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Connectivity & Continuity in Downtown Newark

Property Assessment
January 2018



Downtown Newark Property Assessment: 2018

Proposed to Newark Development Partners



By the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority

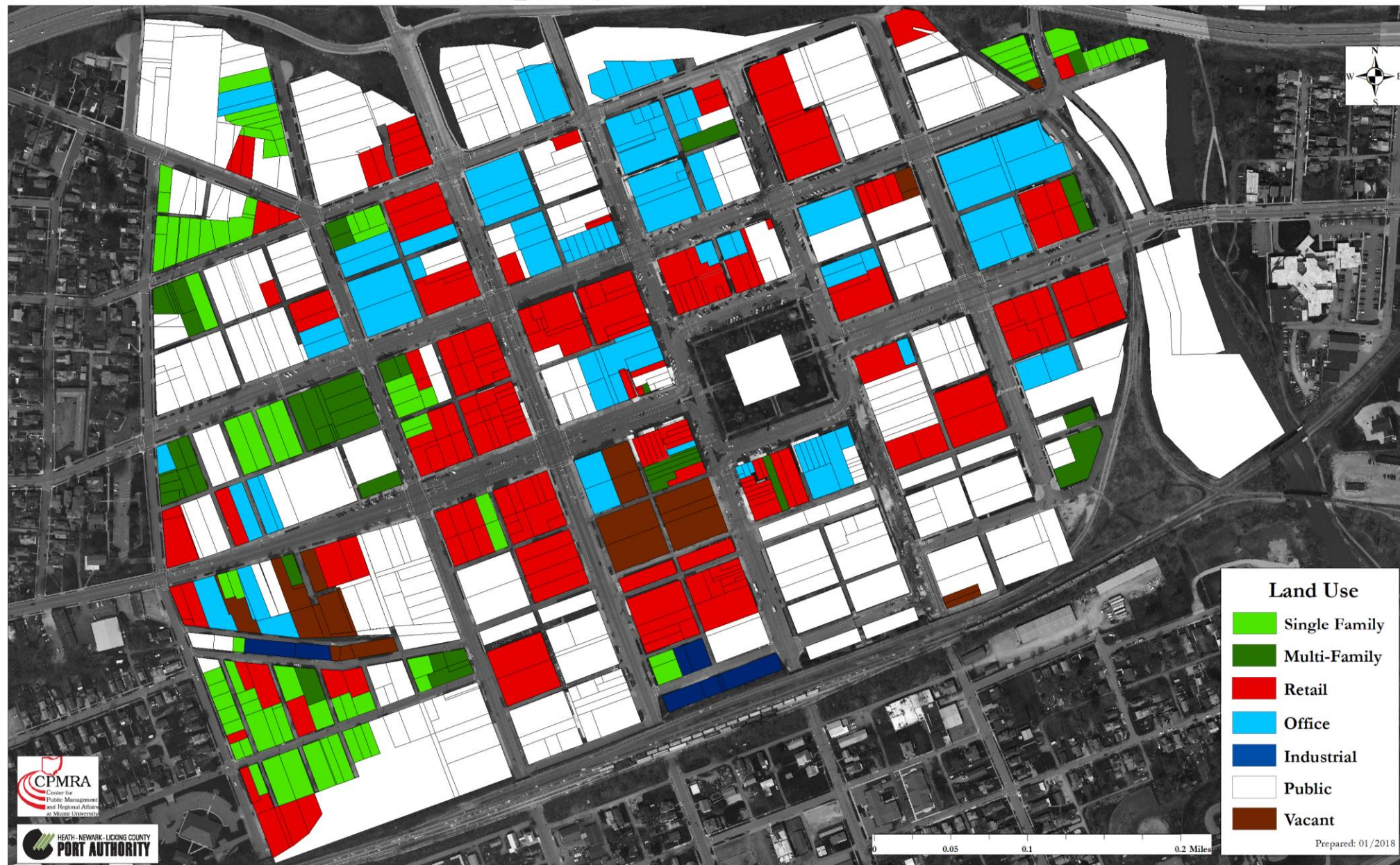


In partnership with Miami University's Center for
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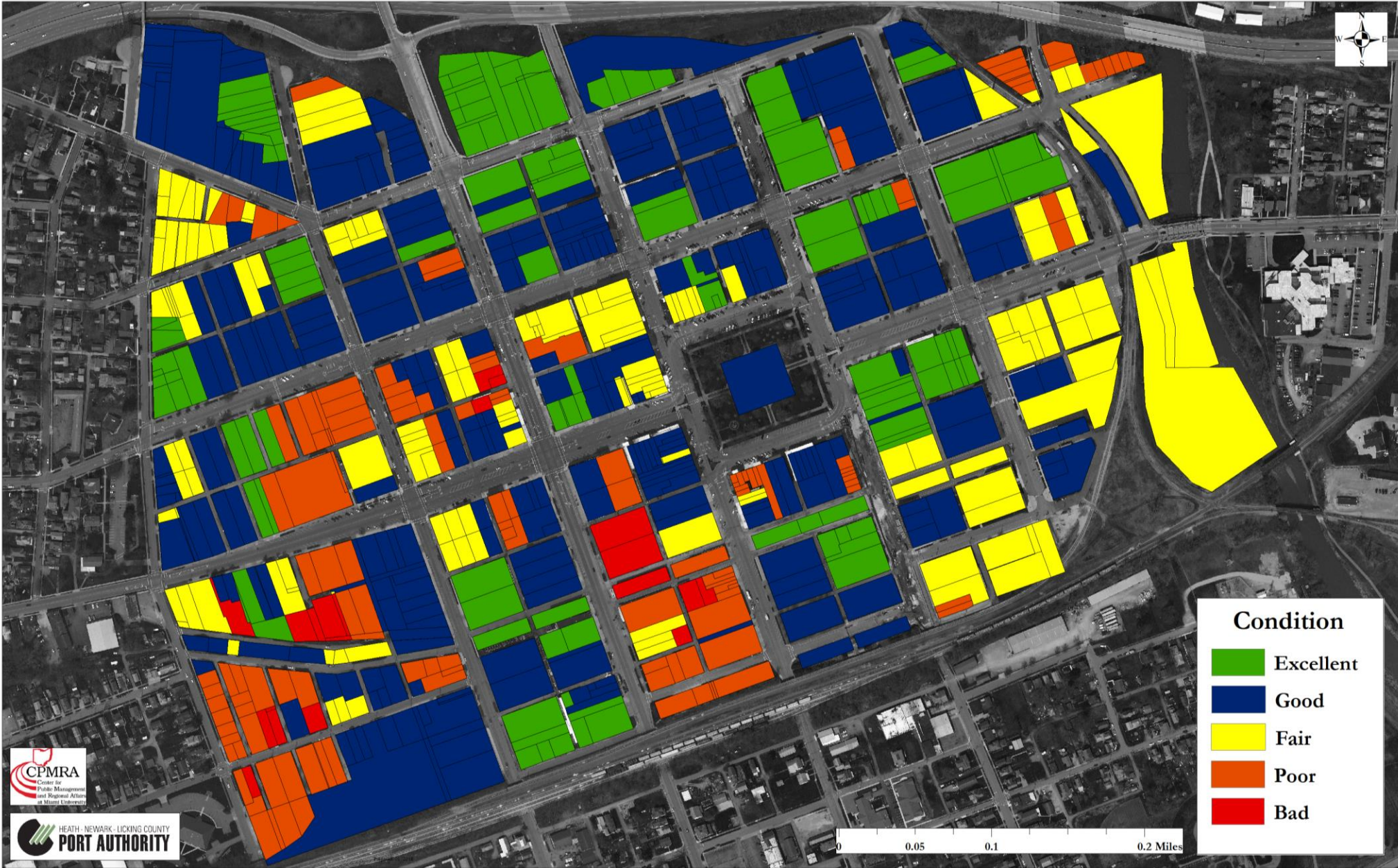


through the Ohio Public Leaders program

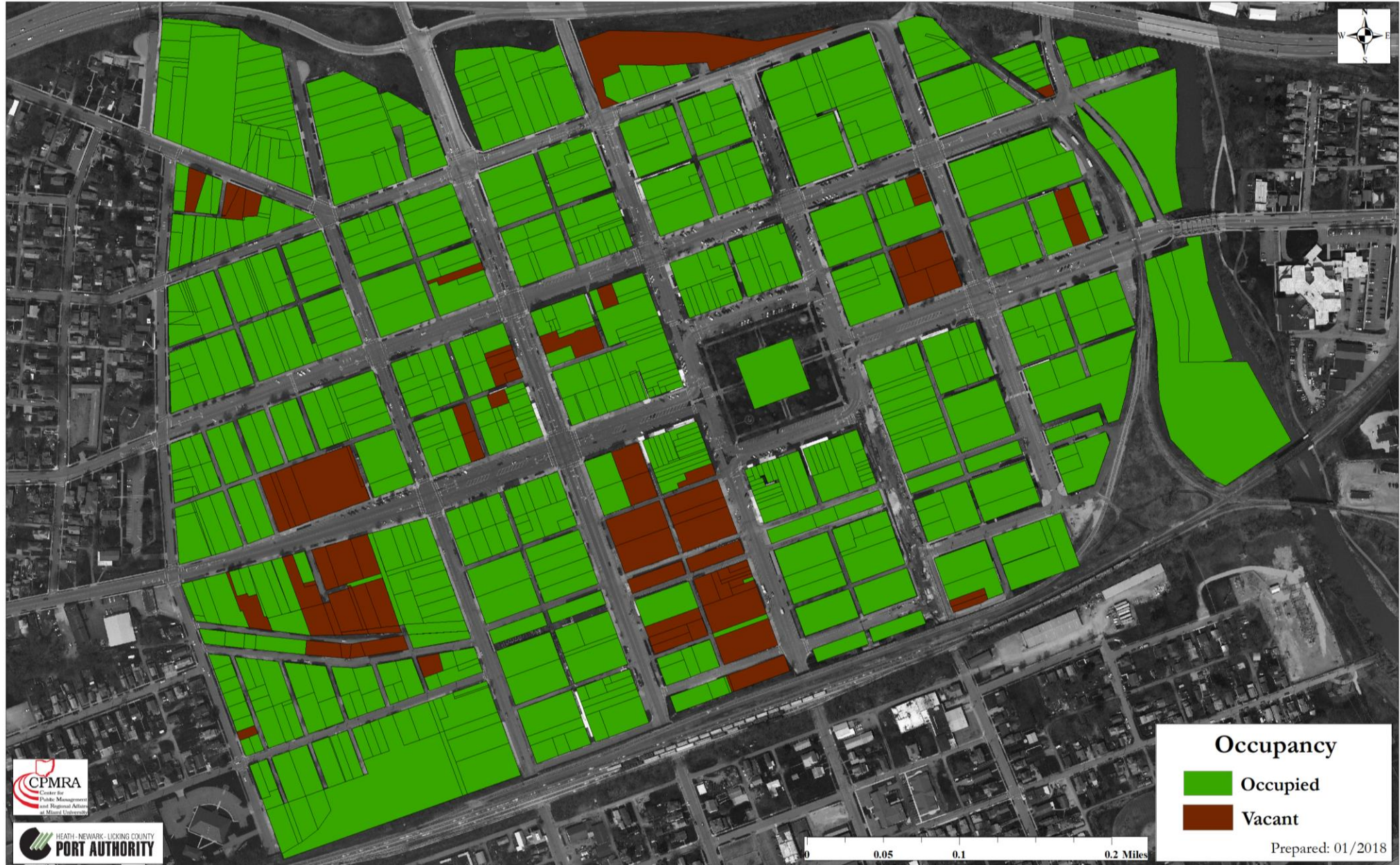
Newark Property Assessment 2018: Land Use



Newark Property Assessment 2018: Condition



Newark Property Assessment 2018: Occupancy



Emily Fernandez, a student in Miami University’s Ohio Public Leaders (OPL) program, worked with staff at the Heath-Newark Licking County Port Authority (HNLCPA) to conduct a property assessment of Downtown Newark during the month of January 2018. The assessment includes a review of land use, condition, and occupancy of 737 parcels in the downtown area. When interpreting the results of this study, note that each 1% represents approximately 7 parcels.

Methodology

Land use is categorized into seven types. Some buildings are mixed-use, but the data reflect the primary use. For the purposes of this study, the primary use is that which occupies the street level floor of a building. The rationale behind this choice is that downtowns are supposed to create a relationship between the pedestrian and the built environment, and the pedestrian interacts primarily with the use that occupies the street level floor. Although some pedestrians interact with higher floors, they typically have to enter the first floor to reach the others.

Condition is ranked on a scale that is as follows:

- Excellent:* Property is well-maintained with recent improvements noticeable.
- Good:* Property shows some wear or need for minor repairs.
- Fair:* Property exhibits signs of need for more major repairs.
- Poor:* Property exhibits multiple signs of needed repairs, including roof, windows, and/or foundation near point of total deterioration.
- Bad:* Property is totally deteriorated and should be razed.

Occupancy is classified using two simple categories: occupied or vacant. A parcel is considered vacant only if there are no apparent signs of residency. If a building appears vacant on the top two floors but has a first floor in use, it is considered occupied.

Findings

Land Use	
Single Family Housing	11.9%
Multi-Family Housing	6.8%
Retail	27.8%
Office	13.4%
Industrial	1.2%
Public	35.4%
Vacant	3.3%

Condition	
Excellent	18.3%
Good	41%
Fair	20.1%
Poor	18%
Bad	2.6%

Occupancy	
Occupied	89.8%
Vacant	10.2%

Spreadsheets, graphics, and map documents are downloadable from: portauthorityusa.com/downtown

Comparison Report

Introduction

Property assessments of Downtown Newark were also conducted in August 2007 and January 2014. The 2007 study involved many data collectors, as six teams surveyed different parts of Downtown and combined their results to complete the full picture. The 2014 study was conducted primarily by an OPL fellow. The current study more closely resembles the 2014 model, in which the fellow is primarily responsible for both the data collection and analysis. The remainder of this study is a comparison of the three assessments that have been completed to date, followed by recommendations for further improvement to Downtown Newark.

Land Use

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2018</u>
Single Family Housing	9%	11%	11.9%
Multi-Family Housing	6%	4%	6.8%
Retail	28%	28%	27.8%
Office	17%	12%	13.4%
Industrial	3%	1%	1.2%
Public	31%	34%	35.4%
Vacant	6%	10%	3.3%

Analysis- Land Use

	<u>% Change: 2007-2014</u>	<u>% Change: 2014-</u>
2018		
Single Family Housing	+2	+0.9
Multi-Family Housing	-2	+2.8
Retail	0	-.02
Office	-5	+1.4
Industrial	-2	+0.2
Public	+3	+1.4
Vacant	+4	-6.7

As depicted in the chart above, land use has remained mostly consistent over the past decade. In terms of housing, the differences between single family and multi-family within a given year are greater than the differences in the total amount of housing between years. Therefore, the variation within each of the two categories, single family housing and multi-family housing, is most likely attributable to classification error rather than real change.

A notable trend is that the amount of retail has not changed since 2007*. The 2014 report notes the 5% decrease in office space from 2007-2014, but office space is on the incline again with a 1.4% increase in the past four years. Public space increased 3% from 2007-2014, and 1.4% from 2014-2018. After accounting for the variation in elapsed time between studies, further analysis indicates that public space has been steadily increasing by about 0.4% every year since 2007.

The largest differences are in vacancy, which between the three studies shifts from 6% up to 10%, then all the way down to 3.3%. The explanation for this may lie partially in classification differences. The current study assigns an “occupied” status to parcels with any amount of occupancy, while the previous studies may have been based on whether buildings had full occupancy or a certain percentage of occupancy. Additionally, the results of the current study and 2014 study are derived from windshield surveys of Downtown. Buildings that appear vacant on the outside may in fact be in use, while buildings that appear well-maintained may be empty. Although the 2007 study was conducted on foot, and therefore at a closer perspective, recordings were still based on the exterior appearance of buildings. Because occupancy is

*A difference of <1% is negligible for the comparative purposes of this study because the previous two studies rounded percentages to a whole number. This study includes fractions of percentages so that readers may determine the number of parcels that are represented by a given percentage with greater accuracy.

difficult to determine from an outside perspective, recordings about vacancy are more susceptible to error than recordings in the other categories.

Comparison Report

Condition

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2018</u>
Excellent	29%	17.5%	18.3%
Good	26%	35%	41%
Fair	32%	38%	20.1%
Poor	11%	8.5%	18%
Bad	2%	1%	2.6%

Analysis- Condition

	<u>% Change: 2007-2014</u>	<u>% Change: 2014-2018</u>
Excellent	-11.5	+8
Good	+9	+6
Fair	+6	-17.9
Poor	-2.5	+9.5
Bad	-1	+1.6

The number of *Excellent* properties decreased between the first two studies, but increased between the most recent two. The decrease from 2007-2014 is probably due to typical deterioration over time. Perhaps growth stagnated from 2007-2014, and some of the *Excellent* buildings shifted to *Good* condition while there was no new construction to replenish the *Excellent* category. One possible explanation for the lack of new growth is economic hardship stemming from the 2008 recession, which occurred just after the first property assessment of Downtown Newark was completed. While part of the increase in *Good* properties may be due to the decline of *Excellent* properties, it is also important to note the large decrease in *Fair* properties. Some of the properties that were previously considered *Fair* have probably been renovated and shifted to the *Good* category. The increase in *Poor*

properties indicates that other *Fair* properties were probably neglected, and therefore fell into *Poor* condition. There is minor fluctuation in the *Bad* category, with a net increase of just 0.6% since 2007. Still, the number of *Poor* properties in Downtown has increased sharply by 9.5% since 2014. If those areas are not addressed promptly, there may be a significant shift from *Poor* to *Bad* over the next few years.

Occupancy

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2018</u>
Occupied	87%	81%	89.8%
Vacant	13%	19%	10.2%

Analysis- Occupancy

	<u>% Change: 2007-2014</u>	<u>% Change: 2014-2018</u>
Occupied	-6	+8.8
Vacant	+6	-8.8

The net difference from 2007 to 2018 is a only a 2.8% increase in occupancy. However, occupancy has been relatively unsteady. There was a drop of 6% from 2007-2014, but then occupancy spiked by 8.8% from 2014-2018. As described in the “Analysis- Land Use” section of this report, vacancy is probably the most difficult category to measure from an outside perspective. Of all the attributes recorded, vacancy may be most affected by classification differences. However, classification differences should not account for a full 6-8% of change.

One possible explanation for the spike in occupancy is the rate of population increase. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Newark’s population was 47,130 in 2007, 48,399 in 2014, and 49,134 in 2016, which is the most recent data available. This means that the population was increasing by approximately 181 per year from 2007-2014, and by 368 per year from 2014-2016. Assuming the population continues to increase at the same rate, the 2018 population will

be about 49,871. Part of the increase in occupancy may be due to the quick rise in population over the past few years. However, the population has been on the incline since at least 2007, so population change is probably not the driving force for the sharp increase in occupancy. The most likely explanation is that Downtown Newark has recently seen more vigorous community development efforts, and that the efforts have been successful.

Conclusion

Considerations

To reiterate what has been mentioned throughout this report, it is important to remember that the findings of each study are affected by the biases of the individuals conducting the studies, and comparisons should be drawn with care. Distinguishing between retail and office space can be difficult from an outside perspective, but the absolute lack of change in retail space between the three studies most likely means that the uses were classified consistently and that retail truly has remained at about 28%. Industrial use does not appear to have a place in Downtown, and there is no compelling reason to expect that it will increase. A comparison of the maps from all three studies shows that an industrial use was primarily assigned to parcels containing storage units. Although small storage units are not typically associated with industrial use, they are most suited to the industrial category for the purposes of these studies because they do not fit retail or other uses.

When interpreting condition, the maps should be viewed in clusters, such as a whole block or one side of a block, rather than as individual parcels. The condition that was assigned could be different based on the angle of the

building that was seen, or the amount of the building that was seen. Some of the buildings in Downtown appear maintained from the street, yet have sides or backs that appear to be falling apart. This seems especially true of the mixed use buildings, many of which have a well-maintained first floor but are neglected on the higher floors.

Some of the parcels around Courthouse Square have retail on the bottom floor that is in fine condition, while the top floors are designed for housing and yet they are vacant. Housing as a whole seems to be a problem in the Downtown area. Most of the housing on the outskirts of Downtown is in *Fair* or *Poor* condition, while the center of Downtown struggles with vacancy in spaces that are dedicated to housing. Again, the condition map should be viewed in terms of broad areas with evident trends rather than as a collection of individual parcels.

Recommendations

Moving forward, the primary focus in Downtown should be on filling the major areas of vacancy in order to encourage continuity and connectivity. Maintaining and improving the condition of currently occupied spaces is also important, but Downtown is in overall good condition. The majority of parcels in Downtown are in *Good* or *Excellent* condition, at a combined 59.3%. Another 20.1% is in *Fair* condition, while *Poor* and *Bad* conditions comprise the final 20.6% of parcels. The parcels that are completely vacant are most concerning because they are concentrated in central areas, which creates a disconnect between some of the major attractions in Downtown.

The worst vacancies are the ones on Third Street, southwest of Courthouse Square. This area has the potential to create a smooth connection between the

park, Canal Market, and Courthouse Square. Instead, it harms the walkability of the street and tarnishes the aesthetics of the nearby attractions. The vacancies on Third Street could be filled with more retail. An ice cream parlor directly across from the park may be successful. In winter, when both the park and ice cream parlor are out of use, the spaces could be used to host events such as a chili cook-off or snowman building contest. Family-oriented, seasonal events will help build community and keep the street alive all year round.

Fostering a unique culture and sense of place is essential to Downtown's vitality. Although vacancies are not ideal, the city has a huge opportunity right now to rebuild the entire southern stretch of Third Street in a creative way. The possibility of pop-up shops should be explored as the city debates a long-term vision. Support for pop-up shops can be found in publications by Smart Growth America¹, as well as other articles published within the past year². A similar approach, filling vacancies with artists, is another temporary solution that keeps the street busy and helps create culture³.

The park also needs to have its own central attraction. While Licking County Foundation, the nonprofit northeast of the courthouse, has a splash pad, there is nothing similar in the park. Moreover, the one at Licking County Foundation has been out of commission for years. With more knowledge available about sanitation and maintenance than ever before, it may be time to

¹ <https://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/app/legacy/documents/rebuilding-downtown.pdf>

²

http://web.gazettextra.com/20171001/pop_up_shops_eyed_to_fill_downtown_janesville_vacancies

³

http://jacksonville.com/business/20091021/story/artists_creatively_filling_vacancies_in_downtown_jacksonville_buildings

reexplore the idea of including a similar feature in Downtown.

A splash pad within the park itself would help create a sense of centrality and make the park more attractive. Some companies, such as Custom Ice¹, specialize in multipurpose splash pads that serve as ice rinks in winter so that spaces can be utilized year-round. Another option is a small fountain and pond, with ledge seating that allows people to put their feet or hands in the water. Water is desirable, but another option is to put something climbable in the park, such as statues or a jungle gym. As it sits now, the park more closely resembles a requirement for green space than an actual destination where people can spend time.

The occupancy and conditions around the library are another area of concern. There are a number of vacancies immediately to the west of the library. The space could be filled with a recreational use to complement the library. Some suggestions are a basketball court, sand volleyball court, playground, skatepark, tetherball, or a combination of such activities. Equipment that is necessary for the games can be signed out at the library, which also encourages youth to actually enter the library.

Another idea is a pavilion, which would be a good spot to host live music, reading programs related to the library, and other community events. The library closes at 8:00 p.m. on weeknights and as early as 5:00 p.m. on weekends, so live music and other noisy events should not cause a conflict. The vacant parcels in that area that are directly on the street can become a small expansion of the library parking lot. This will help accommodate any increased traffic due to new facilities, and will also protect the people using the facilities by creating a barrier between the recreational area and Main Street.

¹ <http://www.customicerinks.com/splashpads.html>

Finally, the alleys throughout Downtown would benefit from some cleanup efforts. Taking care of the alleys supports the connectivity and continuity that was discussed in relation to the vacancies on Third Street. Newark should look to other downtowns in Ohio with model alleys, such as the Easton Town Center or Kent's Acorn Alley. Although Downtown Newark is walkable in terms of physical distance and sidewalks, there are parts that simply look uninviting and may deter pedestrians, especially after dark.

Adding signage to the alleys is a good way to make them seem as if they are a part of the Downtown experience, rather than just dismal corridors a person must pass through to get from one destination to another. The signage should be consistent, symmetrical, and well-maintained. Additionally, putting decorative lights in the alleys is a good way to make them more aesthetically pleasing and will serve as a safety feature at night.

In some of the more open alleys, which are really just centers of blocks and are not enclosed, the city should consider allowing local artists to paint murals. Most of the buildings are bare on the sides that do not directly face the street, so there are a lot of places that could benefit from some artwork. Filling in some of the major vacancies and cleaning up the alleys will help to create connectivity and continuity, and show people that Downtown Newark is a livable and exciting place all on its own.

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