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COMMISSIONERS INVEST IN MAIN STREET, FRANKLIN COUNTY

The Franklin County Commissioners voted this morning to authorize a new economic development initiative called Downtown Works. The latest in the Commissioners' Smart Works suite of economic development programs, Downtown Works is a partnership with Heritage Ohio, which works with municipalities all over the state to preserve and revitalize historic downtowns, and is funded with \$54,175 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money.

The program will pay half of the cost for a city, town, or suburb to take part in Heritage Ohio's Ohio Main Street Program, which works with a group of stake-holders to renew, revitalize, and enhance historic commercial districts.

"We have a wealth of charming downtowns in Franklin County," said Board of Commissioners President Marilyn Brown. "Some of them are thriving, but others need some attention in order to make them the economic drivers they once were, to put some more of our neighbors back to work, and to improve property values in our suburbs, cities, and villages, and to grow the county tax base."

Every municipality--city, village, and township in Franklin County is eligible to participate in the program except for the City of Columbus, which has its own CDBG allocation. Participating municipalities will form a group of stakeholders in their downtown area, and the group will work with economic development and historic preservation experts at Heritage Ohio on plans to restore buildings, provide appropriate retail and professional space, create a cohesive visual identity unique to the community, and marketing as well as other enhancements to lure development and residents.

"In Franklin County, we have it all...urban, suburban and rural!" said Commissioner Paula Brooks. "I look forward to our communities using these funds and unique expertise to create jobs, while sprucing up their retail business districts, preserving important historic buildings and sites, and even adding wildlife features like pollinator and native plant gardens, perhaps incorporating those into natural infrastructure to benefit ALL Franklin County families. We are proud to be the first county in Ohio to enlist Heritage Ohio!"

Downtown Works is a first-of-its-kind program in Ohio, and only the second such program in the nation. There are currently more than 30 downtowns across the state that have worked with Heritage Ohio on similar efforts, which have resulted in hundreds of new businesses moving into historic commercial districts, representing thousands of jobs and millions of

dollars of new investment.

“Downtown Works is an economic development initiative, first and foremost, which will benefit our whole community,” said Commissioner John O’Grady. “But it’s also an opportunity to invest in some of the smaller towns and suburbs around Franklin County that don’t always get as much attention as the bigger cities, and a chance for them to build some cachet, improve property values, and get people living and working in their downtowns again.”

The resolution will fund a dedicated position at Heritage Ohio, which will be measured on the amount of technical assistance provided, new business openings, new investment, job creation, volunteer board hours, and other benchmarks.

“This is an exciting partnership,” said Heritage Ohio Executive Director, Joyce Barrett. “We’re very much looking forward to continuing the work to help preserve and grow Franklin County’s historic downtown centers through the proven Ohio Main Street model.”

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