

## Changing Columbus

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- Photos by Todd Yarrington



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Guy Worley and the nonprofit development organization he leads are helping to reshape Downtown, one monumental project at a time.

Guy Worley has climbed an impressive list of mountains. The CEO and president of Columbus Downtown Development Corp. and

Capitol South Community Urban Redevelopment Corp. started with Mount Rainier late in the 1990s and has since climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Hood, Mount Shasta, Mount Adams, Mount St. Helens and the Pico de Orizaba, the highest mountain in Mexico. Never let it be said that Worley denies himself a challenge.

Today, however, he's not climbing a mountain. He's taking a walk in the park.

Specifically, the Scioto Mile—one of the projects spearheaded by the CDDC/Capitol South. As the wiry 53-year-old leads a tour around a transformed riverfront, he sets a quick pace. Striding along the ribbon of pavers extending from Broad Street to Rich Street above the Scioto River, he points out the shaded swings and benches, the chess tables, the abundant plantings and gently trickling fountains lining the way. "This," Worley says, "is a jewel for our region."

Since the promenade opened a year ago, thousands have rocked for a spell, using the Wi-Fi for their smartphones or laptops or just looking across the river at COSI while eating their lunch. At night, soft lighting creates a romantic mood, something almost Parisian. Worley pauses at the Town Street intersection to point out a prow in the walkway jutting out above the riverbank. It marks the spot where the Town Street Bridge to Franklinton had been, a detail that he says Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman was especially interested to include.

At the southern end of the Scioto Mile, next to the bustling Milestone 229 restaurant, a spectacular 15,000-square-foot fountain in Bicentennial Park shoots streams of water from more than 1,000 jets. In late October, cold weather will shut it down until spring.

Worley turns east from the Scioto Mile up Town Street, now surfaced with pavers recycled from the demolished Town Street Bridge and flanked by innovative bio-retention basins that hold and filter stormwater. On his left is Lifestyle Communities' Annex at River South. Its more than 200 apartments and townhouses are fully leased at rents ranging from \$900 to \$2,190, according to property manager Dan Hand. Just three years ago, it was all parking lots.

On Worley's right is the first project completed by the CDDC, the former Lazarus department store, its 700,000 square feet of office space fully occupied by city, county and state agencies and 2,000 employees. The renovation, finished in 2007, features an inner courtyard with art deco design and lettering. It earned LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, the highest possible rating.

On the ground floor, the Ohio State University Urban Arts Space presents exhibitions of art and dance and music performances by students, as well as public workshops and lectures. Approximately 8,000 square feet of retail space along High Street remains unleased. Worley calls the Lazarus building the cornerstone of all the recent Downtown projects. The renovation cost \$100 million, with \$75 million in public money and \$25 million in private contributions. The building is owned by the city-created RiverSouth Authority.

Worley crosses High Street and strides into Columbus Commons, a 9-acre green space that replaced the hulking 1.2 million square feet of retail space that once was Columbus City Center. Coleman was fond of calling it a "bunker." It's now, in Worley's words, an "urban oasis," with ever-changing plantings from the Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in a dozen locations.



Since its opening in spring 2011, Columbus Commons has been humming with activity. An outdoor stage featuring performances of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra's Picnic with the Pops, Actors' Theatre, Shadowbox and local indie bands has brought thousands of visitors to the park.

At the Rich Street end of the Commons, near BDF Café and Lola's Pizza Shack, are a classic carousel (whimsical hand-carved figures include a dragon and a frog prince) and an outdoor reading room, where the 2nd & 7 Foundation has donated books to thousands of children.

Ryan Miller, former OSU outside linebacker and co-founder of 2nd & 7, says the number of kids has been "phenomenal-unbelievable. We've put books in the hands of children that need them the most." The Columbus Metropolitan Library also furnishes carts of books for adults to read on-site. Throughout the week on the spacious lawns, there are seasonal classes in Zumba, crossfit, boot camp and yoga. Other recreational options include a bocce court and a giant-size chessboard. On Thursdays throughout the summer, a Food Truck Food Court served lunchtime crowds.

Along High Street, construction fencing encloses the site of HighPoint at Columbus Commons, an estimated \$50 million privately funded project of Carter, a diversified real estate company based in Atlanta. Carter paid Capitol South \$2 million for the 2-acre site. Construction on twin six-story apartment buildings with 23,000 square feet of retail space on the first floor began in August, with completion scheduled for late 2013. On the ground level, two signature restaurants yet-to-be-named will have covered outdoor patios facing the park.

Conor McNally, Carter's chief development officer, says the 300 apartments and townhomes with market-rate rentals should attract young professionals in particular. "Across the country," he notes, "young people are interested in living Downtown. Columbus has a head start on that."

One more commercial building site remains at the southeast corner of Columbus Commons, at Rich and Third streets, where Marshall Fields' (then Kaufmann's, then Macy's) had been. Worley says it will be developed when the housing and retail market justifies the investment.

## Nonprofit Partnership

The transformation of downtown Columbus has come out of a public-private partnership involving the mayor's office, Columbus City Council and such major local corporations as American Electric Power, Nationwide and Huntington Bancshares. The partnership involves bankrolling projects as well as planning them.

Like the Lazarus building, the most recent CDDC/Capitol South projects have involved a mix of public and private funds. Phase 1 of Columbus Commons (the park creation and pavilion) cost \$25 million, with \$7 million in public and \$18 million in private money. The \$44 million Scioto Mile was split equally between public and private dollars. Michael Morris, chairman of American Electric Power and chairman of CDDC/Capitol South, estimates the AEP Foundation's contribution to the Scioto Mile between \$10 million and \$20 million. Twenty-three other companies and nonprofits also chipped in.



Not long ago, the CDDC and Capitol South were separate organizations with separate missions. Capitol South was formed by the city in 1974 to redevelop the Downtown area just south of Capitol Square. The nonprofit's major accomplishment was City Center. The nonprofit CDDC, meanwhile, was created in 2002 by Columbus City Council to implement the Downtown Strategic Plan. The two entities merged in 2007.

Today, the private nonprofit development organization has a common 15-member board of directors, seven of whom are appointed by the mayor and one by the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. The board appoints seven members-at-large.

Worley has headed CDDC/Capitol South since January 2007. A Pittsburgh native, Worley earned degrees in economics and public administration at OSU and served as Franklin County administrator and Coleman's chief of staff. "Guy was a great chief of staff for me when he worked here at City Hall," Coleman says, "and he's been a great partner now that he's leading CDDC." Coleman credits Worley's determined approach as a key factor in the success of the new Downtown projects.

Boyce Safford III, Columbus's development director, calls Worley "a wonderful project manager. He does a masterful job of herding the cats." That's no small task, considering the number of different agendas and egos that need to be satisfied when working on such public-private ventures.

Columbus City Council President Andrew Ginther says Worley "makes the best use of resources given to him. There hasn't been anything he's worked on that's not been on the fast track."

Morris remembers when Worley outlined his plans during his first days on the job, after which one of the people in the room remarked, "Boy, that guy sure has a lot of dreams." But, Morris quickly adds, Worley made those dreams come true. Ginther agrees: "We couldn't ask for better leadership."

Now that some initial trepidation (homeless people and panhandlers might take over the parks!) has faded, Columbus Commons and the Scioto Mile-particularly the fountains-have garnered mostly rave reviews. That goes for the public as well as civic and business leaders. Morris admits that at the opening of the fountain, he and Coleman "ran through the water park wearing our business suits."



The awards are piling up, too. In late September, the International Downtown Association recognized the CDDC with a Downtown Pinnacle Award for its work related to the Scioto Mile. Also, the Columbus Landmarks Foundation conferred the 2012 James B. Recchie Design Award jointly to the Scioto Mile and the new Main and Rich street bridges that span the Scioto. In early October, Worley himself was recognized by OSU's John Glenn School of Public Affairs as its outstanding alumnus of the year.

You can't please all the people all the time, of course. There are grumblings about fountain closures caused when a child has an "accident" in the water area. Some visitors also pine for shade at the Commons and wonder why trees haven't been planted. Amy Edwards Taylor, chief operating officer of CDDC/Cap South, says the six-story High Point building will provide shade when complete. Trees, she says, would make the park too shady.

Complaints about the stench from the Scioto River will be solved by the removal of the Main Street dam. Dredged soil will be deposited along the riverbanks, narrowing the width from 600 feet to somewhere between 250 and 270 feet and creating 33 acres of new green space. Natural areas and a bike path are part of the plans for the new acreage.

The total project cost is estimated at \$35.5 million, with \$18 million pledged by the city, \$3 million from private sources and \$5.9 million from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission. Another \$8.6 million remains to be raised.

Worley says the project, which should be done in 2015, will be "transformative." Coleman adds, "The Scioto Greenways project will make the river leaner, cleaner and greener in the years to come."

The OSU Crew Club has already jumped on board and moved its practices to the downtown segment of the Scioto River as of September. More than 120 students are on the men's and women's teams, which are using the city-owned Boat House at Confluence Park as their home base. The club aims to eventually form a Downtown Rowing Club.

## **Peninsula and Parking**

On April 3, Worley and his colleagues got another charge. The mayor, city council and commissioners asked the CDDC/Cap South to take the lead role in developing a strategic plan for the 56-acre

Scioto peninsula, home to COSI, Franklin County Veterans Memorial and a sea of parking lots. Officials would like to see the plan by year's end.

The nonprofit has been conducting stakeholder meetings with community leaders and will hold a public meeting to consider the kinds of housing, cultural amenities and retail and office development that would be desirable. Already, restaurateur Elizabeth Lessner has plans to open the Franklinton Tap Room. The watering hole is in the planning stages, but Lessner hopes to open it by summer 2013.

Also on CDDC/Cap South's to-do list are modifications to Broad and High streets. Metered parking will be in place on High Street by the end of 2012. Randall Bowman of the Columbus Division of Mobility Options says the meters will cost the city \$74,000 plus undetermined installation costs.

On Broad Street, city officials want to reduce the current eight lanes of traffic to accommodate space for pedestrians, bicyclists and landscaping on both sides of the street. In April, city council awarded a \$515,000 contract to Burgess & Niple to devise a plan for a narrower Broad Street, two-way traffic on North Front Street and additional Downtown bike lanes. Bowman anticipates the first Broad Street phase will occur in conjunction with the renovation of the LeVeque Tower. A later phase will include High Street to Marconi Boulevard.

In the meantime, CDDC/Cap South is again preparing to decorate the Lazarus windows along High Street for the holiday season to evoke years past. "People have memories of Downtown that we want to renew," she says.

Beyond fun fountains and twinkling lights, Taylor says programming is essential for the success of Downtown as a whole and Columbus Commons in particular. Recent attractions at the Commons included a simulcast of a Columbus Symphony Orchestra concert on giant LED screens and a planned Harvest Fair Funday featuring hay rides, a hay maze, pumpkin-carving demonstrations and a screening of the movie, "Babe," ending with a fireworks show. Winter will reduce the number of outdoor events, but it won't eliminate them.

The blueprint for all these projects is the 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan, written by elected officials and CDDC/Cap South, with much input from public participation. The report pulls no

punches, stating, "Downtown Columbus does not feel consistently vibrant and active. In part, this is due to the sheer size of downtown. It is difficult to energize the entirety of its 960 acres."

"In order to be truly successful," the report argues, "downtown needs to develop a critical mass of interconnected residential density, pedestrian activity, arts and civic attractions, and retail destinations."

Distance between destinations was identified as another problem: "There are few major downtown destinations that are within a quarter-mile radius of one another." Rather, they are islands in a sea of surface parking lots—a use that occupies 24 percent of Downtown's total developable land area, which the report states "has adversely impacted the public realm."

The Downtown residential population, though nearly twice the number of 3,488 in 2000, must increase to 30,000 in order "to achieve the missing critical mass" that is "large enough to support a wide range of retail offerings."

### **The Challenge Ahead**

Lessner, founder of the Columbus Food League (the parent of Betty's, the Jury Room, Surly Girl, Tip Top Lounge, Dirty Frank's Hot Dog Palace and, most recently, the Grass Skirt), has some specific suggestions for Downtown. "I'd like to see businesses moving into the empty storefronts on Gay Street," she says. "There are a lot of gaps around Downtown that need to be filled. It's up to the business community."

