

A Note on the Redesign

Over the past several months, *The Oberlin Review* layout team has worked to reimagine the design of the newspaper as we know it. We started by closely examining our old style — questioning choices such as headline fonts and column sizes — and quickly realized that the paper was in need of a systemic upgrade. From minor technical issues to larger inconsistencies in design, we recognized the need for a long-overdue bout of problem solving. Today, we are proud to share the fruits of those endeavors.

With this final edition of the fall semester, we present to you the first edition of the new *Review*. Packed to the brim with details and features like a more visually exciting and colorful front page, recurring comic column on page 7, and a weekly crossword on page 11 — there is simultaneously more to look at and more to do in the *Review*!

We welcome your feedback and input as we finalize the finer details and look forward to continuing to serve and engage the Oberlin community through our ever evolving newspaper.

A Short History of Downtown Oberlin

Cal Ransom
This Week Editor

The City of Oberlin has brought in Downtown Strategies, Inc. to help create a strategy for post-pandemic development of the downtown area. Downtown Strategies will present actionable solutions that downtown Oberlin can implement in the next five years.

Oberlin's downtown was at its height in the 1940s and '50s, a time period which Liz Burgess, OC '73, owner of Ginko Gallery, remembers fondly.

"Downtown used to be where the entire community came," Burgess said. "It was a community center."

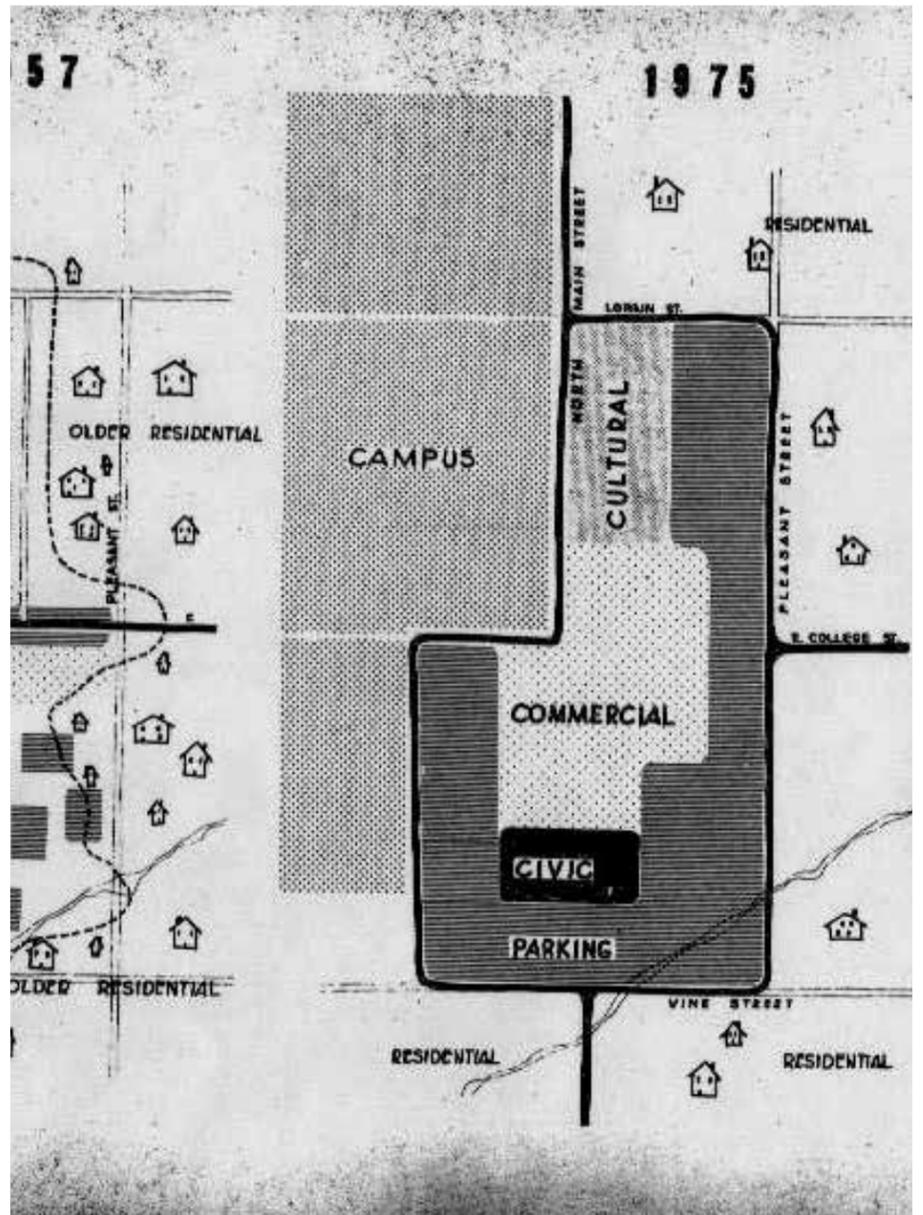
In response to the rise of the shopping mall in the '50s, Oberlin brought in Victor Gruen Associates in 1957 to redevelop the downtown area and keep people shopping in local shops.

"Shopping centers were the real wake-up call," Marianne Cochrane, whose family owned Ben Franklin and Mind-Fair Books, said in an interview from the

early 2000s on the Gruen Plan. "I think that the variety of merchandise changed. Pretty soon you noticed there were no children's shops anymore, no shoe stores, and as the competition moved in, the stores couldn't support themselves. That is still happening today."

The Gruen Plan would have consolidated Oberlin's downtown into a central unit, housing cultural, commercial, and civic sections, encircled by plenty of parking space — a priority for local merchants. It was never implemented fully because it received heavy criticism during the testing phase.

"I think that we finally realized, after trying a lot of different things, that we were never to be a primary shopping destination again," Cochrane said. "We had a secondary position. There was a niche, particularly with the variety store — if you didn't have time to go to the mall, you stayed in Oberlin to shop."



A map of the proposed Gruen plan, ca. 1957

Photo courtesy of Oberlin College Archives



The Mill on Main interior.

Photo by Abe Frato



Ratsy's storefront.

Photo by Abe Frato



The Workshop Art Gallery storefront.

Photo by Abe Frato



W. College Street from second floor, ca. 1945

Photo courtesy of Oberlin Heritage Center

In later decades, Oberlin was able to establish itself as a hub for the arts in the northern Ohio area.

"In the '90s, 2000s, back when I opened [Ginko Gallery], we really had become an art center," Burgess said. "With the FAVA building and the New Union building being renovated and all the arts groups moving in there — and the art museum — we always had a number of artists living in town. And then I opened [Ginko Gallery], and we had a sort of critical mass of art-related activities. We drew a lot of people from out of town and became sort of a day tourist destination. People would come here specifically for the arts — for music and for visual arts."

Since 2020, Cuyahoga County has invested \$3.3 million from the American Rescue Plan in Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and Assembly for the Arts, splitting the funds evenly between the two organizations, which in turn invested in the Cleveland art scene.

"During the pandemic, most [arts and culture in Oberlin] shut down, so it's just now rebuilding," Burgess said. "Cleveland has invested a whole lot of money in the arts ... [and] built up their art community. It used to be [that] people from Cleveland all came here. Now they have so much happening up there that they stay there."

Zeb Wimsatt, evening circulation supervisor at the Mary Church Terrell Main Library, held the first art book fair at the Mill on Main Dec. 3. They brought a few vendors to the space and said they had about 50 townspeople come by.

"It's certainly something you probably see in an urban space, but it sort of felt

that it would be nice to run something like that in town, and that it might actually be feasible to do," Wimsatt said. "We felt like because it was a new event, it might not really be realistic to expect people to pay a tabling fee. It's not something I make money off of, [and the fair] definitely ran at a significant loss."

Jill Sawyer, owner of Mill on Main, a space aimed at creating more opportunities for professional creatives to collaborate, said that they're not looking at the Mill as a revenue source yet.

"I pay everything out of my day job," Sawyer said. "I did take a big risk in that that money could be going toward retirement or paying for other things, but I decided it was worth it."

The Mill joins a number of creative spaces in Oberlin's downtown building on Oberlin's arts identity. In addition to the arts identity that Oberlin holds, Janet Haar, executive director of Oberlin Business Partnership, said that Oberlin's variety of shops, including consignment shops and utility shops, contribute significantly to the culture of the town. Burgess agreed that small businesses are central to Oberlin.

"If we looked like Legacy Village or Orchard Park, no one would come," Burgess said. "I wish spaces in The Hotel [at Oberlin] would get filled, but not with chains — with little shops that people think up."

She said that it's important for Oberlin to enhance the identity it already holds and expand where possible.

"I think when you're branding a place, you shouldn't fight what you are, you should make the most of what you are."