

Walton Main Street Strategic Plan

PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

History of Walton

Walton, located approximately 20 miles south of Cincinnati, Walton traces its roots to a settlement that began in the 1790s. Originally known as Gaines Cross Roads, the Kentucky Legislature renamed the town Walton in 1840. It was at one time a major transportation hub and north-south portal of not only Boone County, but also for the entire Greater Cincinnati region. The town's early development was closely tied to Abner Gaines, who built a striking brick house (c. 1814) just north of today's downtown. Gaines operated a tavern on the property for a number of years and founded a stagecoach line that carried passengers between Cincinnati and Lexington on the Covington-Lexington Turnpike. This turnpike eventually became U.S. 25 (Dixie Highway), which brought a great deal of vehicular traffic to Walton's Main Street – the core of town. Furthermore, two separate railroad lines were built through Walton, including the L&N (1860s) and Cincinnati, New Orleans, and Texas Pacific (1870s – now Southern RR), bringing further traffic and economic opportunities to the historic downtown area. While used almost exclusively as freight lines now, at one point these two rail lines offered regular passenger service with two depots being located on Main Street near the intersection with Depot Street.

Prior to Interstate 75 (I-75) opening in the early 1960s, traffic heading north and south to and from Cincinnati would pass through the historic Walton downtown on Main Street (Dixie Highway/U.S. 25). Once opened, I-75 essentially served as a bypass to Dixie Highway (Main Street) and created a new threat to the businesses that depended on the traffic to stay open. In 1961, an interchange to I-75 was built on the road known today as the Mary Grubbs Highway. Instead of passing through downtown Walton, most traffic would now never see it. Only the occasional car exiting the highway and venturing over to Main Street would augment the local traffic. The impact was immediate and from that point on, the focus would be on how to keep businesses in downtown as commercial activity and development began to shift toward the interstate highway interchanges. The situation has only accelerated as the Walton Towne Center develops and expands.

Walton Downtown (WD) Zoning District

In 1997, the Walton Downtown (WD) zoning district was established through the creation and adoption of Article 24 "Walton Downtown District (WD)" of the Boone County Zoning Regulations. The zoning for the properties along Main Street from Old Beaver Road south to just south of the Walton Branch of the Boone County Public Library was changed from Commercial Two (C-2) to Walton Downtown District (WD) on the Official Zoning Map at the same time (**see Figure 1**). This WD zoning district was the result of months of study by the Main Street Committee, City of Walton, and Boone County Planning Commission staff beginning in 1996. The Committee recognized that the Main Street area had a broad range of residential, office, and commercial uses

in a small town environment, and that the area's character and needs did not correlate to the requirements of the C-2 zone in place at that time. The WD zoning district was designed to encourage continued growth of the mixed-use central business district in a manner that maintained Walton's small town character along Main Street. In addition, streetscape improvements were made to Main Street in that same general time frame.



Figure 1 - Walton Downtown (WD) Zoning District

Walton South Main Street National Register Historic District and Gaines Tavern

The Walton South Main Street National Register Historic District was established in 2005. The 31-acre district is linear in nature, straddling south Main Street from Depot Street south to the Norfolk Southern overpass (see Figure 2). It originally included 47 primary buildings, mostly residences built between c. 1900 and 1925, along with the 1949 Walton Christian Church and 1922 Walton Methodist Church. Also included are three houses previously listed in the National Register: the Bruce Wallace House (67 S. Main), the Edwards House (143 S. Main) and the Chandler House (167 S. Main). In 2007, the city purchased bronze plaques to recognize each historic property in the South Main Street district. Since its creation, two contributing structures in the South Main Street Historic District have been demolished: the Baptist Parsonage (49 S. Main) and the Vernon James House (149 S. Main).

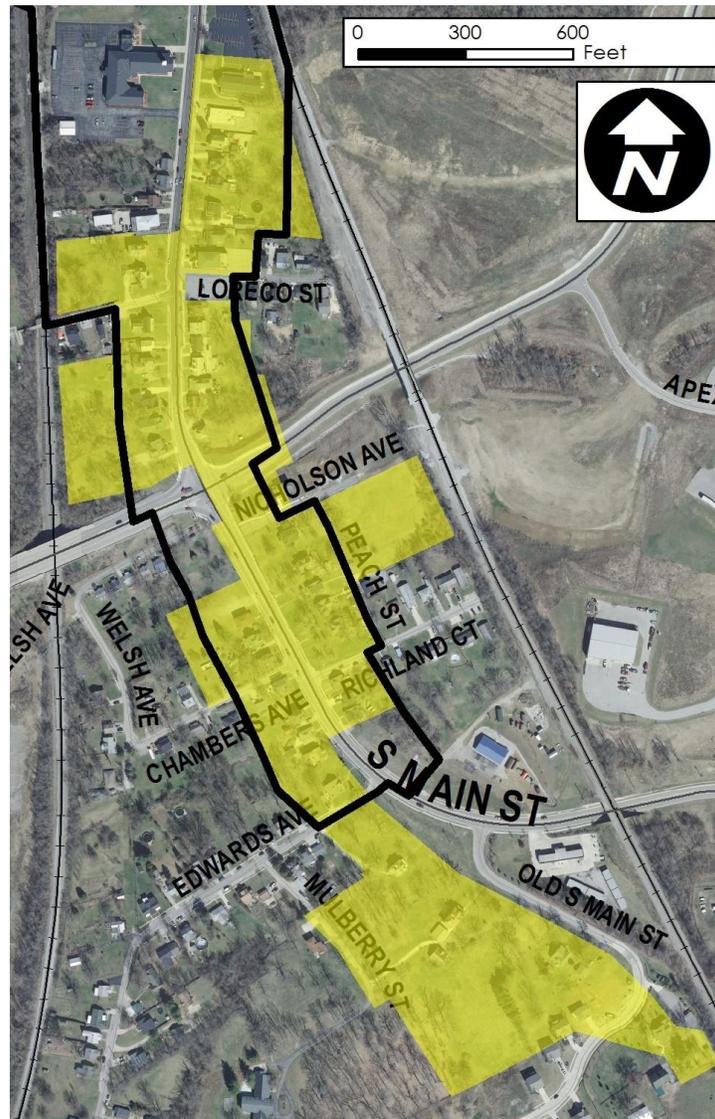


Figure 2 - Walton South Main Street National Register Historic District

More recently, the City of Walton acquired the Abner Gaines House, which is located at the north end of town outside the South Main Historic District and current study area. The house has been expertly rehabilitated as a house museum and is being operated by the City and Friends of Gaines Tavern as the Gaines Tavern History Center, with regular Sunday visiting hours and numerous seasonal special events.

Walton Towne Center Zoning Map Amendment

In 2005, a zone change was requested, and ultimately approved, by the City of Walton for the commercial section of the Walton Towne Center development on Mary Grubbs Highway located between Main Street and I-75, just a quarter of a mile away from the study area for this plan (see **Figure 3**). The zone change was for the property to change from Industrial One (I-1) to Commercial

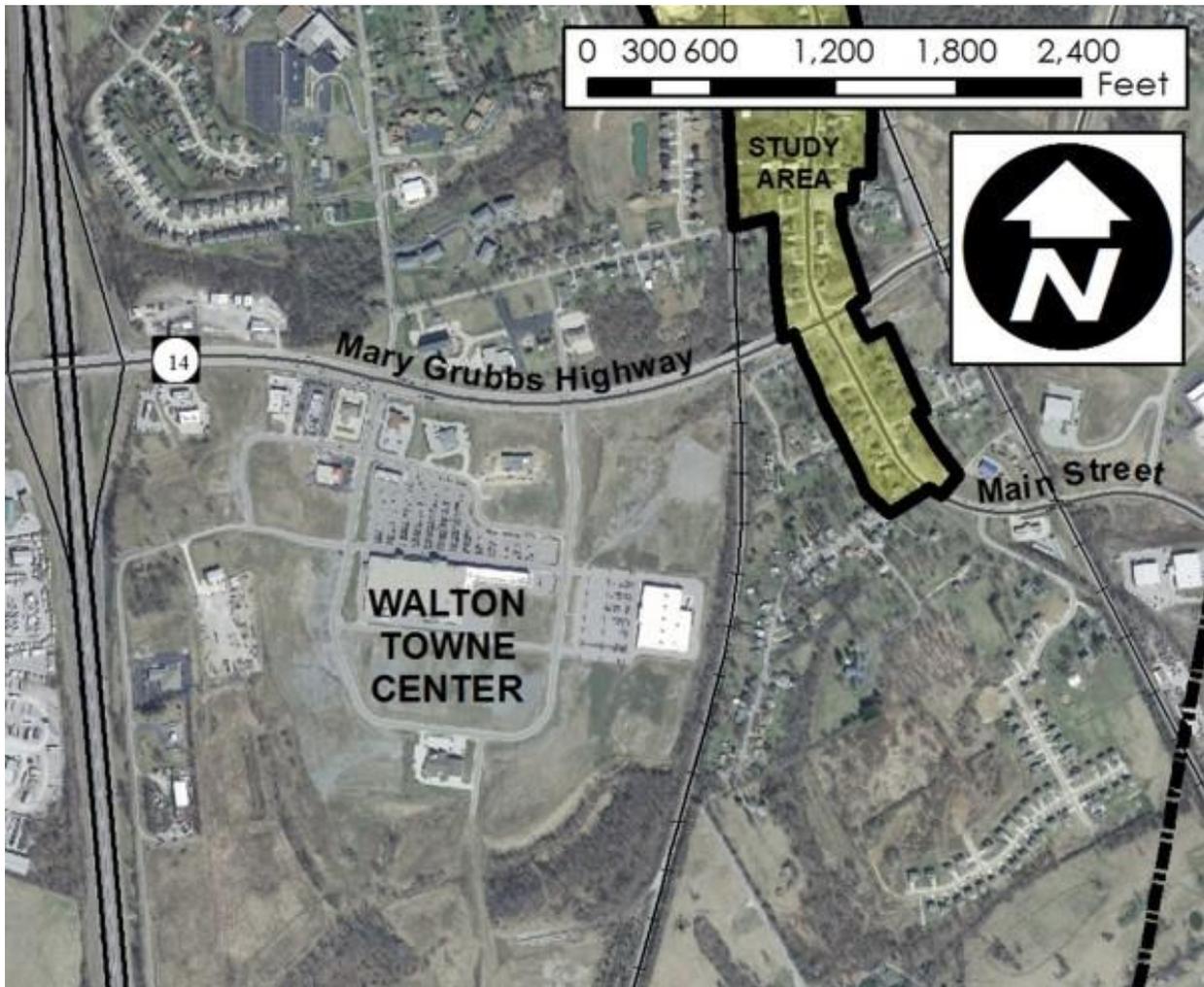


Figure 3 - Walton Towne Center

Two (C-2) and encompassed approximately 130 acres. The I-1 zoning district was retained for approximately 75 acres in the southern portion of the Walton Towne Center development area. In a letter that accompanied the application, the City of Walton stated that “the City feels this (zone change) will help to accomplish our goal of bringing a grocery store to the City.” The effect of the zone change, however, presented the possibility of negative impacts upon the historic Main Street business district. The Towne Center would provide several shopping options concentrated in a small area disconnected from the Main Street district, and possibly force the closure of similar, smaller-scale businesses along Main Street that may not be able to compete with the scale and selection available at the Towne Center.

Purpose of this Plan

Walton’s historic Main Street is in danger of being marginalized by a series of bypasses (especially I-75), new developments outside the Main Street corridor (Walton Towne Center), and an aging building stock. This plan will serve as a guide to help Walton’s historic Main Street remain relevant and vibrant in light of the changes that have impacted it over the past several decades. This plan will attempt to put forth achievable strategies to help the historic Main Street not only survive with the surrounding developments, but also thrive as a unique entity on its own. It is also the goal of this plan to reinforce the qualities which have made historic Main Street the long-standing center of the City of Walton in spite of the changes and challenges it confronts.