

2. Wheeling Heritage – the first ten years

The Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation (WNHAC) was formed in 1994 in response to the recommendations in the 1992 Plan for the Wheeling National Heritage Area, with the general mandate to coordinate and facilitate implementation of the heritage area plan. In the ten years since completion of the 1992 Plan, WNHAC, with technical and financial assistance from the National Park Service, has accomplished many recommendations made in the 1992 Plan.

2.1. The 1992 Plan

The 1992 Plan was the culminating step in a heritage planning process that began in 1990. The plan called for the creation of a **Heritage Port** that would serve as both an interpretive and development infrastructure for the city. The plan analyzed historic periods and themes of Wheeling, identified focus areas for projects, and proposed an implementation plan over a 10-year period that specified the management structure and roles for WNHAC, project costs, responsible parties and sources of funds. Highlights of recommendations from the 1992 Plan are summarized below.

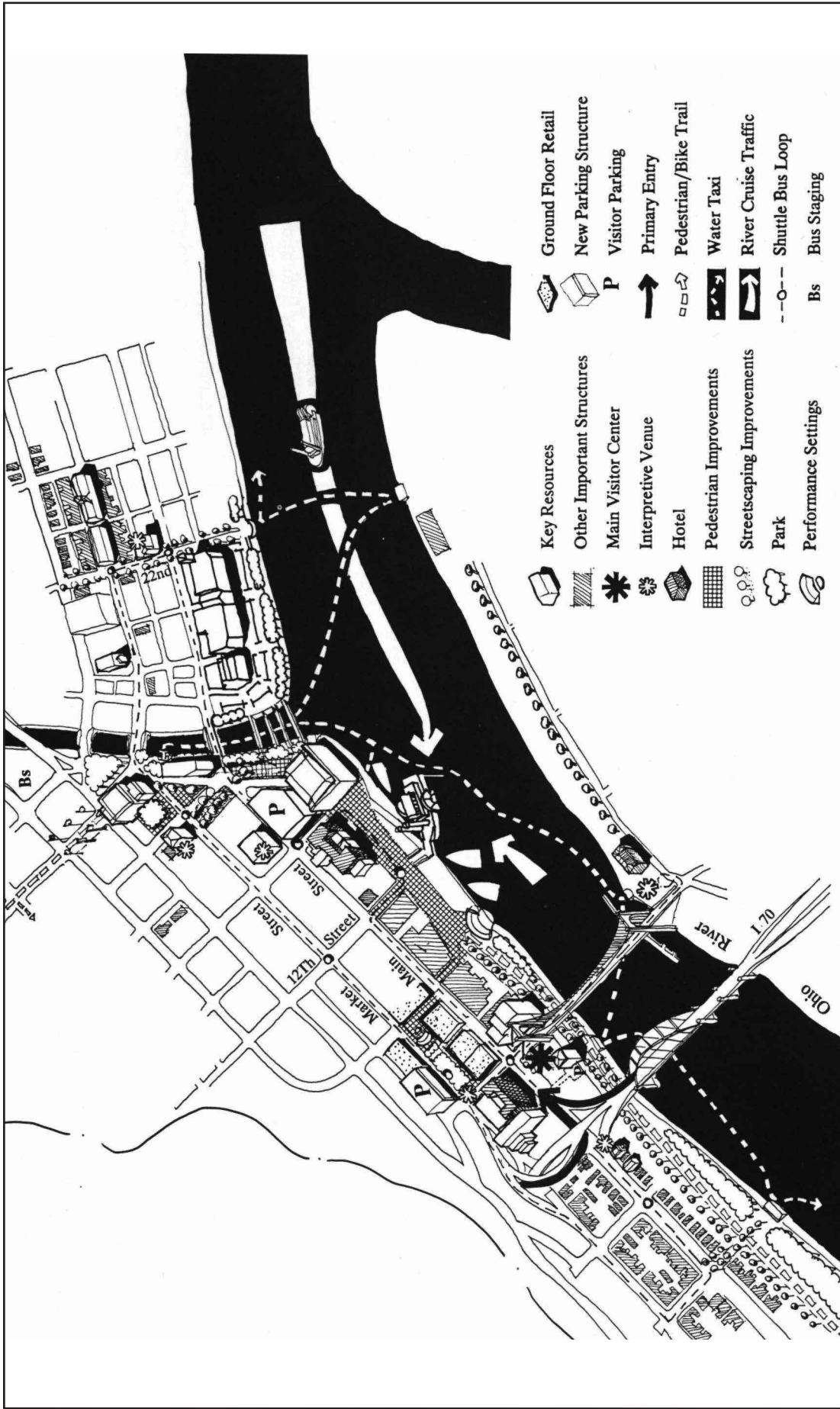
Structure of the Plan

A diagram of the Plan's recommended approach is presented in Figure 1. With the focus on the city's location and history as a port of entry on the Ohio River, the plan identified a **Downtown Core** and **Historic Context** settings:

- **The Downtown Core** encompassed the *Crossroads*, the area surrounding the Wheeling Suspension Bridge, the *Waterfront*, the area adjacent to the river including the former wharf landing and intact portions of Main and Market Street, and *Civic Area*, that included the West Virginia Independence Hall and the B & O railroad terminal.
- **The Historic Context** venues were the neighborhoods surrounding the core area to the north (*North Wheeling*), west (*Wheeling Island*), and south (*Center Wheeling*). In each of the six venues an interpretive center was proposed to illustrate an aspect of Wheeling's heritage. The venues would be linked together through directional signage and physical transportation and pedestrian links, including a water shuttle on the Ohio River and Wheeling Creek.

Economic Development

The Heritage Port, a major waterfront park that replaced a multi-story garage that blocked visual and pedestrian access to the waterfront, was proposed as the centerpiece of economic development activity. New hotels were proposed in the *Waterfront*, *Wheeling Island*, and *Crossroads* areas. Related visitor amenities (privately operated tours and B&Bs) were proposed in the *North Wheeling*, *Wheeling Island*, and *Center Wheeling* areas. Office and commercial development and student-oriented shops and services were proposed in the *Civic* area. A Heritage Research & Development Park reusing older warehouse buildings was proposed in the *Center Wheeling* area. Expansion of the marina was proposed at *Wheeling Island* near the Suspension Bridge.



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| | Key Resources | | Ground Floor Retail |
| | Other Important Structures | | New Parking Structure |
| | Main Visitor Center | | Visitor Parking |
| | Interpretive Venue | | Primary Entry |
| | Hotel | | Pedestrian/Bike Trail |
| | Pedestrian Improvements | | Water Taxi |
| | Streetscaping Improvements | | River Cruise Traffic |
| | Park | | Shuttle Bus Loop |
| | Performance Settings | | Bus Staging |

Wheeling National Heritage Area Management Plan Update

Figure 1:
Proposed Actions
in the 1992 Plan



Prepared for
Wheeling National Heritage Area
Corporation

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I.C.O.N.
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Interpretation/Visitor Services

A series of interpretive venues and a central visitor center were proposed, linked together by a heritage trail. Interpretation throughout the city would be expanded through coordination of themes, publications, and tours. A central visitor reception center and overview interpretive experience was proposed adjacent to the Suspension Bridge, at the site of the Best Western Hotel. Six interpretive venues were proposed, including a Bridge Museum at the Wheeling Island end of the Suspension Bridge, an exhibit of “Made in Wheeling” at the proposed Artisan Center, a transportation exhibit, interpretive installations at the Heritage Port, Victorian house exhibits in North Wheeling, expanded exhibits in the West Virginia Independence Hall, and exhibits at Centre Market. A Heritage walking trail was proposed through the Downtown Core, supported by activities in the Historic Context areas as well as a city-wide system of signage, walking tours, printed literature, and tours of functioning industrial resources.

Transportation

The 1992 Plan proposed an integrated series of transportation improvements to serve visitors and to connect the resources. A new garage and Intermodal Transportation Center would replace the parking in the Wharf Garage that was demolished to make way for the Heritage Port. Pedestrian and bicycle paths were proposed along the riverbanks and Wheeling Creek. A mini-bus system would link interpretive venues, and a water shuttle would connect the *Waterfront* and *Wheeling Island* areas. A bus layover facility was proposed under the Route 2 ramps in the *Civic* area.

Conservation/reuse

The Plan proposed a series of initiatives to preserve the integrity and setting of key resources, including: (a) improvement of key buildings critical to interpretation in the Downtown Core; (b) preservation efforts to maintain overall historic integrity of key buildings and settings; (c) district design guidelines and regulations; (d) low-interest revolving loan funds; (e) programs to identify and designate historic resources, and; (f) streetscape and pedestrian improvements. The Plan proposed that the Heritage Port area evolve into a working waterfront with significant water transportation activity and reuse of Water Street buildings. Outlying resources including National Road, Oglebay Park, and Elm Grove were to be reclaimed as part of the Plan. The Plan included a program of highlighting key attractions through an exterior lighting program, including the Suspension Bridge and Front Street on Wheeling Island.

2.2. Implementation to Date

Significant progress has been made by WNHAC and its partners to move the 1992 plan forward. A detailed list of their achievements is presented in Appendix B: WNHAC Accomplishments. Some of the most notable accomplishments include:

- **Heritage Port** -- The replacement of the Wharf Garage by Heritage Port has dramatically changed the relationship between the City’s downtown and the Ohio Riverfront. Heritage Port events attract significant attendance; between 250 – 300,000 visitors to a range of festivals and performances. Interpretation in this area is modest and the edges of this space with the downtown are not active and do not take advantage of the park and its activities. The Heritage Port is not strongly connected to other heritage resources in Wheeling.
- **Artisan Center** -- The Wheeling Artisan Center features a magnificent three-story atrium and skylight and a unique historic renovation. The building, owned by the City, was rehabilitated by and with WNHAC funds, and WNHAC holds a long-term lease and manages the property. WNHAC offices are on the third floor, while a large brewpub restaurant leases the

first floor. Visitors can enjoy a taste of Wheeling's heritage in this restored industrial building featuring unique West Virginia arts and crafts including: fine art, local pottery, weaving, basketry, jewelry, candles, furniture, quilts and toys; glass shop featuring Fenton, Pilgrim, Blenko and Weishar glass and various glass artists; Wheeling historic gift shop; industrial heritage interactive exhibits; loft gallery art exhibitions, full-size Mail Pouch sign painted by Harley Warrick, and Mail Pouch souvenirs. The layout of the building does not take best advantage of these combined uses, since it is easy for restaurant patrons to enter and leave the premises without passing by the retail part of the Artisan Center. The exhibits and displays in the Artisan Center integrated within the retail operation and would benefit from a more prominent location as well as interactive elements that could more powerfully illustrate with a "hands-on" approach how important objects in Wheeling's history were made.

- **Intermodal Transportation Center** – This facility is an 850-space garage that was developed to replace the spaces lost by demolition of the garage that was removed as part of the Heritage Port project. This facility also includes the Wheeling Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) Visitor Center and a transportation history exhibit. Approximately 12 – 14,000 visitors pass through this Visitor Center per year. The content of the exhibit is effective, but would benefit from a sense of visual connection to the river and the other transportation facilities that are mentioned.
- **Exhibits at WV Independence Hall** -- Nearly six years before President Lincoln signed the proclamation making West Virginia the 35th State in the Union in 1863, construction had begun on the Wheeling Custom House, headquarters for federal offices for the Western District of Virginia. The architecture of the building's interiors has been restored, and the building is known today as West Virginia Independence Hall. West Virginia Independence Hall is listed as a site visit on The Civil War Discovery Trail. The Trail links more than 300 sites in 16 states to teach the story of the Civil War and its impact on America. The Trail allows visitors to explore battlefields, historic homes, railroad stations, cemeteries, parks, and other destinations. WNHAC has created the statehood exhibit, "West Virginia: Born of the Civil War", within the structure, which is operated by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History. The building draws students and other visitors and attracts approximately 15,000 visitors per year. Due to a circuitous entry, and the need to preserve key architectural characteristics of the structure, the exhibits in this facility are somewhat removed from the street entry and are somewhat removed from other interpretive resources within the city. The addition of further waysides or of interpretive content at the entry to the building could mitigate this situation.
- **Wheeling Heritage Trail** – This Trail, recommended in the 1992 Plan and principally implemented by the City, is a 13-mile bike and pedestrian facility that follows the east bank of the Ohio River passing along the edge of Heritage Port, adjacent to Center Wheeling, and along sections of Wheeling Creek to the east. The trail attracts strong local use and can be an important part of the Wheeling visitor experience.
- **Wheeling Stamping Building** – This former industrial building has been transformed into a global operations center for the international law firm of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP that will ultimately employ 250 local residents. Sympathetically rehabilitated during 2001-2002 to preserve its historic industrial character, the building's rehabilitation was one of the earliest, after the Wagner Building's completion in 2000, in a proposed redevelopment of the Center Wheeling area into office and commercial uses, similar to the concept of the Heritage Research and Development Park recommended in the 1992 plan. The project demonstrates a successful collaborative effort between WNHAC, the City of Wheeling, Ohio Valley

Industrial and Business Development Corporation (OVIDBC), and other partners with the packaging of public/private funding that included a HUD Section 108 loan, Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI) grant, West Virginia Infrastructure Council loan, a loan from a local consortium of churches, and private equity investors that used both state (10%) and federal (20%) historic preservation tax credits.

- **Other interpretive improvements** – WNHAC has supported interpretive installations at Centre Market and North Wheeling and has provided a number of modest grants to local entities for interpretive, educational, and preservation purposes.

Table 3 shows an analysis of WNHAC’s approximate project and program expenditures to date, showing the percentage distribution by activity and planning sub-area.

Table 3: WNHAC Expenditures 1992-2002, by Category and Sub-Area

	Preservation	Interpretation (exhibits, archives, installations)	Education	Tourism (including events)	Project Development	Recreation, Trails, and Parks	Total
The Crossroads Area	0.3%	2.8%	0.0%	0.9%	1.1%	0.0%	5.1%
The Waterfront Area	7.2%	2.2%	0.0%	1.7%	36.2%	28.8%	76.1%
The Civic Area	0.3%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	3.0%
The Center Wheeling Area	13.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13.5%
The North Wheeling Area	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
The Wheeling Island Area	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
City-wide initiatives	0.5%	0.7%	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%
Transportation	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.1%	0.7%
Total, %	21.6%	7.5%	0.4%	3.3%	38.3%	29.0%	100.0%
Total, \$	\$3,191,138	\$1,101,590	\$59,599	\$481,000	\$5,642,270	\$4,271,000	\$14,746,597

The implementation to date has had a significant positive impact on the community leading, directly or indirectly, to major private investment in the target areas identified in the Plan. Private investment over the last ten years in these target areas has totaled more than \$31million. The improvements at the Wheeling Coffee and Spice, Egerter, and Laconia buildings were assisted by the City of Wheeling’s façade rehabilitation program and technical guidance from WNHAC. The ongoing Wheeling Island Racetrack and Gaming Center project, not included in the foregoing total, includes the development of a hotel, theater, and food and beverage facility that is anticipated to dramatically increase the visitation to this facility on Wheeling Island.

In terms of geographic emphasis, by far the major focus of WNHAC’s activities has been the Waterfront Area, in support of the bricks and mortar costs of the Heritage Port, Artisan Center, and Intermodal Transportation Center. Parts of the 1992 Plan that have not been implemented include extensive interpretation at the Heritage Port, major downtown streetscape improvements, and physical and transportation linkages proposed to connect the interpretive venues and key attractions. Interpretive venues at Market Plaza and Center Wheeling, the main visitor center at the eastern terminus of the Wheeling Suspension Bridge, and a bridge museum at its west end also have not been realized.

