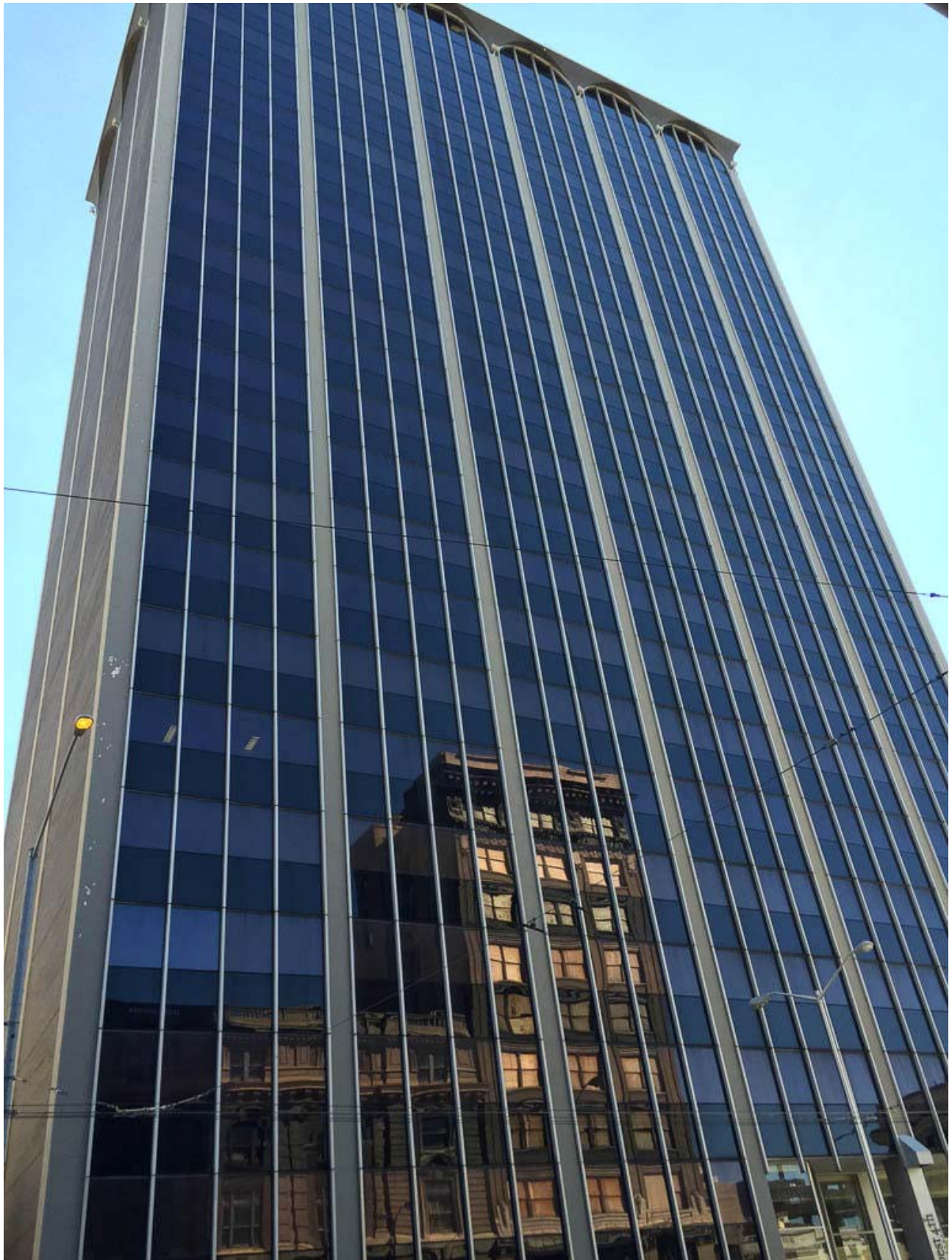


# How Many Downtown Dayton Buildings Are Empty? WYSO Curious Explores

By CAREY SCHEER • NOV 22, 2015

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(/sites/wyso/files/styles/x\_large/public/201511/IMG\_6335.jpg)

*A mostly empty building, 40 West Fourth St, with a reflection in its windows of part of the empty Dayton Arcade.*

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Dayton's first modern skyscraper stands at 40 West Fourth Street. It's all glass on the outside, stretching 22 stories into the sky. The lobby is brightly lit, but it's eerily empty, aside from a bored looking security guard. He tells me there's only two businesses left in this building, leaving 20 totally empty floors.

 Listen  
3:14



I take the elevator, stopping at a few floors at random. The lights are on, and the halls are well maintained, but there is no sign of anyone. All the office suites are locked. I make my way to the top floor, where I finally find Dawn Ballain.

“There’s nobody. It’s kind of leery, scary at times,” Dawn says about working in an empty skyscraper. She’s worked in a law office in the building for about 23 years.

“When I first started here it was full capacity. All the floors were occupied,” but Dawn says that it’s not just this building. “It’s scary because places aren’t here anymore. They are gone and it’s sad. I remember as a little girl coming downtown with grandma going to Woolworth and they are not there anymore.”

### **The question**

I found my way into this building while researching Joe Kirby’s WYSO Curious (<http://wyso.org/topic/wyso-curious#stream/0>)s question.

“These are big buildings” Joe says, “and I feel like there is not that many people around.”

Joe, who lives in Oakwood but works in downtown Dayton, wanted to know just how empty the buildings here are.

### **The answer**

This year alone, more than 30 businesses have left or have committed to leave the city’s core. Many stay in the region, but they head to the suburbs or places like Austin Landing, where there’s free parking, restaurants, and a grocery store.

But the matter of exactly how many buildings are empty, or just how full the buildings are, is tricky. Integra Realty Resources puts Dayton’s office buildings at about 32 percent vacant, the worst rate in the country. Still, vacancy rates only ever include actively leasable buildings; it’s 32 percent vacant units, not 32 percent vacant buildings. If boarded-up buildings like the Arcade were counted, the rate would be even higher.

**"The American dream might have died a little bit"**

Sandy Gudorf, President of the Downtown Dayton Partnership, says they are trying to fill up some of this empty space.



[http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wyso/files/styles/x\\_large/public/201511/IMG\\_6343.jpg](http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wyso/files/styles/x_large/public/201511/IMG_6343.jpg)

*It's tricky to get a full count of vacant buildings and units in downtown, but about a third of available units are empty.*

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state of them today, he says, "You can't help but feel that the American dream might have died a little bit in Dayton Ohio."

Thrasher tells me that as much as he loves to explore these abandoned, mysterious buildings, he'd rather see them redeveloped, or if need be, torn down.

*WYSO Curious is our series driven by your questions and curiosities about the Miami Valley. Is there something you've always wondered about the Miami Valley's history, people, culture, economy, politics or environment? Send in a question now (<http://wyso.org/topic/wyso-curious>), and check back to see which questions we're considering. WYSO Curious is a partner of Hearken (<http://www.wearehearken.com/>), founded by Jennifer Brandel.*

"So we come up with creative strategies," Sandy explains. "How do we transition from strictly office to mixed use and or housing? And we are seeing some success with that strategy."

The Downtown Dayton Partnership hopes to see some of these office towers transformed into apartments with restaurants and retail on the bottom.

But downtown development advocates have a lot of work to do. Dayton's got so many run-down buildings that the city has become a playground for urban explorers. Thrasher Banks, which is his online identity, is part of a network of people who go into empty structures and tag and share photos on social media. This hobby has left him with a grim view of the city.

"Dayton is called the Gem City, but I think it should be called the grime city," Thrasher tells me. He likes to daydream about what these buildings once were. But, seeing the