

Program Excellence Award for Outstanding Partnerships: Public- Private Partnerships

POPULATIONS 50,000 AND UNDER



Fairfield, Ohio

ICMA's Award for Public-Private Partnerships recognizes a local government and its private sector partner (including nongovernmental organizations) that have demonstrated the value of public-private partnerships as an effective technique for introducing greater efficiency, innovation, and civic awareness into a variety of local government services. The 2004 recipient of this award in the 50,000-and-under population category is the city of Fairfield, Ohio, and City Manager Arthur E. Pizzano for the Fairfield Village Green project.



Lifeside interactive bronze sculptures adorn the Fairfield Village Green park area.



ARTHUR E. PIZZANO

From the time Fairfield, Ohio (pop. 45,000) became a city in 1955, its land use pattern was typical of many post-World War II suburbs in that

it developed several disparate commercial areas but had no identifiable downtown business district. In the early 1990s, city officials sought to designate a "town center" in hopes of stimulating downtown development and fostering civic pride.

The logical site for the town center was a centrally located area at the intersection of two major roadways, Pleasant Avenue and Nilles Road. Although all four quadrants at that intersection needed improvements, the southwest quadrant contained an undeveloped 120-acre farm tract with sporadic commercial development lining the two roadways. This property offered the best potential for the kind of project that would spark development in the other three quadrants.

In 1996 a local residential developer, who had acquired the farm at a sheriff's sale, proposed a mixed-use development plan to include residential, recreational, and commercial facilities. City staff worked closely with the developer to design a planned unit development (PUD) of

160 in-town family homes. The developer also agreed to donate a two-acre parcel in the center, which would be used as a public park and would serve as the focus for the town center concept. The proposed development was named the "Village Green."

But there was a problem: while the property could be reached from Nilles Road and adjoining residential areas to the west, earlier development and a major drainage ditch blocked access from Pleasant Avenue, the major north-south artery. Moreover, the drive-through lanes of a local bank blocked the ideal access point for a new roadway into the development. A solution came when the city partnered with the developer and the bank to secure the needed access point on Pleasant Avenue. Fairfield contributed \$600,000 to the acquisition and demolition of the bank, enabling the developer to properly align an entrance to the development with the existing roadway to the east. The bank relocated as the first tenant in the Village Green area.

For the park, the city retained an architect to develop plans for an amphitheatre, a playground, a fountain and water features, grassy knolls, walkways, and even a stone footbridge. After the park was completed in the fall of 2000, bronze sculptures were added. Overall, Fairfield invested approximately

\$2 million in park infrastructure and improvements.

Attractively designed commercial development has added desirable character and balance to the downtown as well. A new 72,000-square-foot, full-service supermarket and 195,000 square feet of adjacent retail stores, restaurants, and professional offices are fully occupied after just two years. On the 8.8-acre site where the supermarket once stood, the city plans to build a new 45,000-square-foot Justice Center along with a mixed-use development. The architecture will complement the high-quality image initiated in the Village Green development. And careful attention to traffic mitigation, buffers, lighting, and so forth has prevented anticipated negative traffic impacts on the existing residential areas, enabling the community to embrace the commercial component as integral to the overall fabric of the neighborhood.

While the concept of the Village Green and town center has attracted state and national attention from a variety of sources, including the new urbanist movement, the most significant outcome has been the community spirit evident within the Village Green. Annual July Fourth activities have drawn thousands to the area, and arts festivals are promoted

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regionally. The Thursday night
“Groovin’ on the Green” concert
series at the outdoor amphitheater is
supplemented with community the-
ater events as well as by Friday night
“Movies in the Park,” sponsored by
the Fairfield fire department. This
new sense of community and civic
pride, brought about by the develop-
ment of Fairfield’s Village Green, is a
testament to the commitment and
long-term planning that characterized
the partnership of public, private, and
nonprofit entities in the Village Green
development. ■