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**'Vision Plan'
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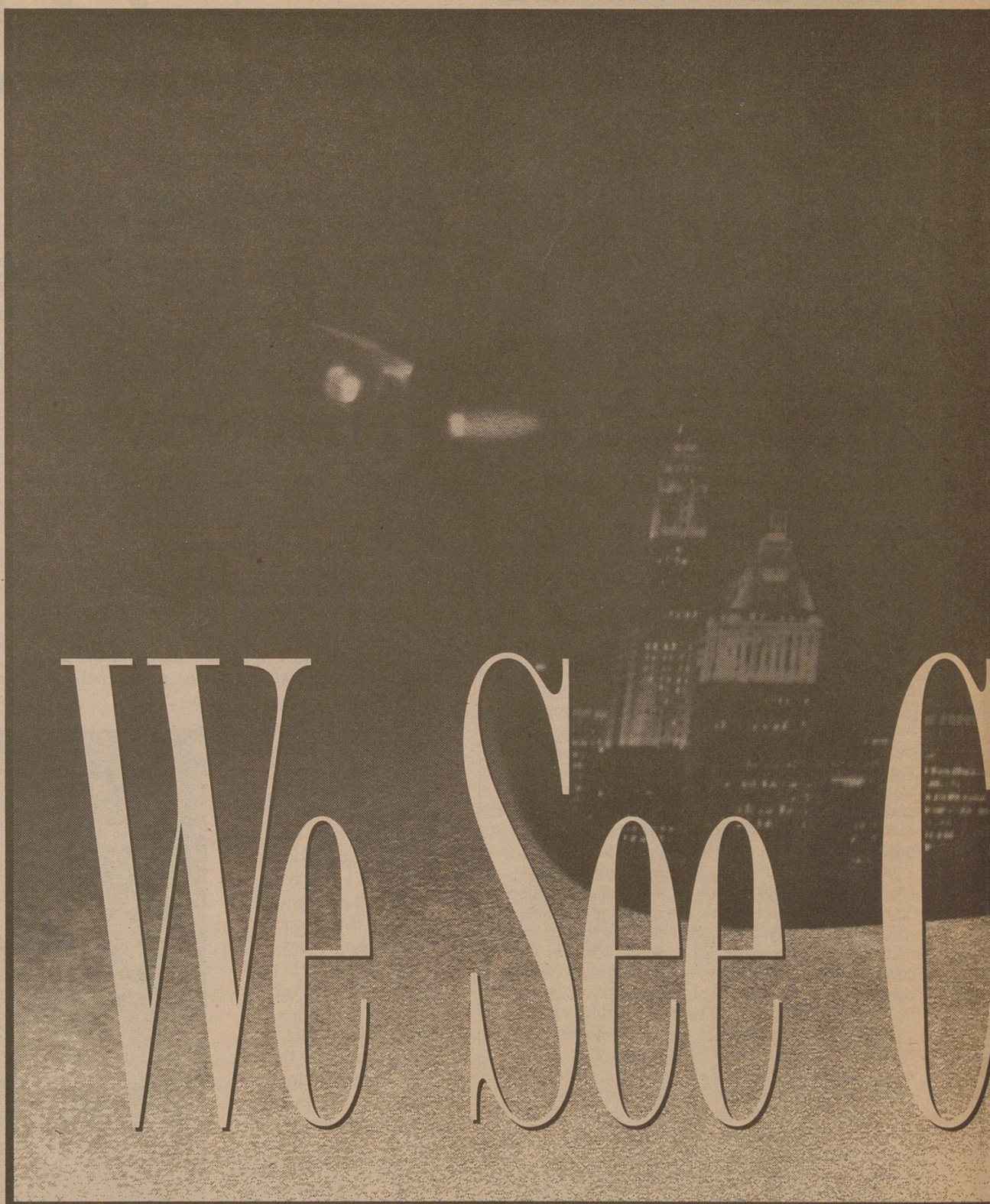
blueprint for

downtown

development.

BY NANCY FIROR

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY
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Downtown Cincinnati in the year 2020 is the "envy of cities everywhere." The bustling riverfront draws visitors and tourists by the thousands. They flock to shops, restaurants, galleries, Reds games and the Aronoff Center for the Arts.

Residents from all incomes and races live here. Housing — much of it renovated — is affordable and pleasing. The streets are safe and friendly. Cincinnati police officers are visible and bilingual.

The struggle for downtown revitalization is long forgotten in this place, which has remained "North America's Most Livable City" since 1994.

This is not a dream. It's a vision — carved out of opinions from more than 4,000 Tristate residents. And even though the question of how to breathe new life into downtown has been looming for years, the vision's creators and city officials are adamant: In some form, this vision will become reality.

"We finally are awake now," says Rick Greiwe, chief operating officer of Downtown Cincinnati Inc. (DCI), founded by a business leadership group to encourage downtown development. "Downtown is the heart of the

area, and we have to take action soon. Downtown has to be safe, it has to be clean, it has to be easy to use."

But because past efforts have not guaranteed downtown's sound economic future — coupled with an announcement last week that Lazarus could scrap its \$29 million project on Fountain Square West — some wonder whether city leaders are reinventing the wheel in an attempt to reach an impossible goal.

"Everybody needs 'the vision thing,' but a lot of it is money and competition from retailers in the suburbs," says Peter Strauss, who was a Cincinnati City Councilmember from 1981 to 1993. "The jury's still out as to whether downtowns are going to make it anymore."

To reverse the impact changing business trends and suburban sprawl have had on downtown Cincinnati, DCI stepped into action last fall and formed a 15-member Vision Committee. The committee consulted experts, solicited responses from more than 4,000 people and crafted The Vision, which was presented to City Council in May.

Since then, signs of DCI follow-through have been apparent: