



# Sharonville's Northern Lights District: **REVITALIZATION** *in Motion*

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Photography provided by the City of Sharonville

**Sharonville's Northern Lights District (NLD) – the city's bright star in its ongoing successful revitalization saga – is set to become the meeting, athletic, performance and entertainment center of the region.**



Jim Downton, executive director of the Sharonville Convention Center

It is home to the exquisite and recently expanded Sharonville Convention Center at 11355 Chester Road. In early 2017, it will be connected to the new \$14 million Hyatt Place Hotel. Just down the road, the Princeton Community School District's new Viking Village at 100 Viking Way offers another exciting development draw.

"We are thrilled to welcome the Hyatt Place brand to the Northern Lights District," says Mayor Kevin Hardman. "In addition to the approximately 75 jobs that the hotel will create once it is opened, the hotel will also bring many other economic benefits to our community."

Sharonville development officials, elected officials and business leaders agree that the Convention Center/Hyatt Place Hotel connection will bring a new and dynamic product to the district.

Customers are clamoring for the combination.

"The arrival of Hyatt Place @ The Sharonville Convention Center provides a superior enhancement to our world class convention center," says Jim Downton, executive director of the convention center. "Our customers are thrilled to have an opportunity to contain their events and hotel needs all under one roof. This is a one-of-a-kind amenity that allows us to continue to build and grow economic impact for our community and Hamilton County.

"Hyatt is a hotel brand people know. We broke ground in December 2015, and we can't get the building up quick enough."

Owned by the City of Sharonville, the convention center, which was built in 1994, completed a \$25 million renovation in May 2012. That provided a contemporary yet comfortable location for conventions, banquets, trade shows and other public events. The multi-level facil-







ity, which is 15 miles north of downtown Cincinnati near Interstates 75 and 275, includes a 20,000-square-foot exhibit hall; 14,000-square-foot ballroom; 8,200-square-foot room that can be divided into three spaces; 7,400-square-foot room that can be divided into five spaces; 6,300-square-foot room that can be divided into four spaces; three additional break-out rooms; electronic signage and message boards; Wi-Fi; innovative projection wall at the entrance to welcome guests; and built-in registration areas and ticket counters.

"The renovation nearly tripled the convention center's event space, increasing our capacity to host larger events with more economic impact," says Downton. "Since we reopened in 2012, we have been very, very successful."

More than 200,000 visitors passed through the doors in 2014.

Of course, when one hears the term "convention center," one often envisions a big, gray box of a building. But nothing could be further from the truth with the Sharonville Conventional Center.

"Glass, natural lighting, tile, wood – we're more in alignment with a fine hotel – and that is the reason 75 percent of our customers are regional corporations like P&G, Kroger's, Pure Romance, Macy's and General Electric," Downton says. "The convention center has also been embraced by regional and state convention associations. That's their expectation – they don't want a big, gray box; they want a high-end facility with a great reputation for service and excellent food."

And that is exactly what customers get. Contemporary meeting spaces. Unparalleled customer service. And delicious meals prepared on-site by a renowned chef and served by Ovations, an award-winning catering team.

"When the convention center is successful, its economic impact is felt throughout the Sharonville community," says Downton. "When the convention center is full of customers, so are the other many local restaurants and hotel rooms."

The Sharonville Convention Center is not only a first-class event center, it is also Greater Cincinnati's premier planet-friendly facility, earning the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC).

"The Hyatt Place will fully complement the Sharonville Convention Center, and improve the center's competitiveness when courting events and conventions," says Chris Xeil Lyons, Sharonville Economic Development Director. "The convention center and the hotel will be great partners, making Sharonville and the Northern Lights District an increasingly sought-out destination for meetings and events."

Historically, the convention center is at the heart of the revitalization and economic development that has unfolded, through good and bad economic times, along the Chester Road Corridor.



Locals who remember the late 1970s through the late 1980s remember well that Chester Road was booming with several hotels and fine restaurants – Marriott, Howard Johnson’s, Windjammer, Cork & Cleaver, Victoria Station and the ever-popular Red Dog Saloon, to name a few.

Then, in the late ‘80s, the Emperor’s Wok location was acquired to build the Sharonville Convention Center. Other establishments began closing as new developments began to pop up.

The NLD Master Plan was released in July 2007, its main goal to develop a distinctive and vibrant hospitality, entertainment and office district. Described in the vision statement as a year-round destination with “inclusive offerings,” the NLD would offer a unique, local flavor with hotels, retail and locally owned restaurants surrounding the Sharonville Convention Center. The synergy among these multi-land-use developments was expected to create a welcoming, vibrant gateway environment appealing to a wide range of visitors.

A secondary goal envisioned the creation of an aura celebrating visitors’ arrival to the district, displaying one-of-a-kind lighting, streetscaping and architecture. A third goal emphasized the creation of pedestrian connections while accommodating automobile access.

Sharonville’s NLD future looked bright.

And then came 2008, and the economy tanked.

### **Behold Viking Village**

In January 2010, voters in the Princeton Community School District passed a bond levy to replace the existing junior and senior high school buildings that were fraught with infrastructure problems and non-compliance with many federal standards.

The new middle school wing opened in 2013 and the high school wing opened in 2014.

Viking Village, the centrally shared space between the two buildings, opened in 2015.

The \$140 million construction project, school and business officials agree, shows the strength and faith of an intently focused, forward-thinking community willing to support a bond issue during a recession.

The new facility will serve as a revitalization magnet for Sharonville’s NLD by pulling in visitors and developers alike.

Here is why: Located at 100 Viking Way, the \$500,000 facility offers world-class sports and performance venues such as:

- A 500-seat natatorium.
- A 2,500-seat arena-style gymnasium.
- A 1,200-seat performance theater with full orchestra pit and music studios for vocalists, band, orchestra, piano, jazz and theater.
- Physical education and athletic facilities that include weight rooms, wrestling rooms and auxiliary gymnasiums.





Site renovations are underway for new softball and baseball facilities, a middle school track, parking and football and soccer fields along the high school's former site on Chester Road.

"The Princeton School District, home to the sixth-largest public school facility in the state, is scheduled to host several regional and national events, and as such, we envision Northern Lights to be the premier destination for corporate, performance and sports visitors," says Lyons. "The state-of-the-art facility, with its top-notch performance and athletic platforms, is sure to bring throngs of visitors to the area. These visitors will be looking for great food, perhaps hotel accommodations or nearby shopping. The possible economic benefits are endless."

According to Lyons, Viking Village and its visitors, combined with the convention center's more than 200,000 annual visitors – 70 percent of whom are corporate – and the 300 new jobs to be created by Tata Consulting Services (TSC), a global leader in IT services, makes the NLD attractive to restaurant developers. The NLD, which has received \$175 million in recent investment, she says, is within 600 miles of 54 percent of the U.S. population, and 56 percent of its buying power

"Our next step in Northern Lights development is to secure additional full-service restaurants for the district," says Lyons. "These restaurants are critical to satisfying the current and future demand of our hotels, convention center and Princeton's Viking Village."

The NLD has many sites available for development, several with direct highway visibility. In 2010, the city re-

ceived a Community Entertainment District (CED) designation. This allows the city up to 15 D-5j liquor licenses within the CED boundary. The CED is an additional incentive for restaurants and entertainment establishments to locate in the NLD.

### Corridor Improvements Have Been Approved

In an effort to continue the revitalization of the NLD, Sharonville City Council has approved the continuation of Chester Road corridor improvements extending from the convention center to Kemper Road. The stamped sidewalks will be widened and retention walls will be installed at three locations. Additionally, the city will eliminate poles and provide services underground where feasible. The \$2.9 million project will complement the \$6 million in corridor improvements from Sharon Road to the convention center.

One of the area's most prominent commercial real estate developers, Neyer Properties, purchased the Triangle Office Park in 2015. Located at the corner of I-75 and I-275, the site has a daily traffic count of almost 250,000 per day. Neyer is working to redevelop the highly visible location in 2016.

For information about the Northern Lights District visit their website at [NorthernLightsDistrict.com](http://NorthernLightsDistrict.com). You can reach Economic Development Director Chris Xeil Lyons by phone at 513.563.1144 or email at [clyons@cityofsharonville.com](mailto:clyons@cityofsharonville.com).