in response to evolving local conditions:

2008 to 2010 -- an early focus on City Finances ("belt tightening") and Economic Development ("grow the tax base") during the Great Recession period.

2011 to 2016 -- The success of the redevelopment efforts gradually provided Council with resources to refocus on Safety and Service needs, e.g., more sidewalk and street repairs, more safety personnel, new sidewalk snow clearing, pilot sewer lateral funding, new neighborhood grants, new Police Station.

2017 to 2018 -- As Kent's revitalization matured, Council was able to increase development and maintenance standards and zoning regulations to protect neighborhoods; invest in initiatives to expand quality of life opportunities (Main Street Kent, social/cultural events); and take extra steps to protect lifestyle choices (LGBT) and expand citizen engagement (One Kent, Better Block, East Main Street, SR261) – resulting in Planning, Community Development occupying the majority of Council's Committee time.

2019 to 2024 – The unexpected arrival of COVID necessitated refining and adapting City services, including expanding public health and safety services. That shift in focus inspired new investments in paramedicine and police body cameras, as well as adjustments in employee recruitment, retention and salaries to compete in the constricting job market. Much of the focus during the last 5 years was sharpening and realigning organizational capabilities in rapidly changing conditions – which resulted in Organizational Performance occupying the majority of Council's legislative focus in Committee.

## **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.

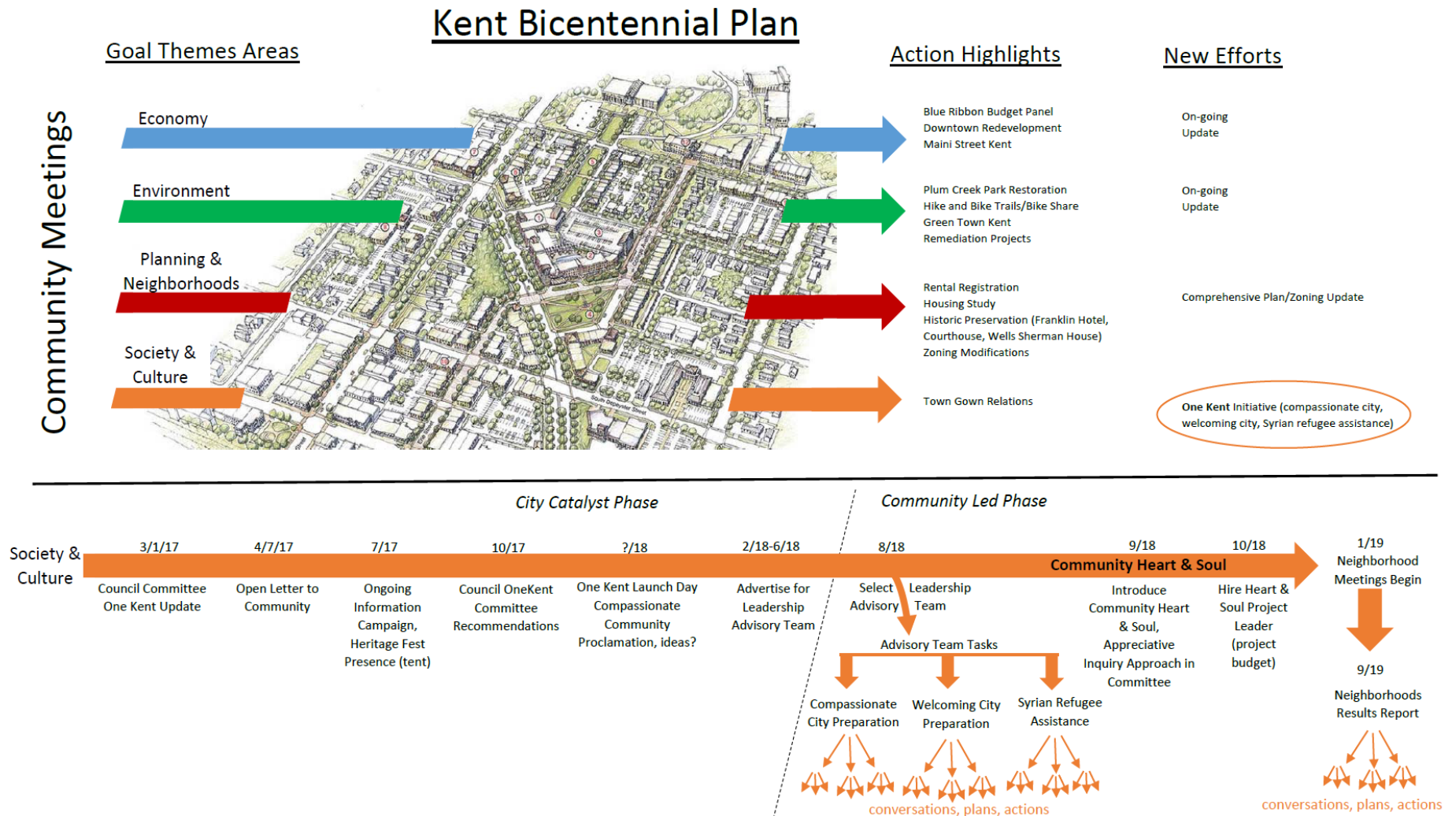
The dramatic reshaping of the physical infrastructure created a community inflection moment, with Council seeking a way to gather residents around the ‘community table’ and have conversations for how to best integrate the new “hardscape” with Kent’s “connective tissue” -- its community culture and values. 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.”

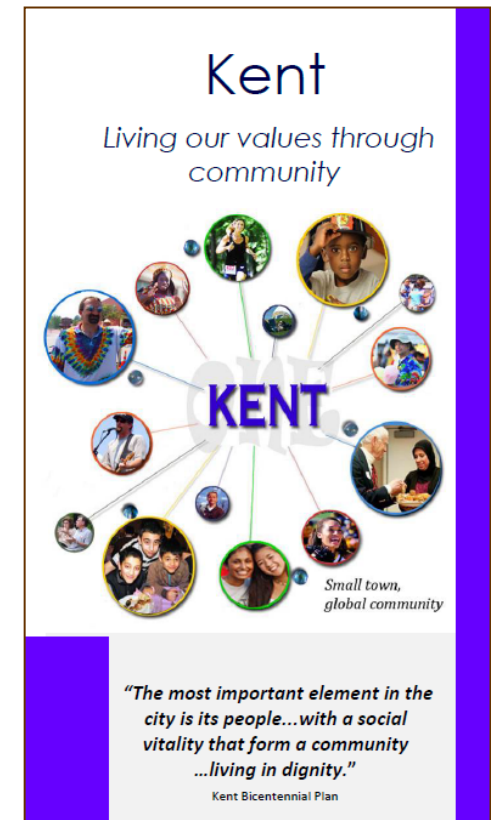
The “One Kent” initiative was rolled out in 2018 along with a renewed focus on neighborhood enrichment and a community wide zoning code update focusing on optimizing livability and quality of life elements that directly impacted residents and the neighborhoods where they live.

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.”*



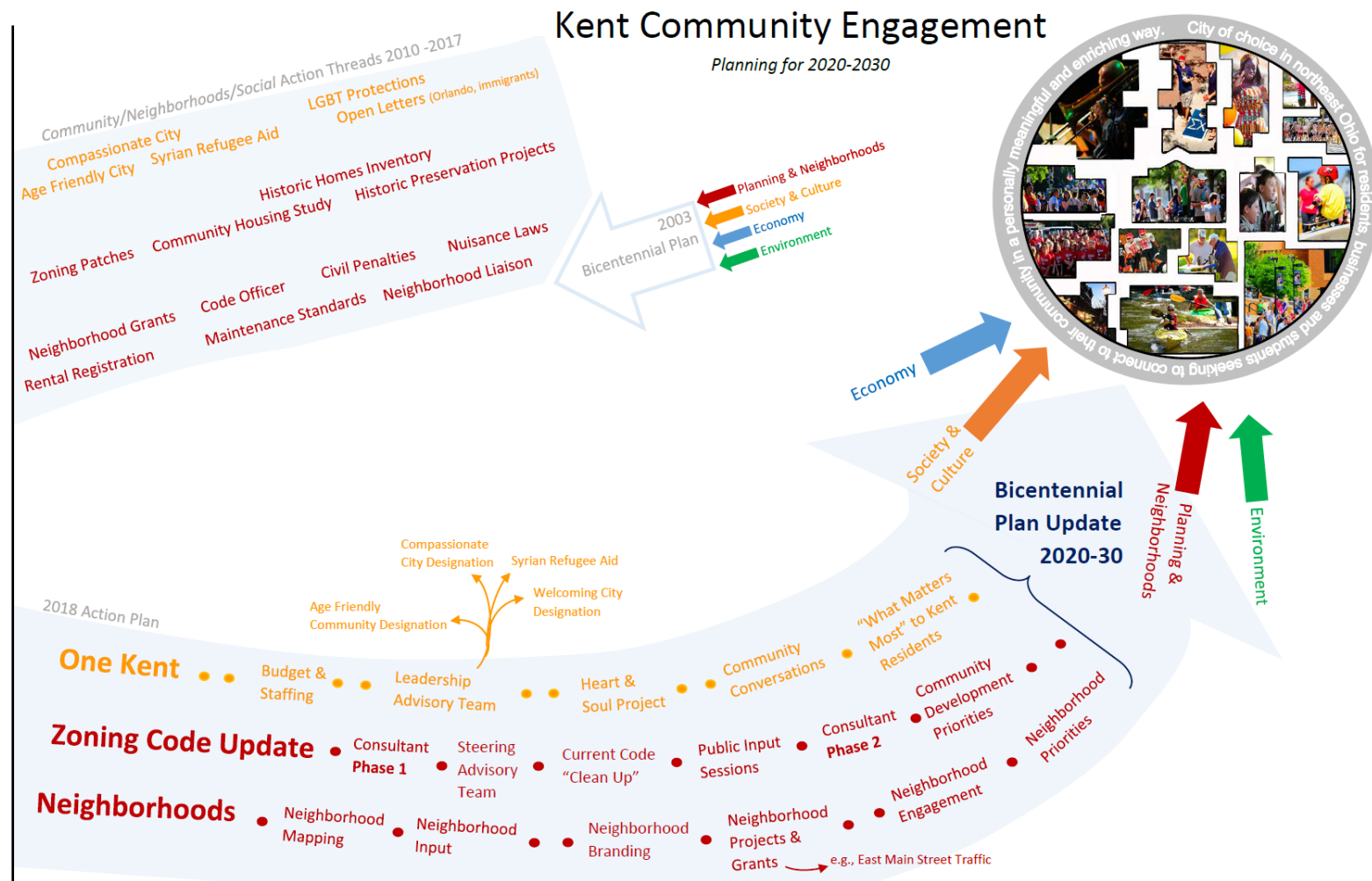
**Neighborhood Enrichment Part 2:** The staff had been operating under the umbrella of Neighborhood Enrichment since 2007 to improve the quality of life in City neighborhoods. The early efforts were focused on adding tools to the "toolkit" to be able to more effectively intervene on the neighborhood's 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.

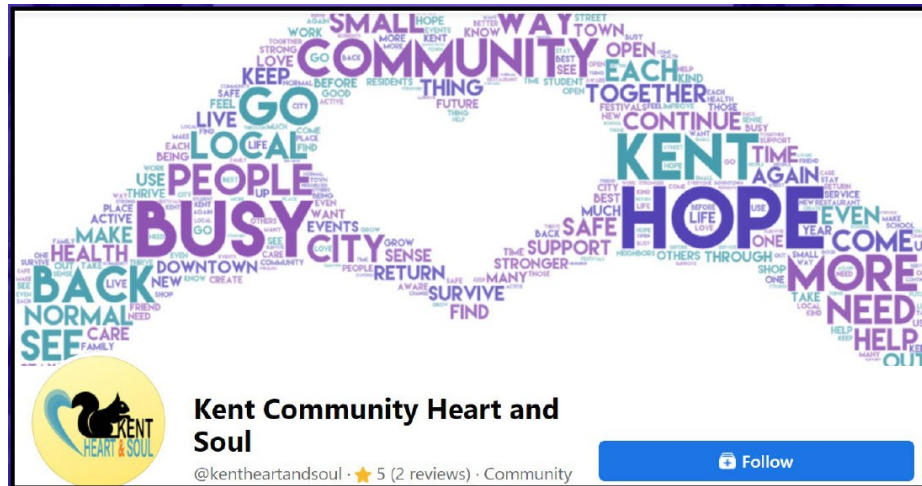


**Kent Heart & Soul Community Building/Planning Project:** In the course of ramping up the One Kent initiative, staff discovered a community-based planning model called “Community Heart & Soul” that had been used in over 100 communities in 19 states, including Ohio. Heart & Soul had a proven methodology 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.

### **Infrastructure Investment Management: 5-Year Capital Plan, Utility Rate Stabilization Plan**

Public infrastructure is the largest class of investments that Kent has made in pursuit of community prosperity. Like any successful investment strategy, managing the City's infrastructure portfolio requires balancing risks against the City's income position, asset base and goals. In this process, asset allocation decisions can be aligned with strategic objectives and infrastructure equity can be leveraged to yield dividends in public safety, environmental protection, economic development and quality of life.

Infrastructure makes strategic outcomes possible. When infrastructure performs at the highest levels it is capable of being leveraged to drive economic activity and enhance quality of life. Likewise, poor performing infrastructure is equally capable of impeding economic growth, impairing quality of life and undercutting efforts to stimulate community vitality. The City's CIP creates a framework for matching resource inputs to community outputs.

The City has established a multi-year planning process as a framework to evaluate and address short- and long-term capital needs. With more capital outlay needs than available resources can support at any one time, this framework serves as a decision matrix for maximizing resources and selecting projects based on Council policies, priorities and sound financial principles.

The use of a planning framework enabled the City to outperform its financial position, leverage external funding sources and phase projects to optimize the mix of internal funding and debt funding based on changing market conditions and project needs.

The multi-year focus creates the continuity needed to focus resources towards long term strategic objectives in a decision environment that is typically dominated by the short-term pressures of the annual budget cycle. This continuity does not mean that the CIP is rigid and non-adaptive. Rather, the CIP provides a platform to understand the choices and consequences of possible budgetary changes before making decisions – which is what sound fiscal management and strategic planning is all about.

The effectiveness of the CIP framework is measured by its ability to provide predictability, stability and financial sustainability for the replacement, upgrade and development of critical public facilities and infrastructure. In this way, the CIP offers a fiscally responsible approach to reconciling the gap between the mounting costs of critical infrastructure needs and affordability or the ability of the customer to pay for those needs.

In 2011, City Council adopted a multi-year rate stabilization plan for water and sewer utilities that is designed to reduce the volatility that results from rate spikes following periods of rate increase deferrals. By allocating rate increases annually, the multi-year rate plan is a more predictable and reliable funding source.

The Five-Year Capital Improvement Program and Utility Rate Plan are working documents reflecting the dynamics of an ever-changing environment that requires constant monitoring and adjustment as priority needs change over time. This process needs to be revisited and updated annually with the understanding that the plans may need to be modified from time to time in reaction to the transforming needs of the Kent community.

Between 2022 to 2025, the City has invested \$1.5 million in state-of-the-art technological platforms for enhanced data management, transparency and customer service improvements for utility billing, community development online services, work order systems, automated time and attendance, 911 redundancy/call stations/software upgrades, public safety radio network enhancements, Health department administrative functionality, new Council/staff agenda/minutes/streaming platform, City web site upgrades and social media.

The City is proud to be the recipient of the “Ohio Auditor of State Award with Distinction” for 5 years in a row. Less than 3% of the 6,000 government entities in Ohio achieve this high standard of excellence in government finance management.

**The Bottom Line:** Different cities have different levels of needs for city services and resources available to fund those needs. Cities like Kent with higher poverty rates, lower home ownership, higher multi-family populations, wider age distribution and a large public University have high service needs and less resources to meet those needs. To counter those socio/demographic limitations, Kent has focused on building management systems and decision frameworks to identify public investments in areas promising maximum rates of return and growth through partnerships, leveraging external funding, and optimizing strategic opportunities.

**B+** Forecast Rating: (B+) What Kent lacks in financial reserves, it makes up through business acumen and strategic discipline, with systems and methods in place to guide the community along the trajectory towards prosperity. Those systems and decision frameworks rely on a culture of constructive dialogue and collaborative spirit which in the increasingly polarized and politicized public/social arena will be tested – particularly as new members of Council/staff/partners/community members step in to leadership positions without the benefit of the institutional knowledge and experience that led Kent through its most transformative era in history.