

Beechmont Avenue



*Beechmont Avenue
near Eight Mile, circa 1912*

A look at the past, present and future of Anderson's 'Main Street'



"Main Street USA." The phrase invokes thoughts of a quaint downtown, highlighted by interesting shops lined up side by side. Picture multi-story buildings and a mixture of shops, housing, and offices where people walk from business to business. However, for Anderson Township, like many post-war communities across the country, the concept of a Main Street has had a different connotation.

Many Anderson residents wonder why Beechmont Avenue is the way it is. And they ask what can be done to better the busy corridor. This booklet has been designed to share the Beechmont Avenue story - its history, its problems, and its future possibilities.

THE BEECHMONT STORY

Though Beechmont is the center of community commerce and activity, the corridor evolved in a much different manner than did many people's image of a "Main Street USA."

As recently as the middle of the 20th century, Beechmont Avenue (State Route 125) was a two-lane roadway, connecting spotted developments focused on farming outposts such as Fruit Hill (near Salem Road), Forestville (near Forest Road) and Cherry Grove (near Eight Mile Road). In fact, less than 100 years ago Beechmont was a dirt road running parallel to a rail line.

Beechmont's History

Commercial development accompanied growth in 1960s

Anderson's explosive growth, which began in the 1950s and continued well into the 1990s, resulted in a transformation of Beechmont Avenue. The roadway itself grew from two lanes to three and ultimately five lanes by 1970.

Much of the commercial development that accompanied this growth unfortunately occurred in a unplanned manner. The result of this can still be seen with many of the existing developments along the thoroughfare.

By the mid-1990s, the growth curve that drove Anderson Township and Beechmont Avenue for decades began to shift east into Clermont County, and with this so did several major retailers along the corridor.

In response to this, the township and Anderson Area Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Department of Transportation, Hamilton County Engineers' Office and many other stakeholders devoted considerable energies into planning for the future of this roadway.

RETROFITTING BEECHMONT

Over the last 16 years, numerous planning studies have been conducted and many recommendations have been implemented.

However, despite progress along the roadway, issues surrounding Beechmont Avenue remain one of the most common complaints of Anderson residents. Nearly all residents have a view or opinion about how to make Beechmont better.

Township officials realize that there is much work ahead to retrofit this major corridor. In fact, it will likely take decades to "undo" the errors of past decisions; however, having a plan is a critical first step.

This booklet provides an overview of the past planning efforts and recommendations that have been made, along with

completed projects to date, plus details the constraints and challenges moving forward. It also previews public projects that are in the "pipeline" for implementation.

We hope that this brief overview of Beechmont Avenue will enable you to have a better understanding and appreciation for the considerable planning work that has occurred.

As always, Anderson Township welcomes the feedback and ideas of concerned residents, business, and property owners who are vested in the future of Anderson's Main Street, Beechmont Avenue.



Beechmont Fire Station #6, 1973



Beechmont Avenue at Paddison Road, 1955



Plans, plans and more plans

Corridor's improvement continual since 1990s

If there is one thing that Beechmont Avenue does not lack, it is plans. Of course, ironically much of the corridor's historic development occurred in an unplanned manner. As a state highway, the operation and control of the roadway is under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Department of Transportation. That means Anderson Township has much less control over what happens on Beechmont Avenue than many might expect.

Anderson Township is actually the "middle man" between ODOT and private property owners. ODOT controls what happens on Beechmont and Anderson Township enforces land use controls and zoning regulations. Today, ODOT and Anderson Township work closely with one another and other partners regarding decisions affecting the roadway and abutting properties.

However, this was not always the case. In fact, there were no zoning controls in Anderson until 1948, and zoning was administered by Hamilton County until 1988.

Soon after assuming zoning authority, Anderson Township Trustees realized the need to develop a guide for not only zoning decisions on the corridor, but transportation flow in general. As a result, the original Beechmont Corridor Task Force was assembled in the early 1990s, at a time when the image of Beechmont Avenue was likely at its lowest. Congestion and accidents were widespread along the corridor, and businesses had begun to leave Anderson, impacting the economic vitality of the corridor and therefore the township in general.

THE BEECHMONT CORRIDOR PLAN

The township's first Beechmont Corridor Plan, adopted in 1996, took on the task of charting the future of the road, by taking a puzzle piece at a time and making changes. This plan was awarded the Outstanding Plan Award by the Ohio Planning Association. The mission of this effort was to:

- Promote safer, more efficient access to businesses
- Allow for the smooth flow of current and future commuter traffic
- Create an environment that encourages economic vitality

The plan detailed cutting-edge ideas for the future of Beechmont Avenue, and implementation began immediately, continuing through the 1990s.

CORRIDOR GOING GREEN

In 2001, in response to residents' comments about the need to "green" Beechmont Avenue, the township developed and adopted the Beechmont Landscape Plan. In 2005, Anderson's first Comprehensive Plan was prepared, containing several key goals for Beechmont Avenue.

Later that year, the Beechmont Corridor Plan was updated and a new Beechmont Vision Plan was developed. This plan helped create a sense of place on the corridor through development patterns and land use. Finally, in 2009, the township's Anderson Trails Plan, which won the Ohio Planning Association's Plan Implementation Award, provided recommendations for pedestrians and bicyclists along Beechmont.

Each of these four planning efforts has connected planning professionals, technical experts, government agencies, citizens, businesses, property owners, and key stakeholders, to arrive at a vision for Beechmont Corridor.

In addition, while these efforts all had a slightly different focus, each built upon and recognized the recommendations contained in prior work. Perhaps most importantly, none of these plans just sat on a shelf gathering dust. All plans have projects in various stages of completion.

FAST FACTS

Average Number of Cars on Beechmont per Day (2002)

Salem Road West to Mt. Washington - 17,800

Salem Road East to Union Township - 33,700



Improving Beechmont

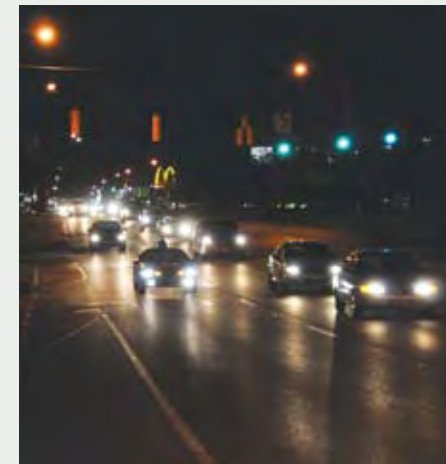
Focus on traffic, safety, economic vitality

Making change in the 3.4 mile - Beechmont Corridor begins with a plan. From roadway improvements, to landscaping enhancements and a higher quality of private development, significant improvement has occurred within and along Beechmont Avenue through careful planning. Change also has come through the township taking a greater role in improving private development patterns.

Here's where improvements have occurred in the past 15 years in the Beechmont Corridor's plan goal areas:

Traffic

Anderson Township has undertaken efforts to relieve traffic congestion and eliminate hot spots through several projects.



- Infrastructure Maintenance – Beechmont has been repaved and much of the curb was replaced with this process.
- Signalization Changes – A closed loop signal system has been installed on Beechmont, between Salem Road and Glen Este-Withamsville Road (in Clermont County). While this is not a system where all signals are timed, the computer-managed system enables the traffic

signals to be coordinated with each other. Timing can be changed to respond to traffic fluctuations based on time of the day, day of the week, etc.

- Right turn lanes have been constructed from Beechmont to Five Mile, Forest and into numerous private developments. Additionally, right turn lanes have been added from Five Mile, Asbury, and Nagel to Beechmont.



Safety

Safety on Beechmont has significantly increased over the years, with the number of accidents reduced through the township's efforts.

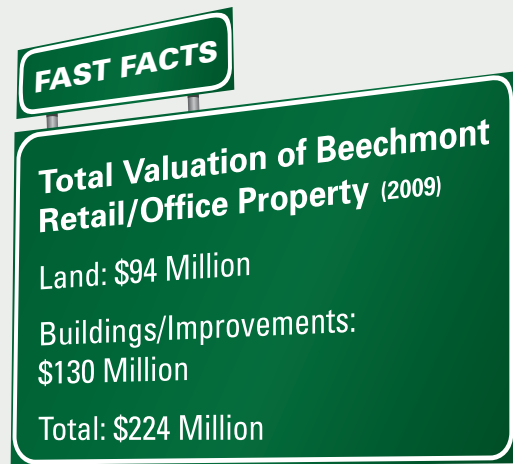
- Over 30 driveways or curb cuts have been eliminated, with five others modified to eliminate left turning movements into or out of private property.
- The Anderson Accessways program promotes parallel drives between properties, including Target - Beechmont Square, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church - Pinnacle Plaza, Anderson Operations Center - Five Mile Center - Beechmont Avenue, and Ace Hardware Center - New England Club Drive.
- Over 1,200 linear feet of landscaping has been installed along Beechmont, replacing pavement that formerly existed along the curb.
- A new traffic signal was installed, with connecting Anderson Accessways, at New England Club Drive.

- Battery backups were installed at the intersections of Five Mile and Eight Mile roads to provide continual service during an outage.
- Nearly 90 storm sewer grates have been replaced with models that are bicycle friendly. *Share the Road* signs were installed with educational information on the back for bicyclists.
- Over 30 pedestrian signals have been replaced with countdown models, as Beechmont was one of the first ODOT roadways where this technology was introduced.
- Permanent electronic speed information signs were installed at locations west of Salem Road.
- Bus stop benches and trash cans were installed at key METRO stop locations

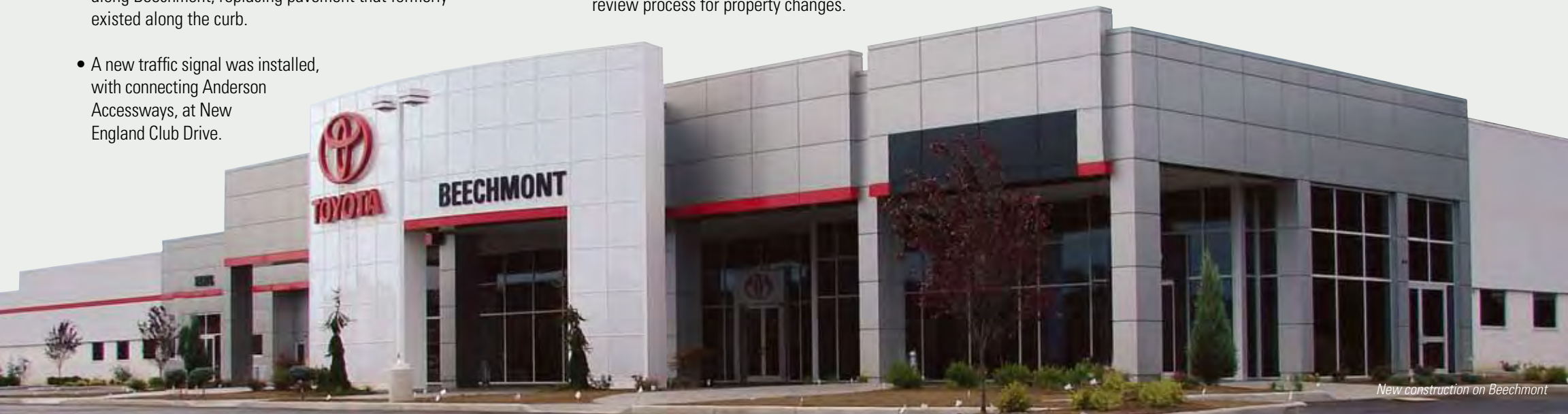
Economic Vitality

Township efforts have helped to maintain and enhance property values.

- Innovative address signage/wayfinding numbers have been installed along Beechmont Avenue to orient motorists.
- Enhanced zoning regulations have been enacted, including signage, parking and landscaping (including streetscape requirements), as well as a modification to the site plan review process for property changes.



- Access management or driveway restriction regulations have been established by ODOT and the Hamilton County Engineer's Office.
- Over 3,000 linear feet of sidewalk has been built since 2000.
- Intersection streetscape improvements have been constructed at four intersections (Salem, Asbury, Nagel and Eight Mile) consistent with the Beechmont Vision Plan. Changes include decorative stone walls, pavers, new handicapped ramps, landscaping, and enhanced crosswalk markings.
- Wayfinding signs, which identify businesses that can be accessed from Anderson Accessways, were erected at the Five Mile Center and New England Club Drive.



New construction on Beechmont



Photo courtesy Henry Dolive

Top 10 Questions about Beechmont Avenue

Everyone living in Anderson Township has an opinion about Beechmont Avenue. Public officials realize issues on the business corridor continue to be a hot button for many in the community. In the spirit of “The Late Show with David Letterman,” Anderson Township provides the Top 10 Questions about Beechmont Avenue, with a few answers as well.

1. Are there sign regulations on Beechmont?

Anderson Township does have regulations on signs, and these have been enhanced in recent years to limit the height of signs to 15’ or less. Additional restrictions regarding temporary signs help reduce clutter. Many of the signs on Beechmont are non-conforming, which means they can be used only until the property is redeveloped. In recent years, two volunteer committees studying the sign issue have given direction to added restrictions for businesses.

2. Why is Beechmont Avenue so congested?

With most of Beechmont accommodating more than 30,000 vehicles per day, it is one of the most heavily travelled non-interstate roadways in Greater Cincinnati. With roughly four times the number of driveways than is standard for a roadway of this nature, there is a constant flow of traffic off of and onto Beechmont, greatly slowing down traffic flow.

3. Why do parts of Beechmont look so ugly?

The most basic answer comes down to lack of zoning restrictions at its inception. Once Anderson had established its own zoning code, which was more stringent than the county’s code, much of the corridor had been developed. Many buildings built pre-Anderson zoning remain and new plans have not yet impacted property layout or building placement. Further, Anderson Township does not regulate the appearance of buildings, and only recently

did the Ohio Assembly allow townships to such powers (changes are being considered in this area). New zoning regulations for parking areas went into effect in 2002, but only take effect when a property is redeveloped.

4. What about more sidewalks on Beechmont?

Since Beechmont is a state roadway, ODOT has historically not encouraged sidewalks. Zoning changes now require sidewalks with property additions or new development. In recent years the township began constructing sidewalks on Beechmont, an action seen in very few townships. Today, nearly 40 percent of Beechmont Avenue’s business frontage from Salem Road to Clermont County has sidewalks, a number that has tripled in the past 10 years.

FAST FACTS

Number of businesses located on Beechmont

- Over 400

Amount of office/retail space on the corridor

- Over 1 million square feet

FAST FACTS

Beechmont intersections with highest number of accidents (2008)

- Eight Mile Road - 35
- Five Mile Road - 25
- Forest Road - 20

FAST FACTS

Most common types of accidents

- Rear-end collision
- Angle
- Sideswipe - passing

5. What can be done about unsightly power lines?

Removing the utility poles and power lines would greatly improve the appearance of Beechmont Avenue. However, not only is this costly (estimated at \$52 million by a Duke [Cinergy] Energy study in 2001), it is not inclusive of all actual costs to remove the power lines. A complete estimate to do the whole job has been suggested at over \$60 million.

6. Why can't the township do more on Beechmont?

As a state highway and per the Ohio Revised Code, Beechmont Avenue is regulated by the Ohio Department of Transportation. They must grant permission for any projects. In addition, with little public right of way, improvements also often require the permission of private property owners.

7. Why can't the township remove the large billboards?

Nearly all the billboards on Beechmont are non-conforming, introduced before sign restrictions in the early 1990s. Today, there are few areas where billboards can be constructed. However, such non-conforming structures cannot be removed by Anderson.

ODOT's resources are spread across the state and thus we can make a direct change in our community by doing some of the improvements ourselves. Most improvements have been made using TIF (Tax Increment Financing) funds, monies collected

from properties on Beechmont, so investment is then made back into the corridor.

8. If Beechmont is not a township roadway, why should we invest local funds for its improvement?

Though not under township control, Anderson realizes its identity in Greater Cincinnati largely rests with Beechmont Avenue. To improve this image, the township has devoted considerable energy and funding to improving its safety and convenience.

9. What can be done about Beechmont storefront vacancies?

The retail and office vacancy rate on Beechmont is actually quite consistent with other Greater Cincinnati communities. With over 1 million square feet of office and retail space, there will likely always be vacancies on the corridor. Without direct interstate access and/or frontage, Beechmont is at a disadvantage when compared to other areas in attracting national retailers. Anderson is a community-driven market, especially with competition surrounding regional markets such as Kenwood and Eastgate.

10. Are there plans for bike lanes on Beechmont?

Beechmont does have a wide shoulder in most areas where pedestrians can walk and bicyclists can ride. It is not wide enough to be designated as a bike lane. However, some upgrades, such as new storm grates and signage, have been installed for bicyclists.



Photo courtesy Henry Dolive

Beechmont's future

Private development, partnerships will create change

Much has been accomplished along Beechmont Avenue since adoption of the Beechmont Corridor Plan in 1994. However, despite significant effort, the corridor won't look like the wide, landscaped roadways of Mason or Blue Ash in the near future.

Considerable work has enhanced the economic vitality of the corridor, while promoting public safety and managing traffic flow. Much change will occur through private development. The rest will come through partnerships creating significant public projects.

Here are major public projects planned in the near future:

- Reconfiguration of the Beechmont and Five Mile intersection with new continuous flow intersection design – scheduled for 2012.
- Reconfiguration of the Beechmont and Eight Mile intersection in 2014, to allow the installation of a right turn lane from westbound Beechmont to northbound Eight Mile.
- Access management project to eliminate over 30 driveways in Anderson Township, install back plates on traffic signals to improve visibility, implement uniform street signage, and introduce “zebra style” pedestrian crossings at all signalized intersections. Set for 2014.
- Construction of additional sidewalk segments, focused primarily around the Five Mile and Eight Mile intersections.

There is no way Anderson Township can tackle all these projects alone. As we and other partner agencies, volunteers, and stakeholders look ahead to the next 15 years and beyond, you have an opportunity to be part of the solution. Working together, we can evoke positive changes to the future of Anderson's Main Street.

Information on past and future planning efforts is found on the township's website, *AndersonTownship.org*. Click on “Development Services,” then “Plans.” Contact the township at 688-8400 or *ssievers@AndersonTownship.org*. Anderson Township welcomes your comments.

Another way to foster change along Beechmont is to shop locally. Retailers and investors monitor shopping patterns when deciding where to make investment in expansions or new business opportunities. Through improvements with private property owners we can boost public safety, economic vitality, traffic mobility and the image of Beechmont Avenue as Anderson's Main Street and key commercial corridor in Greater Cincinnati.

