downtown TAUNTON

challenges & opportunities

CONDUCTED BY:

THE URBAN INITIATIVE
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

SPONSORED BY:

CITY OF TAUNTON
Office of Economic & Community Development

Our Mission

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth stands at the forefront of many of the major public policy issues that currently confront the regional communities we serve and the entire Commonwealth. With its thumb on the pulse of a wide range of issues including environmental and sustainability concerns, increasing regional educational achievement, and innovative approaches to energy conservation, the University has a history of uniting its educational, research, scientific, and technological resources toward positive efforts that contribute to the progress of our state.

Recognizing higher education's further potential to pursue and promote constructive statewide growth, the University's Chancellor, Dr. Jean F. MacCormack, commissioned the establishment of the Urban Initiative in November 2007, specifically to act on behalf of the many older urban communities throughout the Commonwealth that continue to struggle with the transition from manufacturing to today's knowledge-based economy. Since then, the urban revitalization movement throughout the state has garnered significant momentum and has earned the Urban Initiative a prominent role in its progression.

Considering that the University serves a region that contains several such cities, including Fall River, New Bedford, Brockton, and Taunton, the existence of the Urban Initiative makes not only regional, but also statewide sense. The presence of various policy challenges that have hindered progress in these urban areas represents an opportunity recognized by Chancellor MacCormack to further embed the University in these and other communities in order to promote and affect the necessary policy changes that can lead to their revitalization and an improved quality of life for their residents.

The Urban Initiative's affiliation with the Center for Policy Analysis, a well-established research unit of UMass Dartmouth, is in keeping with the Center's long-held desire to bring a greater focus on urban issues to their own policy work.

Among other elements, the Urban Initiative's mission encompasses a fusion of research, project development and implementation, technical assistance, and policy analysis that supports the work of municipalities, state and local agencies, private and non-profit entities, and other organizations. Specifically, the Urban Initiative seeks to accomplish these goals by engaging our elected leaders, issuing research reports, hosting events and conferences, offering technical assistance and training to policy leaders, encouraging civic participation, and linking the University's resources to the region and beyond.

Fields of Focus

- Economic Development
- Workforce Development
- Municipal Organization and Finance
- Leadership
- Urban Education
- Urban Policy
- Civic Engagement

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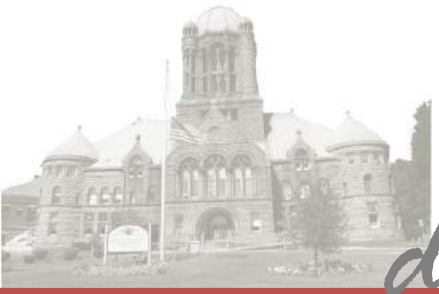

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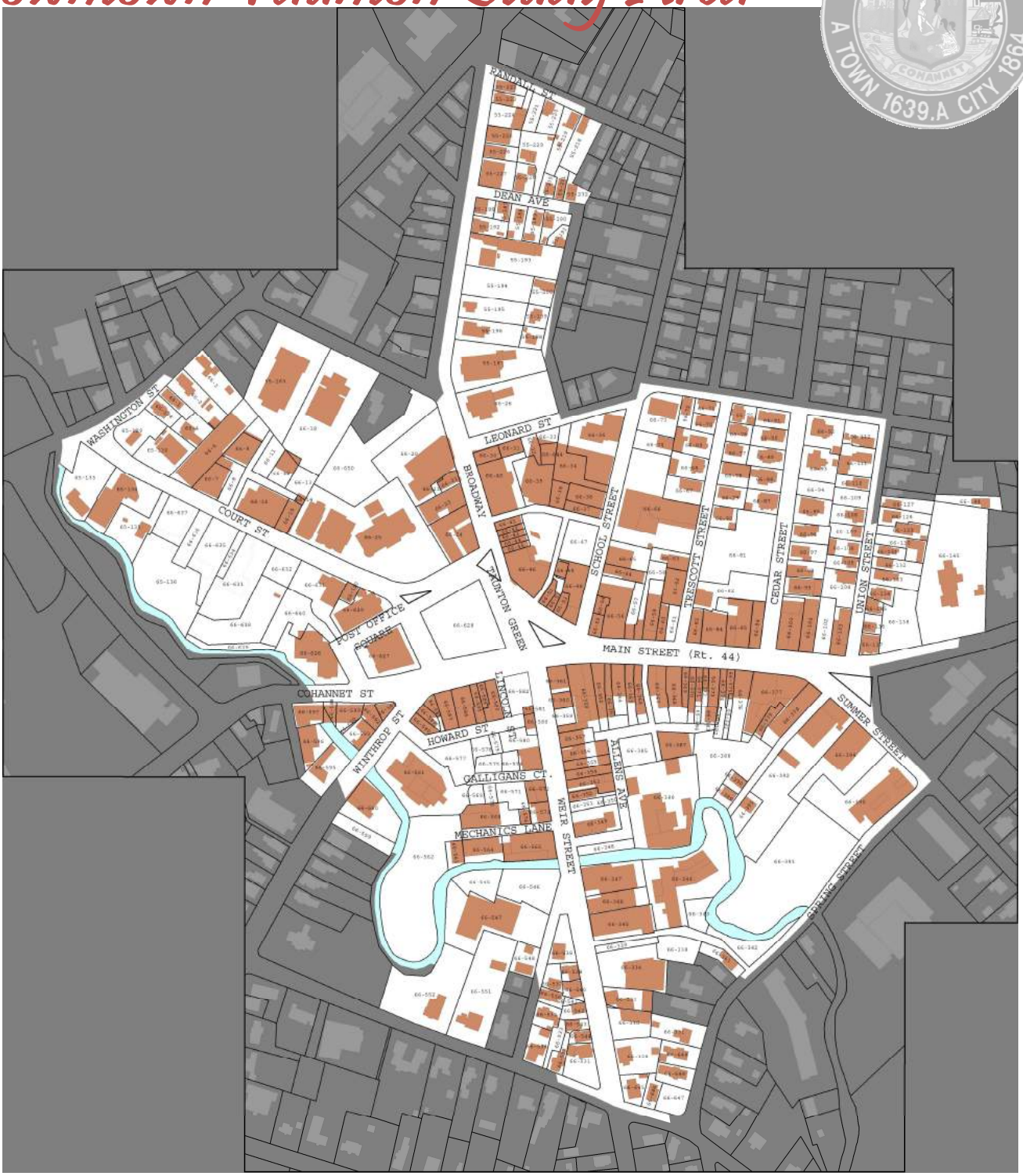
Downtown Taunton Study Area



For the purposes of this study, the boundaries of "Downtown Taunton" were established using the City's definition of the "Central Business District" according to zoning maps accessed via the City's online Geographic Information System (GIS). All properties that were found to be entirely or partially within the "Central Business District" were included in the research team's delineation of the downtown. Moreover, the boundaries pictured above are slightly different than those of the GIS mapping system in that properties that were only partially in the "Central Business District" have been included in their entirety.

The reader should take note that the authors use the terms "Downtown Taunton" and "Central Business District" interchangeably throughout the report.

Executive Summary

Downtown Decline

A National Trend

Downtowns are symbols of America's cultural, economic, political, and social history. For cities and their residents, the downtown (or central business district) once represented the community's center and was regarded as the primary place for not only meetings, celebrations, and entertainment, but also for purchasing basic necessities and finding employment. As areas of enhanced infrastructure and market concentration, entrepreneurs were naturally drawn to downtowns, and they understood that the viability of their business ventures was intrinsically tied to the abundant mix of downtown functions that met a variety of consumer needs. But as America grew beyond the confines of the urban core, downtowns were transformed and the purpose they once served as a region's dominant commercial, financial, and retail center gradually changed to that of a specialized service and office center with meager remnants of a once-vibrant retail sector.

Many small-city downtowns across the United States have seen this trend and are still living through its difficult effects as they struggle to survive. Nearly all cases of downtown economic decline have consisted of a common mix of causes such as the building of a shopping mall on the city periphery or in a nearby suburban community and the construction of new multi-lane highways that accommodated and facilitated the expanded use of automobiles. Americans' fascination with the automobile and the freedom of vehicular travel allows people to travel longer distances to purchase goods and services. In addition, entrepreneurs understand this changing dynamic and have taken advantage of opportunities to build their business ventures on greenspace, avoiding the often exorbitant and unexpected costs associated with converting older downtown units in order to suit their trade.

These developments have resulted in a widespread decentralization of many of the functions that were once staples of downtown economies. Consumers are now able to meet their needs without setting foot in the downtown and, as a result, many cities now focus on commercial and industrial development on the city fringe while neglecting the physical, structural, and economic conditions of their downtown. However, something greater than 20th century technological advances, growing prosperity, unprecedented federal transportation investments, and sprawl has contributed to downtown decline. The foremost factor contributing to the deterioration of downtown districts is "the lack of collective responsibility for [a downtown's] wellbeing (McClure *et. al.* 2001, 107). This lack of collective responsibility has been a significant issue in downtowns across America, and the same has been true in Downtown Taunton.

Fortunately, the past several years have seen increased interest in promoting and revitalizing Downtown Taunton, particularly among the City's administration and downtown stakeholders. Although Taunton may lag behind communities that began redevelopment ventures in the 1980s and 1990s, the wealth of knowledge that exists from the experiences of these communities and the progress of several recent developments in Downtown Taunton present a stable springboard from which to launch an effective effort at redevelopment.

Good intentions, however, must be matched with cooperative action from city government, property owners, merchants, interest groups, non-profit organizations, and city residents. The community as a whole stands to benefit from a healthier downtown, so no one should be excluded from bearing the short- and long-term responsibilities or be allowed to obstruct genuine efforts to improve conditions. Ultimately, the revitalization of Taunton's dormant downtown could prove to be one of the most challenging ventures the community has ever chosen to undertake. In fact, many communities have tried to revive their commercial centers and even those who have decided to tread through the turbulent waters of redevelopment have experienced outcomes ranging from tremendous success to utter failure.

Yet, emerging research and experience shows that, if a community is patient and committed, downtown revitalization efforts can result in decreased vacancy rates, increased pedestrian activity, and rising property values. In fact, the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution has claimed that there is a significant "renaissance" taking place in downtowns across America (Leinberger 2005, 1 and Birch 2005, 1). Taunton stands poised to take part in this renaissance despite the many challenges it currently faces. Those who have hope in the downtown's future also realize its potential and have already begun taking initial steps to plant the seeds for a revitalization effort.

Challenges & Opportunities

Leadership. If Downtown Taunton's stakeholders expect a revitalization effort to succeed, they must foster and support the creation of strong and visionary short- and long-term leadership. Each type of leadership has its own role to play in the overall process. While leadership can come in many forms and emerge from a variety of sources, there are fundamental characteristics that

the short- and long-term leadership must exemplify. Simply put, short-term leadership is catalytic in nature, and requires the inspiration and command of one individual or a very small group of individuals with the necessary power and influence to convince others to actively support and participate in the revitalization effort. Conversely, long-term leadership should embody a strong public/private partnership that is led largely by the private sector within the structure of a permanent, professional, and formal organization to ensure that the work of downtown revitalization is continuous and lasts over a significant period of time.

Consensus Building. Downtown Taunton's stakeholders are currently unorganized, and many are divided as a result of prior disagreements or disputes. In some instances, the individuals and organizations that have led downtown development projects and efforts in the past have gradually lost the confidence of other stakeholders. As such, the need for short-term motivational leadership cannot be overstated. If Downtown Taunton is to undertake a revitalization effort, a catalytic leader is needed to build consensus among differing interests and encourage key stakeholders to work in partnership to develop and implement strategies for sustainable success and growth. Ultimately, short-term leadership does not define the vision or write the plan for downtown redevelopment. Rather, it creates the sense of urgency and responsibility needed to organize and activate downtown stakeholders and persuades them to start marching in the same direction. Conversely, because short-term leadership is often manifested in the form of a chief elected official, term limits and the unpredictability of elections necessitate the establishment of a long-term leadership structure.

Inter-Organizational Action. The long-term leadership must embody a strong private-public partnership that is largely led by the private sector within the confines of a permanent, professional, and formal organization that can ensure continuous and lasting maintenance of the revitalization effort. To be effective, the long-term leadership will need to clearly define, document, and acknowledge the roles to be played by the various groups, partners, and individuals that make up this leadership structure. Despite the number of organizations and agencies that are currently involved in Downtown Taunton, or whose mission links them to the downtown, very little is accomplished because these entities lack a clear understanding of what role they play and how they can leverage and integrate their resources and expertise to achieve unified action. In addition, a strong, professional, and stable long-term leadership is necessary because, as other communities have discovered, downtown revitalization is a process that takes place over time and requires constant management and control over the course of many years.

Vision & Strategic Planning. As important as the need for leadership is, Downtown Taunton will need a vision and a strategic plan for this leadership to implement. Several organizations currently have small-scale efforts to improve the downtown, but no cohesive or comprehensive plan exists to unite these efforts or guide overall development. This is a serious weakness that must be addressed, as a strategic plan allows cities to take appropriate action when development opportunities arise rather than moving forward with projects or allowing private development to take place with little consideration for how these activities will impact the economic future of the downtown. In addition, the process of creating a strategic plan and the product that results from it reinforce the reality that there is no silver bullet or miracle project for accomplishing the goal of downtown revitalization. A downtown development strategic plan should set forth a vision statement describing shared community and stakeholder aspirations for the downtown and articulate a detailed work plan that outlines the specific projects, programs, and improvements that will work to spur economic development, address the downtown's challenges, build upon its assets, and achieve the goals summarized in the vision statement.

Rebuilding Trust. In order to organize the downtown's stakeholders, burnt bridges will have to be rebuilt, and strong relationships based upon mutual interests and a concern for the health of Downtown Taunton must be established. Past disputes and disappointments have led to deep divides, frustration, and disillusionment that prevent merchants, property owners, city officials, business leaders, and other stakeholders from fully committing to cooperative efforts at downtown revitalization. In particular, the controversy that erupted in 2008 over the revision of parking meter rates in the downtown and the scale and length at which it was debated was often cited during interviews as a source of mistrust and frustration. In addition, redevelopment efforts require a significant amount of resources, which can frequently, and understandably, provoke intense debate, skepticism, and obstinacy among stakeholders. The downtown is made up of a variety of constituencies representing unique and often competing interests. As such, all of these factors make downtown revitalization efforts tremendously complex, necessitating the strong short- and long-term leadership described in this report. Moreover, success will require that individuals and organizations leave personal interests or agendas at the door and come to the table with positive and constructive intentions.

BID Paralysis. A clear indication of the lack of strong leadership and the difficulty of building a consensus among downtown stakeholders has been the ongoing effort to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) in the downtown. While the creation of a BID could hold tremendous potential as a mechanism for improving conditions in Downtown Taunton while managing and marketing the downtown's renewal, the significant amount of time (approximately three to four years) that stakeholders have expended on trying to build support for a BID is particularly troubling considering that BIDs typically take approximately two years to establish. Ultimately, stakeholders should be careful not to allow this issue to hang over the community for much longer. Considering recent developments including the hiring of an independent consultant to manage the BID formation effort, stakeholders and proponents should give themselves no longer than twelve to eighteen months to craft a persuasive message and bring this issue to final resolution. If the requisite support exists, quick action should be taken to complete the process. Otherwise, BID proponents should withdraw their proposal for the time being and begin focusing their energy on pursuing other downtown development initiatives.

Leadership Diversity. In order to succeed in coalition-building and consensus-building, efforts must be made to diversify the leadership and composition of organizations, boards, and

commissions involved in the downtown. Past difficulties have caused many stakeholders to experience feelings of fatigue and frustration, and the introduction of new ideas and perspectives will hopefully re-energize these stakeholder groups. If Downtown Taunton is to be the site of a successful downtown revitalization effort, the city and various stakeholder organizations must look beyond the usual suspects and attempt to build a coalition of old and new faces that can infuse the effort with enthusiasm and new ideas. The experience of those who have been working on the front lines over the past several years is critical, but the downtown's base of support must be expanded to sustain the effort and to ensure the interest and endorsement of the entire community.

Change. Downtown redevelopment will ultimately require change – change that city leaders, merchants, stakeholders, and city residents will have to be open to if a revitalization effort is to succeed. The people of Taunton possess a strong sense of nostalgia, and many seek to preserve the *status quo*. As such, the community should be careful not to portray itself as apprehensive of new development. While the community should be applauded for its efforts to maintain the downtown's precious heritage, it must be wary of doing so in excess. Opportunities are fleeting, and new ideas and initiatives must be considered carefully and with an open mind. The downtown is among the most historic places in the entire city. Significant events in the state and nation's history have taken place in Downtown Taunton, and its architecture and layout are perhaps unrivaled by any other small-city downtown throughout the state. This heritage, however, should support, rather than hinder, the downtown's economic future. Balancing this heritage and the *status quo* with new initiatives and development is a difficult task that will eventually require the community to make difficult decisions – decisions that the city and the community must be prepared to make in an open-minded fashion.

Problematic Absentee Property Owners. Urban communities across the United States, including Taunton, are currently forced to deal with the challenges posed by irresponsible or uncooperative property owners. In addition, there is the challenge posed by "absentee landlords," those who own property in the city but do not live in the city itself. For Downtown Taunton, the issue of absentee landlords is linked to another challenge: vacancies. Twenty-five percent of the privately owned properties and 27 percent of the commercial properties in the downtown are owned by individuals or firms with mailing addresses outside of Taunton. As such, developing a strategy to work with these and other problematic property owners must become a critical part of tackling the issue of vacancies in Downtown Taunton. For many absentee property owners, the cost of repairing or restoring their downtown properties outweigh the potential benefit of market-rate revenues, causing these properties to fall into disrepair.

Traffic. The level of vehicular traffic in Downtown Taunton is both a blessing and a burden. While the movement of cars in and through the downtown is a sign of life, excessive amounts of traffic and an intimidating and frustrating rotary near the center of Downtown Taunton hinder the promotion of pedestrian traffic. Downtown Taunton encompasses a rather small area, but the high volume of traffic from a variety of directions creates the perception that the downtown is little more than a throughway for motorists traveling along Routes 140, 44 and 138. Additionally, the Taunton Green, one of the area's most significant assets, is constantly surrounded by moving cars, making access to it difficult and often dangerous.

Aside from the sheer volume of traffic in the downtown, several intersections around the Taunton Green are of particular concern and should be assessed by the city and downtown stakeholders for possible improvements. These intersections include the intersection at Court Street, the Winthrop and Cohannet Streets intersection, and the intersection at Main Street and Weir Street. Of the 166 accidents in Downtown Taunton between 2005 and 2007, 64 percent took place at or near the Taunton Green, with the Winthrop and Cohannet Streets intersection accounting for over 20 percent of the total number of accidents in the downtown. In order to turn the volume of traffic into a potential asset, stakeholders must implement traffic-calming measures that provide a safe pedestrian environment and allow motorists to read signs, take in the sights, and begin to recognize what the area has to offer.

Permitting. Taunton's permitting process is inefficient and overly complex, due to the number of city entities and agencies involved, the perplexing division of permit-granting authorities among these entities, and the multi-layered special permit evaluation and site plan review processes. In addition, the various offices and agencies responsible for granting permits are scattered through the city itself. Another concern is the confusing and un-intuitive layout of authority as outlined in the city's Zoning Ordinance. To remedy these problems, the city should reevaluate its permitting process and finds ways to streamline its complex procedures while also creating easy-to-use guides for developers and permit seekers that clearly define the role of departments and agencies involved. Additionally, the city should consider creating a "one-stop shopping" system, centralizing the various agencies in a single building, in order to further aid those developers seeking permits.

Arts & Entertainment. Creating an environment that offers visitors a variety of things to do and see will make Downtown Taunton a place where people come to do more than simply serve on a jury, pay their property and excise taxes, or mail a package. The success of malls in attracting shoppers and keeping them for extended periods of time is largely due to the mix of venues offered aside from retail shops, including arcades, movie theaters, and restaurants. Downtowns have the capacity to offer so much more, such as art galleries and artists' studios, seasonal parades, farmers' markets, festivals, sidewalk sales, and outdoor entertainment.

Despite the opportunities, downtowns often have an image problem that must be overcome before investors and entrepreneurs are willing to bring their restaurants, cafés, theaters, or studios there. In Downtown Taunton, this challenge is particularly noticeable, as a great deal of the activity that takes place revolves around the courthouses, non-profits, and other government offices located there. In addition, very few establishments are open beyond 5:00 p.m., and those that are open, such as bars and restaurants, serve a limited market. These two features of Downtown Taunton's current state create an environment that is focused heavily on the work cycle of individuals employed in the downtown. The recent opening of Devito's Pizzeria and El Mariachi Restaurant on the

Taunton Green as well as the Ugly Duckling Restaurant on Weir Street have created a much-needed nightlife in the downtown. However, if attempts are not made to attract other venues that can support these establishments such as art centers, theaters, street festivals, and evening retail activity, a few establishments focused solely on food and beverage service will not be able to sustain a downtown redevelopment effort.

A report issued by the Brookings Institute in 2005 asserted that the goal of bringing arts and entertainment into a downtown should be to get "feet on the street," particularly in the evening and on the weekends. Doing so will allow the downtown's reputation as a destination to spread rapidly. "Just as a crowded restaurant is the best recommendation, crowded sidewalks recommend a downtown" (Leinberger 2005, 14). In this regard, Downtown Taunton has an advantage in its compact size. More feet in such a small area creates an amplified buzz that can lead to a critical mass. In addition, its size allows for a good variety of establishments and venues to be located within a walkable distance from one another.

Image and Infrastructure. Downtown Taunton has several unique assets and opportunities to draw upon in efforts to improve the area's physical, structural, and aesthetic environment. The perception of a downtown is shaped by both physical and environmental factors. The physical properties of a downtown directly influence how visitors and shoppers perceive the area. Unfortunately, physical improvements are often costly, and require a great deal of consensus and cooperation from stakeholders. To improve Downtown Taunton's physical and aesthetic environment, the city and downtown stakeholders should focus on the key tasks of creating a "sense of place," improving the downtown's image, enhancing the pedestrian experience, and highlighting the downtown's heritage. Doing so will allow the downtown to be transformed into a destination for a variety of commercial, intellectual, cultural, civic, and community-related activities. In addition, image has as much to do with self-image as the image the downtown portrays to visitors. As such, projecting a healthy self-image involves a change in the psyche of downtown stakeholders, property owners, civic organizations, and city leaders who must support and accept a new self image and share in the responsibility of preserving it.

Healthy downtowns also encourage people to experience their services and amenities on foot and to linger long enough to purchase goods, dine, or otherwise contribute to the downtown's economy. Enhancing the pedestrian experience in Downtown Taunton will require that downtown stakeholders undertake two key tasks: upgrading the visual and aesthetic environment and improving pedestrian safety. Visually and aesthetically, stakeholders can begin to ameliorate these concerns by focusing on creating a sense of place and improving the downtown's image. Typical methods for doing so often include streetscape improvements like the installation of trees, planters, benches, lighting, and banners, as well as marketing campaigns that portray the area in a positive light. With regard to pedestrian safety, the focus must be on how current traffic conditions in Downtown Taunton impact pedestrian movement and activity. While vehicular traffic is important, a downtown benefits greatly from pedestrians frequenting and doing business in the area's shops, restaurants, and service centers. Certainly, cars and trucks do not buy things, people do. As such, pedestrians and their uninhibited movement are central to a downtown's economic survival.

History & Architecture. Downtown Taunton has several natural strengths to work from that puts its stakeholders in a position to address issues regarding image and aesthetic environment. President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society agenda resulted in a massive expansion of federal funding for urban renewal projects throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and led to countless communities using these funds to subsidize the wholesale demolition of historic and architecturally unique buildings in order to construct parking garages and other buildings of more mundane and harsh designs. Luckily, much of Downtown Taunton's built environment survived these often ill-conceived efforts, thereby preserving its unique New England character and feel. Having maintained such a significant stock of historic properties, Downtown Taunton sets itself apart from other downtowns and puts it in a position to engage in historic and heritage preservation efforts that are regarded today as a key part of economic development efforts. The economic benefits of preservation are measured in job creation, increased tax revenue, greater private investment in property rehabilitation, rising property values, small business development, and heritage tourism. Across the country, countless communities have made historic preservation a cornerstone of their economic development strategies and applying elements of this approach in Downtown Taunton could play a significant role in its revitalization.

Compact Layout. The size of a downtown can also be intimidating for those trying to engage in a revitalization effort that focuses on improving physical and aesthetic conditions. Downtown Taunton's compact layout helps the scope of redevelopment be seen as much more manageable and significantly increases the potential impact of targeted investments and improvements within the CBD so as to eventually trigger and sustain further public and private investments in nearby properties. In addition, the downtown's compact layout has implications on efforts to reduce vacancies. Estimates show that 30 properties in the entire CBD currently have some level of vacancy and that of these, only seven are entirely vacant. These seven vacant properties are also located within a smaller zone identified by the research team as the "downtown core" (see Figure 10 on page 25 of this report). In presenting the city with an inventory of vacant space, it can now begin to define and understand the scope of this challenge while recognizing that improving occupancy rates can be a manageable task if it focuses on the actual numbers rather than the often-inflated public perceptions of Downtown Taunton's vacancy problem.

Stable Market Elements. Although many might characterize Downtown Taunton as having a weak market, the research team believes that there are several market elements that currently exist in the downtown that work in its favor and could help to support revitalization activities while promoting new opportunities for private business development. In this case, the focus is on three key elements. The first is the existence of an established core of stable uses including the Post Office, Taunton City Hall, the Public Library, various county and state courthouses and facilities, a number of notable banking institutions, and several law firms. The existence of

these offices in the downtown provides the area with a considerable amount of vehicular and pedestrian traffic that should be encouraged to shop or dine in nearby stores and eateries. The second element is the people themselves who work in the downtown and have disposable incomes. This is largely due to the previous element, since these sectors employ a considerable number of individuals. Efforts should be made to survey this sizable consumer market to determine what type of goods or services they would like to see or would utilize in the downtown. The array of well-established and locally-owned firms and businesses completes this list of stable market elements. Downtown Taunton's long-standing and closely integrated business community, much of which is made up of family-owned and –operated businesses, is a tremendous strength as a good number of them share a deep concern for the health and future of the downtown.

Downtown Advocacy. In many communities, local leaders and business owners often pay a great deal of lip service to downtown revitalization, while taking little concrete action. In Taunton, the nostalgia that local citizens have for their downtown and its economic, social, and political history appears to have sustained an underlying current of advocacy for a return to more prosperous and exciting times. A key part of Downtown Taunton's ability to overcome its challenges and leverage its assets will be creating opportunities to unite stakeholders and form partnerships that can accomplish goals. From the Mayor's Office to the Heart of Taunton, to the city's Office of Economic and Community Development and the Parking Commission, many stakeholders voiced compliments for the commitment these entities and others have demonstrated to the cause of downtown renewal. While advocacy is an important part of redeveloping the downtown, it is time for the downtown's advocates to work together to create strong and competent leadership that can get everyone moving in the same direction and toward achieving common goals. Only then will the many voices of advocacy become one call for a brighter future in Downtown Taunton.

Downtown Vacant Property Concerns

Having to cope with and effectively ameliorate problems associated with vacant property and the disinvestment and blight associated with it is relatively new to small urban cities like Taunton. Understandably, these communities expected the private sector to step in when there was available property to be leased or purchased and that market forces would ultimately lead to an equilibrium between buyers and sellers at which a negligible amount of existing property would remain vacant or underutilized at any given time. Mid- to late-twentieth century market conditions radically changed this norm and created a situation in which private investment in older urban downtowns has been largely discouraged as a result of the major rehabilitation costs associated with redeveloping or converting existing space. Sprawl and the facilitation of rapid and convenient transportation away from the urban core have made greenspace development particularly attractive to investors and entrepreneurs who can often reasonably expect their consumer market to come to them. As such, local governments have been forced to step in to confront the challenges posed by excessive vacancies. In addition, because local municipal budgets are insufficient to adequately address the scale of this problem, many must rely upon state and federal governments for funding – resources that are often competitive and always limited.

While stakeholder concerns about vacancies appear to overstate the actual extent of the problem, promoting the utilization of vacant space in Downtown Taunton remains a significant challenge. The inventory of available downtown space included in this report shows that the problem of downtown vacancies is manageable, and will allow stakeholders to better coordinate efforts to attract new investors to the downtown.

Those properties that were currently being used for or possessed the potential to house commercial activity were ultimately the focus of this report's vacancy inventory. Downtown Taunton currently has 280 properties, of which, 44 are currently occupied by municipal, state, county, and federal agencies. Among the remaining 237 properties, fourteen are currently used by non-profit organizations including churches and other religious establishments. An additional 98 properties are used for residential purposes, leaving a total of 125 commercial properties in the downtown. Of these 125 properties, 30 are either partially or entirely vacant. At the street-level, where vacant space is visible to pedestrians and motorists, 16 of these 30 properties had at least one vacant unit at the street level, giving Downtown Taunton a street-level vacancy rate of 12.8 percent. In addition to these properties, four parcels are currently vacant lots that are covered by grass, trees, brush, or cement. While two of these vacant parcels are located on Main Street, the other two are located on Weir Street. Their location on these heavily-traversed streets makes them significant eyesores and priorities for redevelopment (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: ***Downtown Taunton: Vacancy & Absentee Statistics***

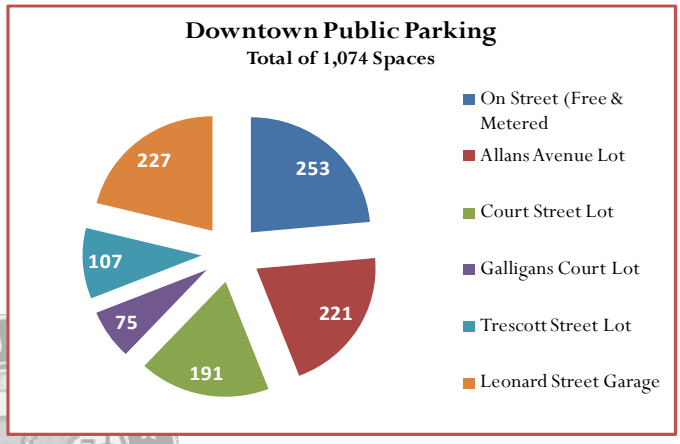
	Entire Central Business District	Downtown Core
Total Number of Properties	280	92
Total Number of Privately-Owned Properties	237	84
Total Number of Properties Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	59	24
Total Number of Commercial Properties	125	78
Total Number of Commercial Properties Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	34	21
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Any Level of Vacancy	30	25
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Both Street-Level and Upper-Level Vacancies	7	7
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Street-Level Vacancies Only	9	7
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Upper-Level Vacancies Only	8	7
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Vacancies Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	20	17
Total Number of Vacant Lots	4	4
Total Number of Vacant Lots Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	3	3

To help overcome the downtown's problem with vacant space, the city should update its GIS system to reflect more recent data, maintain a vacant property database that can be easily amended as circumstances change, coordinate and streamline the city's permitting process, and develop and implement a market-based approach to downtown revitalization that is guided by experienced professionals in the fields of real estate and commercial development.

Downtown Parking Concerns

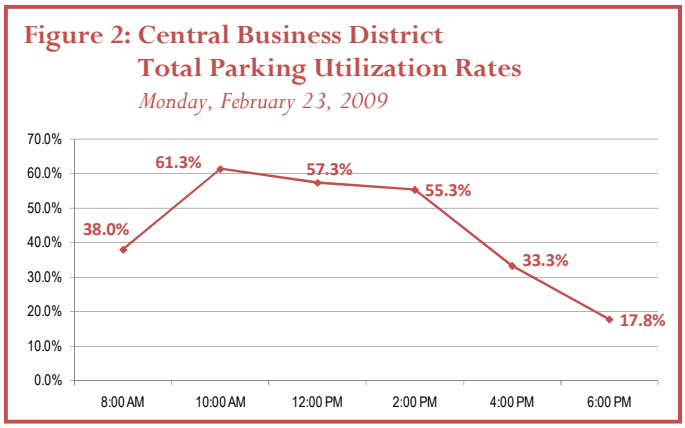
Parking inventory and space utilization data indicate that Downtown Taunton's current parking problems are related more to space management than actual quantity. The downtown has a variety of available on- and off-street parking resources and facilities. In addition to possessing a good quantity of parking spaces, the downtown also offers a useful mix of parking resources that include free on- and off-street parking, metered parking, handicapped parking, and 15-, 30-, and 60-minute free on-street parking. While current conditions will change once the new courthouse on Broadway is completed, there are several infrastructure projects and policy reforms that should be undertaken to lessen the impact of the courthouse's opening. The purpose of conducting an inventory of parking spaces and an analysis of space utilization is to provide the City and downtown stakeholders with previously uncollected data for use in future planning efforts relative to parking.

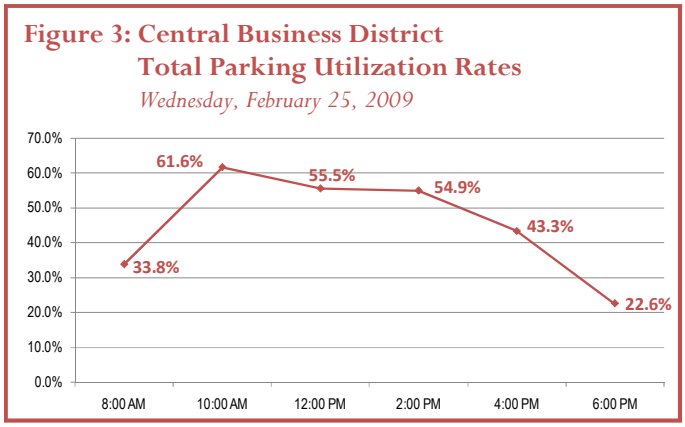
Inventory. Downtown Taunton has a total of 1,312 on- and off-street parking spaces, of which, 1,074 are open to public use and use by handicapped drivers. The downtown contains four city-owned surface parking lots and one two-story parking garage that provide a total of 1,046 parking spaces, 821 of which are open to the public and to handicapped drivers. This includes 107 spaces in the Trescott Street lot, 75 spaces in the Galligans Court lot, 221 spaces in the Allans Avenue lot, 191 spaces in the Court Street lot, and 227 spaces in the Leonard Street garage. In addition to the downtown's off-street parking resources, it contains 266 on-street parking spaces that offer public, handicapped, and restricted access. Of these 266 spaces, 253 are open to public use, which includes a variety of metered, free, and handicapped spaces. Among these 253 spaces, 212 of them are metered.

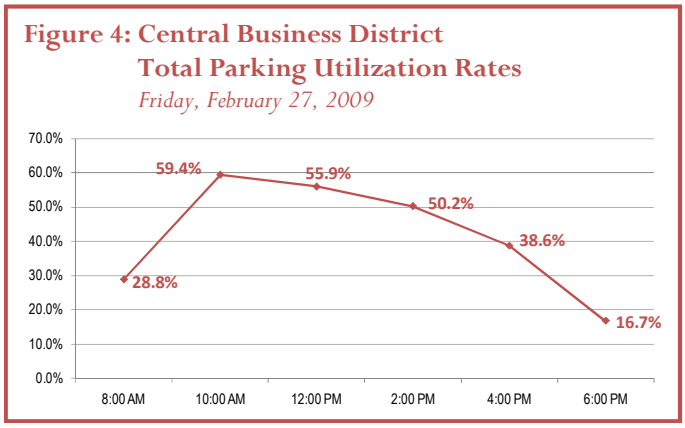


Utilization. Data gathered across three days measured rates of parking space occupancy throughout the Central Business District that ranged from approximately 28 to 38 percent at 8:00 a.m. to about 60 percent at 10:00 a.m. After 10:00 a.m., utilization rates steadily declined throughout each of the three days. The highest level of parking space utilization was approximately 62 percent, indicating that at any time of the day, 38 percent of Downtown Taunton's on- and off-street parking supply is available for use by motorists. The trend across each of the three days indicate that peak demand time for parking spaces is between about 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

It is important to note that because at no time did the downtown's on- and off-street parking resources exceed 62 percent utilization, there were at least, if not more than, 400 unutilized public parking







spaces in the downtown throughout the day. Moreover, It is very easy to assume that a lack of adequate and free parking is the greatest obstacle to downtown revitalization, considering that shoppers can choose to drive to a mall or big box retail store and find ample parking even if they must walk a few hundred feet to get into the store itself. If this is the reality, then perhaps the issue is more about overcoming the perception that there is nowhere to park in the downtown, which can be done by promoting the existence of its many parking resources and facilitating access by improving signage and pedestrian access to off-street lots.

While the construction of additional parking will be necessary to compensate for the opening of the new courthouse on Broadway, the research team cautions the city and downtown stakeholders against contriving a crisis situation that leads to the excessive installation of new parking spaces at a high cost to the community. There are significant opportunities to take advantage of in the Galligans Court and Allans Avenue surface lots. By cleaning, resurfacing, and relining these lots, a significant number of spaces can be added to each lot. Moreover, while construction crews continue to build the new courthouse, the Parking Commission and the city should move quickly to expedite the rehabilitation of these lots so that the downtown can expand its space inventory and capacity in the short run without having to pay for the clearing of existing property to pave a new permanent surface lot. Once these projects are complete, the city should then take another look at how much more parking is potentially needed without haphazardly building a surplus supply.

Besides infrastructure, the city should invest efforts and funding toward improved signage in the downtown. In its mail survey of downtown stakeholders, 66 percent of respondents agreed that the downtown needed better signage that directs drivers efficiently to nearby lots. There are currently 20 locations in and around the Central Business District where parking signs exist. Many of these signs are double-sided and are intended to inform drivers traveling on two-way streets. Despite the existence of these double-sided signs, the city should place parking signs on the side of the street along which drivers are traveling. Many of the signs located on the opposite side of the street could easily be overlooked by motorists. While improving the location of these signs is important, they should also indicate where visitors can access free parking, as has already been done to signs at Winthrop and Howard Streets and at Weir Street and Galligans Court.

The Potential for Partnerships

The importance of developing strong, effective partnerships in pursuit of revitalizing Downtown Taunton cannot be overstated. The only route to successful revitalization is the one that seeks to bring together entities from the public, private, and non-profit sectors to work toward the common goal of an enhanced, vibrant, and energetic downtown. While significant interest and expertise currently exist within various stakeholder organizations, partnerships need overarching leadership and an organizational structure that can ensure its effectiveness and maximize efforts toward achieving common goals.

The need for long-term leadership in Downtown Taunton is strongly tied to the research and analysis conducted around the topic of partnerships. Long-term leadership is unique from the short-term leadership described in this report in that it has the potential to include a wide variety of prospective actors and partners within the framework of a formalized and professional organizational structure. In this regard, Taunton has several advantages, including the existence of several organizations and entities, such as the Heart of Taunton, the Parking Commission, and the Redevelopment Authority, as well as the potential for the creation of other important associations, such as a Downtown Business Improvement District.

While the model and approach to a long-term downtown leadership structure must ultimately come from those stakeholders who will support it, finance it, and voluntarily become a part of it, the research team's assessment of the capacity and conditions that currently exist in Taunton and its independent evaluation of potential partnerships for the downtown's revitalization has led it to recommend an innovative and more sophisticated organizational structure known as the "Entrepreneurial Holding Company" model. This model has been described as a "multidimensional public-private partnership" that "goes beyond the traditional promotional emphasis" and "provides a variety of services and functions, including advocacy of downtown interests, planning to establish and implement a downtown vision, acting as a development catalyst … and managing the downtown environment, including security, maintenance, marketing, and parking" (Segal 1998, 86-87).

Within this organizational structure are a variety of partners that are specifically chosen for their experience and expertise in dealing directly with the diverse challenges related to downtown redevelopment. This feature allows for the establishment of certain conditions that are essential to success and that are currently lacking in downtown redevelopment efforts, including the need for the various participating partners to develop clear objectives and define roles for each entity to assume. Doing so will ensure that everyone understands their part in the revitalization effort and that they can hold one another accountable for achieving designated goals. In addition to this, the configuration and diverse nature of entities within the Entrepreneurial Holding Company will allow each partner to specialize in particular aspects of the revitalization effort. This specialization is key to establishing greater focus among the various downtown partners and ensuring that skills and resources are targeted in meaningful ways. Additionally, specialization will require that organizations make the diversification of their leadership, personnel, staff, and executive boards an important part of role clarification so as to eliminate any potential conflicts of interest and safeguard against a weakening of focus. To do so, agencies and organizations must seek out new individuals to work together with those who have many years of experience to ensure greater participation from the community and create an environment that welcomes fresh perspectives and ideas while preventing the resurfacing of old disputes.

In applying the Entrepreneurial Holding Company model to Taunton, the research team has identified six key partner entities that will serve as the foundation of a new Downtown Development Partnership. These entities include three that currently exist and three others that are either in the process of being established or

whose establishment is strongly recommended. The entities that currently exist are the City of Taunton (specifically, the Mayor's Office and the Office of Economic and Community Development), the Taunton Parking Commission, and the Heart of Taunton. Those entities that are either in the planning phase or do not exist are a Downtown Business Improvement District, a Downtown Development Corporation (which will serve as an offshoot of the Taunton Redevelopment Authority), and a Downtown Business Association.

To ensure the private sector interest necessary for a successful downtown redevelopment effort, the existing organizational infrastructure cannot simply be reshaped. In order to attract a wide range of support, from both the public and private sectors, there must be a variety of ways in which individuals and groups can participate. In addition, there will be a need for flexibility in the various funding mechanisms proposed for each of the organizations involved. There are many ways in which funds can be shared, agreements can be created, and subcontracting can be carried out to allow for the maximization of scarce resources. There are many ways to arrange financing capable of sustaining the overall mission of the combined Partnership and city officials should, in establishing the Partnership, seek to establish the mechanisms capable of meeting a variety of possible changes in market conditions and revenue streams.

In addition to the key partner entities identified above, the research team also recommends that supporting partnerships be established with a variety of individuals and organizations that, despite their diverse purpose or mission, can also provide additional support and expertise to the Downtown Partnership in the realization of its objectives. These supporting partners include the region's public higher education institutions, the National Parks Service (should national historic site status be granted to the downtown), the City's state and federal legislative delegations, the Taunton Development Corporation, the Taunton Industrial Development Corporation, the Taunton Area Chamber of Commerce, the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD), the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, the Southeastern Massachusetts Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Old Colony Historical Society, the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA), the SEED Corporation, the Gateway Cities Coalition, the Massachusetts Court System, and the City's residents and neighborhood leaders.

Introduction

In many communities across the state of Massachusetts - and indeed throughout the United States - the centers of commercial and civic life referred to as "downtowns" are struggling to survive. Nowhere has this trend been more relevant and detrimental than in our nation's older urban communities, where significant economic decline and the departure of traditional manufacturing have compounded their economic distress.

In nearly all instances, the deterioration of a downtown's commercial and economic relevance has included a mix of common factors and forces including the construction of shopping malls on the periphery or in neighboring suburban communities and the construction of new highways that facilitated and accommodated the rising use of automobiles. These developments, in turn, resulted in a widespread decentralization of many of the functions (including retail and entertainment) that were previously the staple of a downtown economy. With consumers now able to meet their needs without setting foot in the downtown, many communities began focusing on commercial and industrial development on undeveloped peripheral properties while neglecting the physical, structural, and economic needs of their downtown. Moreover, as a community's investment in its downtown faded, so too went the willingness of property owners, merchants, and consumers to invest their profits and income in the downtown.

The following study of Downtown Taunton was conducted by the UMass Dartmouth Urban Initiative between October of 2008 and September of 2009 at the request of the City of Taunton's Office of Economic and Community Development. The impetus for this project was a growing concern for Downtown Taunton's future and the passionate belief that the conditions, elements, and resources for revitalization currently exist on the ground, but that their potential and capacity have yet to be properly organized, developed, and utilized for the implementation of such an effort.

This analysis of Downtown Taunton focuses on the challenges and opportunities that currently exist in the downtown and includes an assessment of available parking, a review of space available for redevelopment, and an analysis of existing and potential partnerships that could be useful in the community's efforts to maximize the downtown's potential and undertake a revitalization effort.

Following several weeks of informative interviews with downtown stakeholders and first-hand assessments of Downtown Taunton, the research team was inspired and encouraged by not only the existing assets with which the city can begin to utilize as it works through a coordinated planning process, but also by the remarkably positive attitude that individuals and stakeholders had toward the downtown's potential and future role in Taunton's economy. In fact, it was observed and acknowledged that some work had already been conducted and that efforts currently existed among organizations like the Heart of Taunton, the Office of Economic and Community Development, the Parking Commission, and the Neighborhood Corporation to study potential improvements to the downtown and examine the possible role of innovative approaches to program implementation and management, such as the establishment of a downtown Business Improvement District.

As in all efforts to revitalize a downtown, very often the work done in the early phases sets the stage for significant future success. The work that has been done by the Urban Initiative is a pragmatic attempt to help set the stage for the City of Taunton as it works to understand the many dimensions of its downtown and attempts to develop a vision and plan for what the downtown could be. As such, assessing the downtown's current condition is a key step in moving forward with future plans, and this assessment should identify and document some fundamental features impacting the downtown such as challenges and obstacles to renewal and assets and opportunities from which to launch a revitalization effort. This is part of the work that the Urban Initiative has been tasked with and we hope that this analysis will further the community's understanding of the downtown and put it in a better position to develop and implement a strategy for revitalization.

Rather than seek to replicate or replace the work done by others, this study was designed to support, supplement, and guide these efforts in an attempt to act as a potential catalyst for proactive and meaningful action. In addition, certain aspects of the study (such as the analysis and inventory of parking and vacant space) were conducted to provide the city and downtown stakeholders with helpful, data-based tools in their efforts to market the downtown to potential investors and to work to define the shape, mission, and direction of a potential revitalization effort that respects the downtown's rich history, enhances the community's quality of life, and expands opportunities for it to become a regional hub of economic, cultural, and residential activity.

Chapter 1: The Downtown Dilemma

Putting Taunton's Challenges in Context

The revitalization of a dormant downtown is perhaps one of the most challenging ventures any community could choose to undertake. Over the past four decades, many communities have tried to revive their commercial centers while many more have sat idly by in apprehension and confusion over the daunting task of untangling the web of forces that have led their downtown to its current state. Even those who decided to strap on their boots and tread through the turbulent waters of redevelopment have experienced a range of outcomes from success to utter failure.

Yet, for every failure, emerging research and experience shows that many more success stories are proving that - if done right and with an abundance of commitment and patience - downtown revitalization efforts can result in decreased vacancy rates, increased pedestrian activity, and rising property values. In fact, the level of success experienced by downtowns over the past fifteen to twenty years has led the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. to claim that a significant "renaissance" is taking place in downtowns across America. According to Brookings, this renaissance has been so significant and demand for vibrant, exciting, and walkable downtowns so considerable that the population and number of households in a sample of 44 U.S. downtowns has increased by 10 percent and 13 percent respectively between 1990 and 2000. (Leinberger 2005, 1 and Birch 2005, 1).

As such, the City of Taunton and its downtown stakeholders should be commended for their interest in embarking upon a downtown revitalization effort. While Taunton may be behind other communities that began redevelopment ventures in the 1980s and 1990s, the wealth of knowledge that exists from the experiences of these communities and the progress of several recent developments on the ground present Taunton with a stable springboard from which to launch an effective effort at redevelopment in the downtown.

Taunton is like many similarly-sized communities throughout the United States when it comes to common struggles related to downtown economic development and renewal. In a number of instances the challenges are quite similar and derived from the loss of a consumer market to easily accessible and convenient mega-shopping centers on the city fringe or in a nearby suburban community. While Downtown Taunton may have had a variety of niche and specialty retail shops that are hard or impossible to find in nearby malls and strip developments, the effect was still the same: a widespread attraction to the shopping experience offered by these new retail centers.

Depending upon individual perspectives, a downtown's consistent economic decline is often attributed to a variety of sources, ranging from a lack of adequate parking to dilapidated buildings and public safety concerns, to inconvenient traffic patterns and a lack of venues and shops that consumers desire. All of these reasons and many more are often cited in a large body of literature focused on downtown economics. Yet, determining if these claims are causes or symptoms of a larger ailment is often harder to discern.

1 Downtown Challenges

A National Perspective

To provide some context for the challenges observed in Downtown Taunton and give the community a sense of the city's circumstances relative to other communities, it makes sense to explore some of the challenges that downtowns face in other mid-sized communities across the country. Doing so will also set the stage for exploring how many of these communities attempted to overcome these challenges and the levels of success or failure they experienced with the implementation of particular strategies and programs.

A national study conducted in the late 1990s by Kent A. Robertson of St. Cloud State University in Minnesota surveyed 57 small cities in 34 states (including Pittsfield, MA; Carson City, NV; Biloxi, MS; Jonesboro, AR; Medford OR; Casper, WY; and Fort Myers, FL) regarding local assets, problems, and strategies relative to downtown revitalization. Using a rating system from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating no problem and 5 implying a major problem/priority, these communities were asked to rate the severity of thirteen very specific topic areas that continue to be or once were challenges to downtown revival.

The problem identified as the most serious/highest priority by these communities was "attracting new development" to the downtown. To be sure, the inability to attract new projects in a small city downtown is a result of several factors that are related to some of the disastrous forces previously mentioned. In addition, to understand the complex dimensions of this particular challenge it is important to keep in mind that undeveloped or suburban sites are familiar and comfortable territory for many of today's commercial developers. Undertaking projects within an already developed urban footprint is understandably more difficult than greenspace

development and its costs can oftentimes be unexpected and considerable. Similarly, developers understand markets and market forces, and the current lack of confidence and stability in many downtown marketplaces fuels apprehension and scares potential developers away. Running along a parallel course are issues of market size in small-city downtowns. Put simply, the sheer size of projects that many developers are looking to undertake may not be sustained by the consumer and/or labor markets that currently exist in and around the downtown (Robertson 1999, 274). As a result, many of these projects go to the suburbs or to large-city downtowns like Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York City.

Attracting people to the downtown in the evening and on weekends ranked second on the list of small-city downtown problems and results from the propensity of downtown establishments to provide services during the typical daytime hours of operation, between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. from Monday through Friday (Robertson 1999, 274). In addition, as retail activity virtually disappeared from downtowns, entertainment venues for consumers, such as theaters and restaurants, followed suit and either closed altogether or reopened in or near newly-built suburban malls. As a result, very few attractions exist in many smaller city downtowns to generate the levels of activity and excitement needed to keep a downtown bustling beyond the nine-to-five routine and to prevent the accentuation of a downtown's image as dull and devoid of life.

A policy paper published in 2000 by University of Illinois professor Jan K. Brueckner on urban sprawl in America argues that the incentives to redevelop properties in a city's downtown are significantly diminished by the excessive suburbanization of the past fifty years (Brueckner 2000, 3). This point is related to the number three problem downtowns across the country have to deal with: overwhelming competition from discount stores and/or suburban malls (Robertson 1999, 274). While this is not surprising, it may be worthwhile to consider that the problem of suburban sprawl continues to contribute to the top two problems related to attracting new development and evening/weekend activity.

Moreover, suburban development draws customers and developers away from the downtown, contributing to the fourth major downtown problem: an abundance of vacant or underutilized retail space. Among the 57 cities surveyed in Robertson's study, vacancy rates for street-level space on major commercial streets ranged from 14 to 32 percent. The most emblematic and problematic illustration of vacancies in the downtown is the existence of what Robertson and others have called a "white elephant," defined as a "large strategically located, vacant building" that casts a significant shadow over the downtown and exerts an "overwhelming symbolic effect" that seriously impedes plans for increasing pedestrian and commercial activity. In addition, because of the size of small-city downtowns the impact of a white elephant is magnified drastically (Robertson 1999, 274-5).

The issue of parking ranked near the middle of the list at number five while crime and traffic circulation ranked near the bottom at eleven and twelve, respectively. In last place, case study communities cited organization/cooperation of downtown interests as a relatively minor problem (Robertson 1999, 275). This may be due to the fact that when surveyed on the redevelopment strategies adopted, a vast majority of these communities had indicated some sort of strategy or program that featured an organized/cooperative effort. This issue will be further explored shortly. (For a complete listing and ranking of the thirteen downtown problems in this study, see Figure 5).

Figure 5: ***Small-City Downtown Problems***

Problem	Mean Rating
Attracting new development	3.74
Attracting people downtown during weekend/evening	3.68
Competition from discount stores and/or suburban malls	3.61
Vacant/underused retail space	3.54
Parking	3.53
Shortage of suitable housing	3.42
Image	3.26
Vacant/underused office space	3.19
Preservation of older buildings	3.09
Unattractive building facades	3.00
Crime (real or perceived)	2.93
Traffic circulation/congestion	2.90
Organization/cooperation of downtown interests	2.77

Rating scale on survey (57 cities)

5- A major problem, very high priority
4- A clear problem, medium priority
3- A moderate problem, but not a major priority item
2- A minor problem
1- Not a problem in this downtown

(Source: Robertson 1999, 274)

Admittedly, every downtown is different, and the combination of forces contributing to each one's decline can vary considerably. While one factor may be an overwhelming challenge in one community's downtown, that same concern may be an asset in another community. And yet, despite differences, it is hard to deny that downtowns (like malls and shopping outlets) are a unique category of marketplaces and that some universal issues exist when speaking about the challenges these marketplaces have faced in the past and continue to face today. Readers of this study who are familiar with Downtown Taunton may have already identified certain commonalities between the downtown challenges identified in the preceding paragraphs and in Figure 5 and those that are currently perceived to exist in Downtown Taunton.

2 The Downtown Taunton Survey

In order to link some of the external research presented thus far and provide some context for this information within the scope of Taunton's downtown challenges, a mail survey was conducted by the Urban Initiative between January and March of 2009. The survey included nine questions and space to provide individual

comment after each question. In addition to the surveys, self-addressed and stamped business reply envelopes were provided for participants to respond to the survey. While survey recipients were offered the option to identify themselves, they were informed that any such information would be kept confidential and that in the reporting of survey results, responses would be kept anonymous. In no way was self-identification required in order to participate in the survey. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.

Survey Design & Methodology. The first batch of surveys was mailed to 104 members of the Heart of Taunton. The research team then compiled a list of downtown properties using the City of Taunton's GIS mapping system and Assessor's Online Property Database. This process yielded a list with a total of 280 properties located entirely or partially within the "Central Business District" as defined by the City's GIS system. Of these 280 properties, federal, state, and municipal properties were removed, yielding a list with a total of 237 privately owned properties. In order to determine the actual number of individual property owners in the downtown, this list of 237 properties was reviewed for property owners with multiple properties in the downtown. This process yielded a list with a total of 192 property owners in the "Central Business District" who owned one or multiple properties in Downtown Taunton. This list of 192 property owners was then reviewed in order to remove those property owners who were also members of the Heart of Taunton and were thus surveyed in the first mailing. This process yielded a total of 157 downtown property owners who had not been surveyed. Of these 157 property owners, a random sample of 100 was selected and a second batch of surveys was mailed to these property owners using contact information provided by the Assessor's Online Property Database. Of these 100 surveys, 18 were returned as undeliverable and were thus discarded from the sample.

In addition to members of the Heart of Taunton and downtown property owners, 18 surveys were also mailed to a sample of elected officials at the state and municipal levels, municipal employees, and a number of surveys were also handed out to individuals attending the Neighborhood Corporation's annual meeting in March of 2009. In total, approximately 230 surveys were distributed. Of these, the research team received 33 surveys for a response rate of 14 percent. According to results from most mail surveys, average response rates are typically around 10 percent. While the response rate for this particular survey is higher than the average rate, the research team must caution readers against forming generalizations based solely upon 33 respondents. These individuals do not represent the perceptions and sentiments of all downtown property owners and stakeholders, nor should analysis of these survey results be misunderstood to suggest so. Despite the limited number of responses, the research team considers the results worthy of reporting and valuable in not only making comparisons to external research but in our efforts to validate information gathered during individual face-to-face stakeholder interviews.

Survey Results. The research team chose to report results on survey items as they pertain to and are relevant to specific topics or issues discussed throughout the course of this report. (For a question-by-question breakdown of all survey results, refer to Appendix B of this report.) As such, an analysis of results from questions one and two of the survey is appropriate here considering previous analysis of national survey data from Robertson's 1999 survey of 57 small-city downtowns and the fact that Robertson's survey served as a model for the Downtown Taunton Survey. In question one, the survey asks respondents to use a scale to rank the severity of certain challenges that Downtown Taunton currently faces. The scale ranged from 1 to 4 with scores of 4 indicating a "major problem" and scores of 1 indicating "no problem." The mean scores for each of the thirteen items are presented in Figure 6.

The top two challenges reported by downtowns in the national survey ("attracting new development/investment" and "attracting people in the evenings/weekends") were also the top two challenges identified in Downtown Taunton by survey participants. Nationally, downtowns identified vacant/underutilized space as the number four challenge; in Taunton, this issue ranked third. The fourth-place challenge identified in Downtown Taunton was "image," while "competition from discount stores and/or malls" and the "permitting process" ranked fifth and sixth, respectively. Parking, which has sparked some fierce debates in Downtown Taunton recently, ranked in the middle of the list at seventh place. As such, comparing the top five challenges identified in the national survey to the top five challenges identified in the Taunton survey shows that four of these five issues are matches, demonstrating that Taunton's key challenges are quite similar to those of other struggling downtowns across the nation.

While Robertson's survey does not separate the question of severity from priority, the Downtown Taunton Survey did ask participants to use a scale to indicate their perceived level of priority for each of the challenges listed in question one. The scale once again ranged from 1 to 4, with scores of 4 indicating high priority and scores of 1 indicating no priority. Mean scores for each of the thirteen items can be seen in Figure 7. In this instance, survey

Figure 6: ***Taunton Survey Results: Downtown Challenges***

Problem	Mean Rating
Attracting people in the evenings/weekends	3.65
Attracting new development/investment	3.63
Vacant/underutilized space	3.56
Image	3.19
Competition from discount stores and/or malls	3.00
Permitting Process	2.88
Parking	2.81
Unattractive building facades	2.78
Traffic circulation and flow/congestion	2.75
Organization/management of downtown interests	2.67
Crime/public safety	2.63
Preservation of older/historic buildings	2.55
Shortage of suitable housing	2.45

Rating scale on survey
4- A major problem in Downtown Taunton
3- A moderate problem in Downtown Taunton
2- A minor problem in Downtown Taunton
1- Not a problem in Downtown Taunton

Figure 7: ***Taunton Survey Results: Downtown Priorities***

Problem	Mean Rating
Attracting new development/investment	3.71
Vacant/underutilized space	3.59
Image	3.38
Traffic circulation and flow/congestion	3.09
Parking	3.00
Preservation of older/historic buildings	3.00
Attracting people in the evenings/weekends	2.97
Organization/management of downtown interests	2.87
Unattractive building facades	2.84
Crime/public safety	2.72
Permitting Process	2.71
Competition from discount stores and/or malls	2.50
Shortage of suitable housing	2.39

Rating scale on survey

4- A major priority, to be considered immediately

3- A moderate priority, to be considered in the next 2-3 years

2- A minor priority, to be considered in the long-run

1- Not a priority

respondents ranked the number two challenge, "attracting new development/investment," as the number one priority for Downtown Taunton. Interestingly, the number one challenge, "attracting people in the evenings/weekends," was ranked seventh on the list of priorities by survey respondents. There could be several possible explanations for this, including an understanding on the part of survey respondents that while getting people to remain in the downtown beyond the nine-to-five routine remains an obstacle to revitalization, it cannot happen unless new development takes place and appropriate commercial/retail venues enter the downtown market.

The number two priority identified by survey participants was "vacant/underutilized space," which ranked third in the list of downtown challenges. The survey results also show that respondents ranked "image" as the number three priority followed by "traffic circulation and flow/congestion" and then "parking" to close out the top five priorities identified in this survey. Overall, three problems are present among both the top five challenges and the top five priorities (see Figures 6 and 7).

It is also important to mention that while this survey helped the research team in its development of a list of pertinent challenges and obstacles to downtown redevelopment, its limited nature precludes it from serving as the sole source of information in developing that list. As such, in the next section of this report, readers will notice that while some of the challenges were a part of the survey, others were gathered from direct observations and interviews conducted by the research team.

3 Strategy Adaption vs. Adoption

Because of the wealth of information that exists relative to the process and practice of downtown revitalization, it makes sense for any community to explore the experiences of communities that have succeeded and failed, and understand the landmines, risks, advantages, and constructive techniques they encountered and employed. Downtown Taunton is not unique in its challenges. Many more have faced and continue to deal with the same challenges and obstacles. Moreover, a recognition and understanding of this can help begin to move Downtown Taunton and its advocates in the right direction.

The Urban Initiative hopes that this study will help Taunton with some of this important work by placing this information and data within the context of identifying the challenges, assets, and opportunities that its own downtown must work with and overcome as the community attempts to organize a revitalization effort. While there is some measure of advantage to having an independent review of these issue areas, placing the spotlight on a community's challenges (as well as it strengths) offers little of thoughtful substance and assistance to the community being dissected if it fails to offer some proactive suggestions and lessons to bear in mind as it attempts to ameliorate and leverage current conditions.

Of course, what makes the art of downtown redevelopment so complex is that communities and downtowns differ widely. As a result, any downtown looking to begin a renewal effort must consider the following principle and lesson: "downtown revitalization requires adaption rather than adoption" of strategies and models utilized in other communities. Moreover, programs that worked in some communities may not necessarily fit in others. This does not mean, however, that common lessons do not exist from which communities can learn. Rather, it means that when it comes to downtown redevelopment programs, there is a limit to what replication can achieve (Burayidi 2001, 63).

Ultimately, the development of a revitalization plan and the establishment of mechanisms by which to implement that plan and measure its success over time rests in the hands of Tauntonians and those who consider themselves stakeholders in the health of Downtown Taunton. This study, along with its findings and, is a useful first step in the overall process, but the vision and plan must be tailor-made by those who share an interest in the cause and those who must support and see through its implementation. The downtown truly is the heart of a community and its vitality is a reflection upon the general health of a city. Nurturing and strengthening the heart is difficult work and it takes the cooperation and commitment of more than a small roomful of people; it takes collective responsibility and the will to cultivate and embrace a spirit of collective care.

1 Leadership & Vision

While prior sections of this report have identified forces such as suburban sprawl, big-box retail chains, mega-shopping centers, and the facilitation of expanded travel by the construction of highways and increased use of the automobile as significant causes of a downtown's decline in general, McClure and Hurand (2001) claim that the foremost factor contributing to the decline of downtown districts is "the lack of collective responsibility for [a downtown's] wellbeing" (McClure *et. al.* 2001, 107). This has been an issue in downtowns across America, and the same has been true of Downtown Taunton. As such, any redevelopment plan must first address Downtown Taunton's challenges regarding leadership and vision in its redevelopment efforts.

Lack of Vision, Strategic Plan, and Organized Downtown Leadership

Over the course of the interviews conducted by Urban Initiative staff members, several interviewees were asked if a downtown plan existed. In all instances the research team was informed that no such plan existed for the management of the downtown's development. A few interviewees indicated that a small public meeting had been held a few years ago in which attendees were asked to participate in a visioning session but that nothing from that meeting was ever formalized or placed into an official strategy for guiding development of the downtown. In addition, there are no individually authored plans for an overall downtown development strategy among the various community organizations and city agencies with an interest in the downtown's development.[1]

As a result, the research team turned to the city's most recent Master Plan, which was published in 1998 after a community planning process that began in 1995. While the downtown is mentioned in the plan numerous times and in numerous contexts, no sort of cohesive strategic plan could be found. Of course, this is not unusual, as a Master Plan is meant to gather the aspirations of the citizenry and assess the city's past, present, and future direction as it relates to a variety of economic, community, and land development issues so as to develop an overarching vision for how to manage and respond to change and new opportunities and chart a course that guides the city's future development. However, considering the importance of a downtown to a community's economic and social health, the Master Plan can serve as a document that guides planning and economic development and identifies the downtown's role in overall community development since it often holds such a powerful place in the minds of local residents.

Despite the lack of a cohesive downtown development strategic plan, Tauntonians who were surveyed in the late 1990s during the last Master Planning process identified the downtown as an important part of the city and an ideal location for commercial activity. In fact, more than 50 percent of survey respondents preferred to see an expansion of retail in the downtown, while more than 85 percent of Tauntonians were in agreement that the city needed to promote/rehabilitate the downtown. During a public meeting in the Weir/Downtown area of the city, residents also raised concerns over empty buildings and perceptions of inadequate safety, while also requesting that the city work on decreasing traffic speeds with pedestrian signs and re-routing truck traffic around the downtown. In addition, the Master Plan recommended further support for cultural activities in the downtown, identified traffic and pedestrian safety as important concerns, and suggested the installation of trees, planters, and benches to improve pedestrian comfort and the aesthetic appeal of the downtown.

The very first sentence in the Master Plan's vision statement reads, "Taunton's residents envision a city that grows and changes in a manner that preserves Taunton's unique urban/rural setting, nurturing a vibrant downtown, village centers, and peaceful residential areas."

Although the level of concern and support for the downtown's development appears significant, the lack of a downtown strategic plan over the past decade, which could have harnessed what appears to have been the community's noticeable appetite for downtown renewal, may have acted as a major limitation on the city's ability to revitalize its downtown. During several one-on-one interviews with long-time city residents and downtown business owners and stakeholders, the research team was told that the downtown has remained stagnant over the past ten years. In addition, several interviewees expressed a feeling that the downtown has lost its identity as the city and region's hub of activity and life, and that this fading sense of place makes it difficult to initiate a wide-spread effort in support of downtown redevelopment.

After carefully organizing and considering the significant amount of

1. Since initiating this project, it is recognized that the Neighborhood Corporation was awarded a planning grant from the MA Department of Housing and Community Development to assess the development potential of two downtown properties. While their report contributes to the effort of downtown redevelopment, as designed by the project grant, it was not intended to establish an overall vision and strategic plan for the downtown's redevelopment.

information gathered during its numerous interviews with community leaders and stakeholders, the research team determined it to be important to begin with an analysis of this particular concern. The lack of a plan is a significant challenge to the revitalization of any downtown, regardless of whatever other economic, physical, structural, functional, or political challenges exist. Moreover, a plan allows cities to take appropriate action when development opportunities arise rather than moving forward with projects or allowing private development to take place with little consideration for how these activities will impact the economic future of the downtown. In fact, the city's Master Plan clearly states in its economic development section that, "While growth and development are inevitable, and indeed necessary for job creation and economic opportunity, it is the feeling of the city that the greatest benefit will accrue to all if change is managed and not allowed to occur haphazardly."

Former mayor of Macon, Georgia, and current U.S. Congressman Jim Marshall stressed the need for a downtown plan when he stated that, "Good development projects are not good enough; they have to fit into an overall plan, and they must be feasible as well as desirable. It makes no sense to propose projects without the benefit of context." Robertson (2001) agrees that without this "context of a long-term vision and plan," implementation of individual projects takes place within the imprudent context of a vacuum (Robertson 2001, 13).

Nearly all sources reviewed regarding downtown redevelopment, from the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institute to the National Trust Main Street Center, stressed the importance of a downtown vision and plan as a necessary first step to any renewal effort.

In his policy brief for the Brookings Institution, Christopher B. Leinberger of the Arcadia Land Company and the Robert Charles Lesser & Company (two of the nation's premier urban development and real estate advisory firms) writes: "A good starting point is to engage in a 'visioning' process. While denigrated by some for being 'soft and fuzzy,' a visioning process not only determines if there is community support but it also uncovers the educational, economic, and fiscal reasons for turning around the downtown" (Leinberger 2005, 5).

Establish a Vision. Downtown Taunton has a variety of key strengths and opportunities that provide the city with a strong footing from which to launch a downtown revitalization effort. Yet, a collection of strengths and opportunities with no established vision or plan for their coordinated leveraging is of little value.

It is important to note that a vision is much different from a strategic plan. A visioning process and a strategic planning process have goals that, while overlapping in some regards, are different in scope. The visioning process should be open to everyone in the community, and representatives from a variety of downtown interests – including property owners, business owners, customers, workers, city residents, government officials, and non-profit organizations – should be strongly encouraged to participate. In addition, to garner community-wide support for the product of the visioning process, organizers should take necessary actions to ensure that the interests of those outside the downtown are present and represented. During the visioning process, participants are asked to discuss their vision of what the community would like the downtown to be, including the functional aspects, physical characteristics, social atmosphere, and the economic climate/ environment (Robertson 2001, 13-4).

In the *Downtown Idea Exchange*, community development consultant Kent Burns writes that a visioning process is also a good opportunity to align all of the "stars" in the community for downtown revitalization. By stars, he means more than just people. "Defined visions open [a community's] eyes to weaknesses, [which] help give birth to goals [and] leads to the crafting of real projects" (Burns 2007).

For both those within the community and potentially from outside the city reading this report thus far, it may appear as though absolutely nothing is taking place in Downtown Taunton relative to planning its future. As such, it is important at this point to note that such an observation is somewhat far from the truth. For example, there currently exist efforts within the downtown and among its key stakeholders to establish a Downtown Business Improvement District (BID). While the issue of establishing a BID in the downtown will be further explained and analyzed in subsequent sections of this report, it is important to mention that in no way should a formal visioning process for downtown's future derail, disrupt, or supersede developments or prior decisions made relative to the formation of a BID. Efforts to establish a BID can be incorporated into plans for achieving the overall goal of downtown renewal.

Short-term Leadership. Before looking at the strategic planning process, it is important at this point to discuss one of the essential "stars" that must come into alignment to ensure the start and survival of a downtown revitalization program: *Leadership*.

Ultimately, as Burns argues, "there must be a community leader that [understands downtown redevelopment] and gets behind it" (Burns 2007). Leadership can come in many forms. It can emerge in the form of an esteemed individual possessing community-wide political and/or business stature, a well-respected and effective leader of a community organization, or an admired and successful business leader or small group of business leaders. Across the country, downtown success stories abound, and their tales of leadership come in many different forms, from a proactive mayor with a passionate commitment to downtown revitalization to an active group of downtown business leaders who were tired of persistent economic decline.

The leadership described here is different from the leadership that must emerge later on in the renewal effort. This report distinguishes the two by referring to them as "short-term leadership" and "long-term leadership." Short-term leadership is catalytic in nature and involves the inspiration and direction of one individual or a very small group of individuals with the necessary power and influence to encourage and convince others to become active supporters and participants in the revitalization effort. Klebba *et. al.* (2001) argue further that "catalytic leaders are needed to help facilitate consensus-building among divergent interests, [spark the] development of working partnerships, build support for action, and motivate key stakeholders to undertake agreed upon strategies" (Klebba *et. al.* 2001, 86).

Short-term leadership does not define the vision or write the plan; rather, it creates the sense of urgency and responsibility needed to organize and activate downtown stakeholders and get everyone marching in the same direction. Once the short-term leadership has succeeded in this mission and the effort evolves, the short-term leadership can then step back a bit and become just one part of an expanded long-term leadership structure.

Considering the number of various downtown stakeholder groups and organizations, a discussion of their role within the context of the short-term leadership described here is unnecessary. The research team does, however, consider it crucial at this juncture to assess the role of the city's Mayor. In nearly every face-to-face interview held with Taunton's downtown stakeholders, an appreciation was expressed by interviewees for the level of support that the city's current administration, led by Mayor Charles Crowley, has demonstrated toward downtown revitalization. More specifically, participants pointed to Mayor Crowley's level of encouragement and responsiveness to concerns related to the downtown as great signs of support from the city administration. However, many also expressed a desire to see the Mayor occupy an expanded role within the downtown revitalization effort, a sentiment indicated in survey results shown in Figures 8 and 9.

In question five of the Downtown Taunton survey, participants were asked to use a scale to express their perceived level of **current** involvement in the downtown on the part of eight different community organizations and city entities. The scale ranged from 1 to 4 with scores of 1 indicating high levels of involvement and scores of 4 indicating no level of involvement. As such, it is important to keep in mind while interpreting these results that lower scores indicate higher levels of involvement. Mean scores for each organization and agency can be found in Figure 8.

In question six, survey participants were asked to once again use a scale to express the level of involvement that the same community organizations and city entities **should play** in a downtown revitalization effort. This time, the scale ranged from 1 to 5 with scores of 1 indicating high levels of involvement and scores of 5 indicating no involvement. Once again, it is important to keep in mind when interpreting these results that lower scores indicate higher levels of involvement. Mean scores for each organization and agency can be found in Figure 9.

Analyzing the results of these two questions, it is clear that survey respondents perceive the Heart of Taunton, the Mayor's Office and the city's Office of Economic & Community Development to be not only the top three most active participants in the downtown, but also the top three leaders of a future downtown revitalization effort. When considering the role of the Mayor, survey results appeared to correspond to sentiments expressed during stakeholder interviews; namely, that while the Mayor's Office currently plays a "moderately active role" in the downtown (as demonstrated by the mean score of 2.13 in question five), if a revitalization effort were to take place, it should play a "leading role" / "very active role" (as demonstrated by the mean score of 1.57 in question six).

Other organizations and entities received mean scores indicating a potential "leading role" in a future downtown revitalization effort. However, it is important to bear in mind the current discussion, which centers upon short-term leadership and the limited size and catalytic nature that this leadership tends to embody in downtown revitalization efforts in other parts of the United States. Ultimately, one person or one organization cannot accomplish all the goals of a downtown renewal effort.

The next section of this report describes how a strong downtown revitalization effort requires a robust private/public partnership. As such, when residents and individuals in the private sector look toward the public sector for guidance and support many immediately see leadership in this sector embodied in the form of their mayor or city/town manager. As the top elected or appointed

Figure 8: ***Taunton Survey Results: Perceived Level of Current Involvement in the Downtown by Organizations/Entities***

Organization/Agency	Mean Rating*
Heart of Taunton	1.60
Mayor's Office	2.13
Office of Economic & Community Development	2.46
Chamber of Commerce	2.53
Neighborhood Corporation	2.64
Taunton Redevelopment Authority	2.74
City Council	2.76
Parking Commission	2.92

Rating Scale on Survey
1. Very Active
2. Moderately Active
3. Fairly Active
4. Not Active

*Note that lower scores indicate higher levels of involvement

Figure 9: ***Taunton Survey Results: Level of Involvement that Agencies/ Organizations Should Play in a Downtown Revitalization Effort***

Organization/Agency	Mean Rating*
Heart of Taunton	1.40
Mayor's Office	1.57
Office of Economic & Community Development	1.73
City Council	1.90
Taunton Redevelopment Authority	2.17
Parking Commission	2.20
Neighborhood Corporation	2.45
Chamber of Commerce	2.60

Rating Scale on Survey
1. Leading Role
2. Very Active Role
3. Supporting Role
4. As-needed Role
5. No Role

*Note that lower scores indicate higher levels of involvement

official and chief executive officer of the municipality, mayors and managers who make use of their keen political and interpersonal skills often wield a tremendous power to be consensus-builders and drivers of innovative policies, programs, and initiatives. In fact, as you will read below, the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution recommends that when applicable, the public sector side of the partnership be led by a committed mayor or manager who can provide short-term catalytic momentum for a downtown renewal effort that can ultimately be driven and funded by the private sector and downtown stakeholders. Given the level of esteem with which Mayor Crowley has been regarded by downtown stakeholders, the chance to assume short-term leadership to organize a multi-faceted and long-term downtown revitalization campaign that can potentially sustain itself for future generations presents itself as a significant opportunity.

Long-term Leadership. Conversely, the long-term leadership is the "keeper of the flame," and while it can take many forms, there are several characteristics that a variety of research has recommended become a part of its structure and composition.

First, and most importantly, the long-term leadership should embody a strong private-public partnership – and not the other way around, as is typical of past efforts between the private and public sectors. The Brookings Institution recommends that the public sector – usually led by a mayor or city manager – can act as the catalytic short-term leadership by gathering downtown stakeholders and convening a visioning and/or strategic planning process, but that the private sector must soon be allowed to lead the revitalization effort forward because it is ultimately their time, money, and cooperation that will determine the effort's success. "A healthy, sustained [private-public] partnership is crucial to getting the revitalization process off the ground and building the critical mass needed to spur a cycle of sustainable development" (Leinberger 2005, 8).

Second, the long-term leadership structure should consist of a permanent and formal organization with professionals overseeing and maintaining its operation. Dagney Faulk, economics professor at Indiana University Southeast, argues in her study entitled *The Process and Practice of Downtown Revitalization* that, "having an organization whose sole function is to advocate the interests of the downtown is key" (Faulk 2006, 643).

One of the reasons for this is that downtown revitalization is a process that takes many years to achieve – more than the typical two-year election cycle for most local officials. Even with an effective and well-established downtown organization, the work necessary to bring a struggling downtown back to life requires constant management and control over the course of many years. It is important for Tauntonians to remember that it took a long time for their downtown to decline to its current state; as such, it will take a good amount of time for the downtown to return to prosperity.

In addition, because of the tremendous amount of time needed and the complex work involved in implementing the vision and strategic plan developed by downtown stakeholders and the community, a permanent organizational structure with a professional team of advocates (and perhaps even a corps of dedicated volunteers) will help to hold people accountable and ensure that the revitalization effort does not fade away or completely fall apart.

Thirdly, the long-term leadership should set realistic benchmarks for measuring results on a periodic basis – not as a way to chastise or disband the organization when it fails to accomplish a specific goal within a preordained time period, but rather to celebrate and publicize achievements, objectively measure improvements, candidly assess areas of needed improvement, and develop new short-term goals within the framework of the vision and the strategic plan. Burayidi (2001) suggests the following seven indicators for measuring downtown redevelopment:

1. Change in the tax base
2. Change in real property investment
3. Change in office space occupancy
4. Change in the number of businesses in the downtown district (over two-year periods)
5. Change in population density
6. Change in the size of the downtown residential population by income groups
7. Change in the number of persons employed in the downtown by industry sector (Burayidi 2001, 60).

Ultimately, the benchmarks that are used to measure results in Downtown Taunton should reflect the goals that are set by the community and its stakeholders. As long as the data is available, quantifiable, and continuously collected and assessed, which also supports the need for a permanent and professional downtown team, Taunton can adopt any variety of measures to track its revitalization effort.

The fourth component of the long-term leadership is clearly defined, documented, and acknowledged roles to be played by the various partners and individuals that make up this leadership structure. In addition, it may be wise to define these roles based upon specific sets of skills, expertise, or jurisdiction that each partner brings to the table. These partners include downtown business and property owners; city officials, departments, and agencies; non-profit organizations, redevelopment and/or community development agencies; historical societies; residents; and any other sectors deemed vital by the community to the effort. Coalitions that lack a clear understanding of each component's role rarely accomplish their goals. In particular, this study singles out city government and the importance of having it become a supportive and active partner in downtown development activities. Robertson (2001) points out that there are a variety of ways in which city government can be called upon to demonstrate its commitment, including: "granting downtown high priority in the [master] plan and budgeting process, investing in public improvements such as sidewalks, streetlights, and infrastructure, and providing incentives for building façade improvements and business expansion (Robertson 2001, 12). What those incentives entail, whether financial (such as grants and low-interest loans) or non-financial (such as expedited permitting and technical assistance) can be determined and set by the local government depending upon the particular needs of the downtown and the potential level and areas of reinvestment that are needed.

The fifth key component of the long-term leadership is a stable and secure source of funding that reflects the cost of realizing the vision for the downtown and will allow the organization to implement

Long-Term Leadership is Key to Downtown Success

Lessons from the experience of Charleston, West Virginia

Charleston, West Virginia is a city of about 52,000 residents. In the 1970s, several downtown business leaders met to determine what they could do to reverse the downward spiral they saw threatening their downtown. Their first undertaking was the construction of an enclosed downtown mall with sheltered parking and following the success of this project, they formed the Charleston Renaissance Corporation in 1982 to expand downtown improvement efforts. With the help of consultants, a target program of 16 ambitious projects was developed and the business community along with local government pursued these projects with rare determination and continuity.

The most interesting and perhaps remarkable aspect of their work was that the same three business leaders in the community led the effort for nearly fifteen years. The Charleston Renaissance Corporation board of directors was composed of 60 top business leaders and they joined forces with city officials in an extraordinary private-public partnership. Former presidents of the corporation have been quick to point out that the dedicated cooperation of the city's mayors and officials was indispensible to the effort.

Working together, they were able to clear and redevelop a badly blighted section of the downtown, develop a program of financial incentives in which businesses were required to restore historic building fronts, relocate existing downtown establishments to more suitable locations in the city to make room for new businesses to set up in the downtown, create an attractive riverfront park on the Kanawha River with a popular farmer's market, convert old homes into offices for lawyers, doctors, accountants, and other professionals, and recruit several restaurants that have been vital in keeping the downtown alive in the evenings and on weekends. The final project of their 16-part plan was the construction of a performing arts center and museum, which was completed in 2002.

One of the three Renaissance Corporation leaders, Jim Thomas, once remarked, "One of the most critical roles of the non-profit coalition of downtown businessmen has been to provide continuity and persistent effort through inevitable political changes and changes in the dynamics of downtown. Our comprehensive 16-project program has been long term. We are in our seventeenth year and are completing our last project. However, there will be more because downtowns must be continuously nurtured and revitalized to adjust to changing economic, social, and cultural needs."

Besides being the state's capital and having the availability to tap into a good share of the state's resources, the lesson in Charleston's downtown revitalization and the ability to sustain the effort over a period of two decades (despite turnover in mayors and city councils and other city officials) lies in the dedication of the leaders and the cooperation of business with government.

Today, this good work continues under the Charlestown Area Alliance, which is a consolidated entity of the Charlestown Renaissance Corporation, the Charlestown Chamber of Commerce, and the Business and Industrial Development Corporation.

Source: Bivens, Robert W., "Long-term business leadership is key to downtown success." *Downtown Idea Exchange*, Downtown Research and Development Center (May 15, 2006). http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/perspectives/dixarticle051506.pdf

projects contained in the scope of the strategic plan within a reasonable timeframe. Where this funding comes from is always a difficult and highly contentious decision. Ultimately, true ownership of the revitalization effort can only be achieved when those who have a stake in the downtown's economic success are asked to contribute to its realization. While local, state, and federal grants and other one-time funding sources are important and can act as a catalyst for certain major projects or infrastructure improvements, fostering accountability for the redevelopment effort is best achieved when individuals and organizations close to the action are collectively subsidizing the bulk of the effort. Long-term leadership can be manifested in a variety of ways. Across the country, and indeed the world, many communities have developed innovative organizational leadership structures to manage and maintain a downtown revival effort. From the nationally renowned Main Street Approach to Business Improvement Districts to the emerging Entrepreneurial Holding Company arrangement to private non-profit development organizations, downtowns across the world are becoming more structured and well-planned for; resulting in meteoric improvements to the business, physical, civic, aesthetic, and economic environment. And yet despite the variety, the decision regarding which model and approach to adopt ultimately rests in the hands of stakeholders who must finance its operation.

The need for effective long-term leadership cannot be downplayed. In his research on successful downtowns, Robertson maintains that "an active and well-organized downtown association" is one of the key ingredients in the majority of successful downtowns because it can "help downtown business and property owners work together toward their mutual benefit, [similar] to the organization of a shopping mall." Only a strong and effective downtown association with the necessary resources and management that is focused on the pressing needs of the downtown and provides services and programs that target specific challenges and opportunities is "well-equipped to engage in activities related to marketing, recruitment, promotions and event planning, and serve as a unified voice representing downtown interests" (Robertson 2001, 12).

Key Components of Long-Term Downtown Leadership

1. Establish a strong private/public partnership
2. Establish a permanent and formal organization with professionals
3. Establish realistic and measurable benchmarks
4. Establish clearly defined roles
5. Establish a stable and secure source of funding

Strategic Planning Process. As previously mentioned, the visioning process and strategic planning process are different. In fact, it is wise to conduct the visioning process before the strategic planning process so that the results of the visioning process can be used to

determine if the will to revitalize the downtown even exists and if the important "stars" are aligned so as to inform the development of the overall strategic plan.

In addition, the downtown strategic plan can also be developed once the permanent and formal long-term organizational leadership structure has been established. Doing so will spare the community from going through the intense work of developing the strategic plan and seeing it go nowhere without the benefit of having the organizational advocates in place to push that agenda through. In addition, if the organizational structure exists then the strategic plan can be significantly strengthened by addressing the organization's role and responsibility in implementing key programs and realizing the goals of the plan.

The downtown revitalization experience of Astoria, Oregon illustrates the importance of the strategic planning process. Astoria's downtown revitalization effort was launched in the late 1990s and was centered upon embracing the city's rich historical past. The process began with a petition that was approved in May of 1999 to have Astoria's downtown placed in the National Register of Historic Places. Following that achievement, the city began taking steps to make its historical status apparent to residents and visitors by aesthetically enhancing the downtown's physical environment. With the support of local downtown merchants, the city undertook several projects including sidewalk repairs, the installation of the city's original street lamps, and the restoration of the historic houses adjacent to the downtown. In addition, they coupled this work with a recruitment effort to get more reputable businesses to relocate in the downtown (Klebba *et. al.* 2001, 79-81).

Despite all of these hard efforts, Astoria consistently faced challenges in persuading residents and merchants to buy into the historic vision and help to make that vision a reality. While most city officials and merchants thought that the overall vision was a good one, many were not willing to do their part to make it a reality. In addition, the vision was never made "official" in any way, which contributed to the lack of support offered by residents and merchants (Klebba *et. al.* 2001, 79-81).

The lack of a good strategic plan is thus a significant challenge to the revitalization of any downtown and is a key part of consensus building, stimulating action, and sustaining the effort. As such, the strategic plan can be viewed as having two key components: a downtown vision and a downtown work plan.

The vision statement reflects the community's aspirations for its downtown. But more than that, it also states, in general terms, what types of ongoing activities and programs that should take place throughout the year to sustain the renewal effort and support the results of larger development projects. Among others, these activities and programs can include certain civic and cultural endeavors, a coordinated marketing campaign, business retention and improvement programs, or an organized parking plan. Essentially, these components of the vision serve as the foundation of the downtown revitalization plan and identify the roles of the various partners responsible for it while working to promote, achieve, and maintain that "spirit of collective care" described earlier.

The downtown's work plan is an outline of the specific projects, programs, and improvements that will work to spur economic development, address the downtown's challenges, building upon its assets, and achieve the vision summarized in the first part of the overall strategic plan. Obviously, the individual tasks may be numerous and time consuming. As such, it is important for the downtown stakeholders to identify priorities and distinguish projects that are realistic, manageable, and can act as good development catalysts. This means that the downtown work plan must include both short- and long-term objectives. In addition, it is recommended that the downtown stakeholder group conduct an annual or biennial assessment of the work plan, celebrate those projects that have been achieved, determine the status of those that are still underway, and move other projects from the long-term into the short-term.

One of the ten keys to creating a competitive downtown described by M. Bradley Segal (2002), president of the Progressive Urban Management Associates with nearly 50 years of combined experience in community development, historic preservation, and downtown revitalization, is "developing initiatives with realistic expectations." According to Segal, downtown redevelopment programs should "aim to advance a variety of small initiatives that collectively fertilize the soil for investment and create the vitality that can support large investments" (Segal 2002, 10). To do so, he offers the following three guidelines for downtown improvement programming:

1. Incremental, organic, entrepreneurial – make this the mantra for downtown revitalization. Incremental refers to the project by project improvements that collectively create a vital business district.

2. Organic is building upon the inherent strengths of the community. Entrepreneurial is the method for delivering downtown improvement services – having contact with property and business owners, building an information-based program, and being flexible to respond to changes in the market.

3. Create benchmarks, measure results, and publicize and celebrate success so as to increase civic interest, financial support, and energy for the downtown revival effort (Segal 2002, 10-1).

There are many approaches to a strategic planning process, and communities across the country have adopted different methods ranging from informal attempts run by a small group of downtown stakeholders or city officials to professionally managed and organized workshops and seminars that can take place over the course of two or three non-consecutive days. It is recommended that when conducting the formal strategic planning process, a community strongly consider hiring a consulting firm or other independent organization to help lead and direct it. Doing so often results in greater focus and success during the process itself and has resulted in much stronger revitalization efforts that become embraced by a large group of stakeholders and volunteers. In addition, the format that is used throughout the planning process is important and should contain several concrete opportunities for those in attendance to participate with their heads and hands.

Participatory Design: Designing with people rather than for people

Lessons from the experience of Coleville, Washington

Wendy McClure of the University of Idaho and Fred Hurand of Eastern Washington University have conducted downtown strategic planning processes with several communities across the United States and have adopted a highly-successful format called "participatory design," which describes a variety of strategies for user involvement in decision-making.

In more traditional formats, a professional designer takes charge of design decisions and the participation of stakeholders may be limited to review and comment on several design proposals. With participatory design, the professionals design with people rather than for them. As a result, participatory design can play an important role in allowing downtown activists and leaders to build a broad base of support among themselves and within the community. In addition, by participating in the design process, individuals have more realistic expectations of project outcomes and learn to believe in their city's potential.

In one particular case study, McClure and Hurand were called upon by a group of local business owners in Coleville, Washington (called the Revitalization Advisory Committee) to help with the development of a downtown design plan. The goal of the entire process was to empower the committee to think critically and visually about their downtown environment, to become advocates within the community for their design plan, and act on their design recommendations. To accomplish these goals, the planning process was arranged into three phases: goal setting, visual analysis, and plan development.

In the first phase (goal setting), a meeting was conducted in which a series of small group discussions, a slideshow illustrating typical problems and successes in other downtowns, and a walking tour of Coleville's downtown led to the establishment of several broad goals for the downtown design plan. At the end of the meeting, participants were organized into three teams and each team was given a homework assignment. This acted as the starting point for phase two (visual analysis). Each group was assigned a specific category of physical elements to explore: (1) streets, sidewalks, and landscaping; (2) signage; and (3) buildings. Using photographic documentation, they were asked to record positive and negative examples within each category.

A two-day workshop was then organized and each team presented their analyses. The exercise allowed participants to understand downtown's design challenges by photographing them and allowed them to learn to recognize features that contribute to visual unity and features that are visually intrusive. After reviewing the visual materials, the revitalization committee defined specific objectives and actions and developed specific design recommendations by using representative photographs and rough sketches to describe their recommendations (the committee decided not to use photographs of their own downtown to articulate problems and solutions fearing that they would alienate business and property owners).

At the end of the workshop, each team prepared a display of their work and installed it in a local bank, which became the setting for a public open house for citizens that evening and the next morning. Committee members hosted the open house and stood by their displays to answer questions. Guests were encouraged to review the design objective, make comments, and select their preference for specific design objectives. In phase three (design plan development) the committee developed the written portions of the plan and used computer manipulated images of downtown Colville to illustrate key design objectives. The plan was then presented to the Revitalization Advisory Committee and has become the official guide for making downtown development decisions.

Source: McClure, Wendy & Fred A. Hurand. "Re-engaging the Public in the Art of Community Place-Making," Michael A. Burayidi, ed., *Downtowns: Revitalizing the Centers of Small Urban Communities*, Rutledge, NY (2001).

The research team strongly believes and recommends that if the will, desire, and intention to revitalize Downtown Taunton exist, then it must begin with the development of a roadmap for its future. For this reason, the research team has decided to spend a good portion of this section providing recommendations, making necessary links to current conditions in Downtown Taunton, and offering lessons and specific examples that the community may want to use in overcoming this key challenge. In some instances a few areas discussed within the context of this first challenge will be revisited later as this study explores other challenges and opportunities. As a result, it will become easier to see how crucial a vision, plan, and organized downtown leadership are to any downtown redevelopment effort.

In addition, the process for defining, establishing, initiating, and sustaining that vision and plan must be carefully considered by the downtown's leadership and those who actively pursue a more coordinated, organized, and prosperous downtown. Doing so will also help Taunton avoid what Dick Ryan, founder of the Texas Main Street program calls the failure of "miracle approaches" that suggest that all a downtown needs to do is one particular thing and every problem would be solved. Rather, having a vision and plan would make the community "realizing that they are entering a never-ending project and will have to work on hundreds of goals, not just one" (McClure *et. al.* 2001, 108).

Consensus-Building Barriers

In order for a downtown revitalization effort to have any chance at success, its leaders and stakeholders must find ways to work cooperatively in an organized fashion, put aside past disputes and disappointments, and be willing to set aside personal interests or agendas. Rebuilding a downtown is challenging work. Aside from the economic and market forces that must be overcome, the individuals involved in the effort can often be responsible for further complicating the process and turning genuine good will into frustration and failure. Understandably, any sort of economic or community development effort that requires a variety of limited resources, such as manpower and funding, can frequently provoke intense debate, skepticism, and obstinacy. In addition, when considering the fate of a downtown, a wide variety of constituencies with often competing interests, including residents, merchants, politicians, municipal officials, developers, property owners, and

non-profit organizations, must be taken into account and asked to work cooperatively to realize a common set of goals and objectives. All of these factors make downtown revitalization efforts extremely complicated and often necessitate the strong short-term leadership previously described

Through its direct observations and interviews, the research team deemed it appropriate to include an assessment of several consensus-building barriers that have not only stifled the continuation of recent downtown redevelopment efforts, but have prevented the community from pursuing new projects. After reviewing information collected during interviews and archived in the *Taunton Gazette*, it became evident that issues related to the downtown can often become sources of controversy. As in many other downtowns across the United States, Downtown Taunton has seen its fair share of disputes over critical public policy issues. By its very historic nature, a downtown can evoke strong emotions among those who care a great deal about it or have a deep personal interest in its vitality. While this affinity can be a powerful tool, it can also be detrimental to the overall cause. As individuals work together on key downtown concerns, not everyone will see eye-to-eye and the disagreements that arise often result in deep divides that must be transcended if stakeholders are to move forward with their plans for the downtown.

Overcoming Controversy. Approximately one year prior to the release of this report, Downtown Taunton's stakeholders and the community-at-large were mired in an intense debate over parking in the downtown and, in particular, the cost of on-street public parking spaces. In pointing to this particular occurrence, the research team does not intend to assess the details of the various rate proposals debated, nor analyze the impact of the decisions eventually made. Rather, the controversy that erupted over this particular issue and the scale and length at which it was debated was often cited during several interviews as the cause for a good deal of mistrust and frustration with downtown revitalization . While a certain amount of compromise on all sides of the debate helped to craft the eventual ordinance, this did little to mend some of the fences already destroyed in the process. If Taunton were to initiate a downtown revitalization program, those involved must understand, be sensitive to, and work to ameliorate the impact of such experiences. On the same token, those involved must also work to mend bruised feelings and strained relationships.

Transcending BID Paralysis. In addition to the disagreements over parking rates, a great deal of discussion has taken place over the last three to four years regarding the establishment of a Downtown Business Improvement District (BID). While an analysis of the potential implications of a Business Improvement District will appear later in this report, the amount of time that the downtown's stakeholders have dedicated to this project has particular implications on the issue of consensus-building, particularly when considering that, according to the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development, the typical BID process lasts between 18 and 24 months (DHCD, 9).
In Massachusetts, there are clear rules set forth in the authorizing legislation regarding a community's attempts to establish a BID. There are several conditions that must be achieved before the BID can be officially recognized and collect revenues, including a stipulation that the BID petition be signed by at least 60 percent of all property owners and that those who sign the petition hold property worth at least 51 percent of all assessed property values within the proposed district (DHCD, 9). While the research team was informed during stakeholder interviews that the process to establish a BID was being held up by an inability on the part of BID committee members to devote sufficient time to the process of informing all property owners within the proposed district and convincing them to sign onto the petition, several interviewees also indicated a difficulty on the part of the BID committee to convince certain vital property owners that the additional assessment on their property tax would be worth the investment. The time spent on the establishment of a BID in Downtown Taunton is particularly troubling for revitalization efforts. This is not to say that the creation of a BID would not serve to be a worthy venture in managing and marketing the downtown. However, stakeholders should be careful not to allow this issue to continue to hang over the community and over those who are closely involved and vested in the downtown's economic success without prompt resolution.

The challenge of creating a BID in Downtown Taunton illustrates the challenges the downtown and its stakeholders will potentially face with regards to consensus-building should they undertake a revitalization effort. The establishment of a BID is only one project. A downtown renewal program requires dozens of projects and programs operating simultaneously, including several taking place gradually over the course of numerous years. While the research team is aware of recent developments including the hiring of an independent consultant, the BID process must not be allowed to linger much longer than twelve to eighteen months. A decision must be made on the possible establishment of a BID. If the requisite endorsement exists, there is no reason not to establish a BID. However, if the support does not exist, its proponents should withdraw the proposal and beginning working together with others to pursue other downtown development projects. If the downtown and its stakeholders are not allowed to move beyond this issue of establishing a BID, it could compromise future revitalization efforts that will require a great deal of consensus and collaboration.

Organizational Clutter. Another sentiment expressed by nearly all interviewees, which also has implications on consensus-building, is the fact that despite having a good number and variety of organizations and agencies whose work and/or mission is linked at some level to the downtown, very little has been done to sustain the downtown economy and improve its condition. The research team attributes this failure to three factors. First, while each organization and agency has its own unique resources and expertise, they lack a complete and clear understanding of what roles they play and how those roles must be integrated in order to achieve unified action. Second, while a multitude of organizations and agencies exist, including the Heart of Taunton, the Redevelopment Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor's Office of Economic & Community Development, the Parking Commission, the Old Colony Historical Society, and the Neighborhood Corporation, some are more involved in downtown redevelopment and promotion than others. And third, some of these organizations simply do not have the resources and capacity - in terms of staff and/or expertise - to devote themselves solely to a downtown marketing, business promotion, and economic development mission.

Of course, these observations are not meant to imply that one

organization alone should be responsible for these important tasks. Rather, they point to the need for greater organization and leadership. Consensus-building in Taunton will require that these organizations step out of their comfort zones and begin to engage and employ their resources collaboratively with other partners to bring about true economic, cultural, and social development in the downtown. Cooperation, however, is crucial and will require strong leadership and an open mind on the part of each organization to clearly delineate everyone's role.

The Usual Suspects. Downtown revitalization can be an exciting venture, but inspiring the local population can be difficult when the vast majority of them have already been involved in downtown projects and programs for numerous years and have become accustomed to the minimal impact that these projects often produce. In its interviews with stakeholders, the research team observed a certain level of fatigue and frustration among those who reported many years of involvement in downtown development efforts. While many still believed in the downtown's potential and conveyed a willingness to participate in projects, a number of them expressed caution and reservation in becoming overly excited about new initiatives. As such, if Downtown Taunton is to initiate a revitalization effort, its leadership must look beyond the usual suspects and attempt to build a coalition of new faces that can help to infuse it with enthusiasm and a fresh outlook. The experience and support of those who have been on the front lines over the past several years is critical, but the downtown's base of support must be expanded to sustain the effort and ensure widespread public interest (Klebba, *et. al.* 2001, 70).

Working Toward a Common Agenda. Due to the concerns outlined in this section, it would be in Downtown Taunton's best interest to heed the recommendations in the previous section of this report regarding vision, strategic planning, and leadership in order to establish a common downtown agenda that can act as a safeguard against personal agendas and organizational paralysis. A common agenda will allow the downtown's stakeholders and the community-at-large to promote healthy decision-making practices centered upon the goals and objectives set forth in a downtown strategic plan. Building consensus among various constituencies and stakeholder groups is always a difficult task. However, doing so will hold individuals and organizations accountable throughout the revitalization process and alleviate these consensus-building barriers down the road.

Resistance to Change

Downtown Taunton's commercial and retail activity have steadily declined over the past several decades as a result of a variety of forces. One particular factor that is often forgotten in discussions about revitalization efforts, and has yet to be discussed within the context of Downtown Taunton, is a community's resistance to change, which may cause initiatives and projects to take many years to implement, or prevent them from taking place entirely.

In several interviews, the research team observed a pervasive theme that continues to be a part of the community's perceptions of Taunton and its identity. While officially possessing city status, many continue to view Taunton as still possessing the appropriate conditions and atmosphere to be considered a "large town" rather than a city, as though the term "city" denotes something negative that Taunton does not wish to become. Tauntonians possess a strong sense of nostalgia, and seek to preserve the *status quo*. While some understand the city's place as the official seat of Bristol County and its traditional position as the hub of the Greater Taunton Area, the community as a whole appears apprehensive and unwilling to engage in excessive development in the hopes of protecting its neighborhoods and rural attributes. Opportunities are fleeting and considering the pervasive economic forces and market conditions that continue to put downtowns at a significant disadvantage, new ideas and initiatives need to be considered carefully and with open minds.

While the research team recognizes Taunton's rich cultural, political, social, and economic history and applauds the community for its efforts to maintain its precious heritage, it also cautions Tauntonians against doing so in excess and at the expense of potentially important opportunities for the downtown's revitalization. The downtown is among the most historic places in the entire city. Significant events in our state and nation's history took place in Downtown Taunton and its architecture and layout is perhaps unrivaled by many other small-city downtowns throughout the Commonwealth. However, this heritage should support rather than hinder the downtown's economic future. Balancing this heritage and the *status quo* with new initiatives and economic development is a difficult task that will eventually require the community to make difficult decisions. Regardless of how the community and the downtown's stakeholders decide, they must remember to keep an open mind or risk losing out on potentially prosperous opportunities. Nothing could be worse for Downtown Taunton that to portray itself to potential developers and business owners that it is unwilling to support and facilitate new development.

In addition to this existing sense of nostalgia, a preference for maintaining the *status quo* also presents a significant challenge to downtown redevelopment. Change can often feel threatening and depending upon its magnitude, can evoke passionate sentiments. During a number of stakeholder interviews, the research team learned about a 2002 study of traffic around the Taunton Green by the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD). Traffic around the Green has frequently been studied by a variety of private and public organizations for several reasons, including pedestrian and driver safety, truck traffic, and the impact of traffic patterns on access to the Green. Despite presenting several recommendations, including a proposal to redirect traffic and reduce potential accidents at certain dangerous intersections by closing off the street in front of the Post Office and diverting traffic behind the Post Office, city officials abruptly dismissed the SRPEDD study because they were unwilling to alter the traffic patterns around the Green since that is how traffic has been for decades.

While the research team makes no attempt to support or oppose the recommendations of the SRPEDD study, it does believe that traffic flow is a significant concern that city leaders and downtown stakeholders must consider as a part of a downtown revitalization effort. As such, they must be willing to enter into discussions about traffic flow around the Green with an objective and receptive demeanor. In addition, the same must be true of all issues, not just traffic. If Downtown Taunton is to begin an attempt at

Resisting Change: Lost Opportunities, Investments, & Time

Lessons from the experience of Hayfork, California

Hayfork is a town of approximately 2,500 residents in northern California. In 1996, the community experienced the closure of an important mill and realizing the overwhelming social and economic impact this would have on the community, its leadership formed a variety of Action Teams charged with developing ideas to help the town and get things moving economically. One of these particular Action Teams, which was focused on tourism and recreation, undertook a Downtown Revitalization Master Plan.

One of the greatest challenges that faced Hayfork's downtown was that its main street was also a part of Highway 3 and was paved for no other use than vehicular traffic. As a result of this, storefronts were also set far back from the road and behind a large area of empty pavement that was used for parking. The downtown had no sidewalks or landscaping and there was little sense of cohesion among the buildings within the central business district.

The tourism and recreation action team set to work creating a downtown plan that hoped to address these issues by paying attention to the architectural character and historic value of buildings, landscaping, lighting, signs, and a pedestrian/ bikeway system. The action team applied for and received a $25,000 grant from the California Forest Service's rural community assistance program to begin the planning process. A landscape architect was hired to begin work on a design and members of the action team began discussions with the state's transportation agencies in order to set aside space along the main road for bicycle paths, parking, sidewalks, and landscaping.

But resistance to change on the part of some business owners meant a scaling back of the initial plan. In consulting with the community, the action team discovered that there was strong resistance to the new parallel parking arrangements that were part of the plan. The debate over parking became intensely emotional, with some business owners unwilling to relinquish any of the empty pavement in front of their stores.

The result was a two-phase plan, with the first phase covering only two-thirds of the downtown area. At the time, the action team hoped that once improvements had been made to the west side of downtown that the rest of the community would come around. By the fall of 2001, the first set of improvements was in place, with sidewalks built and landscaping completed. In addition, the state's transportation agency funded and built a new storm drainage system to address the town's chronic flooding problems.

Overall, the downtown revitalization plan and accompanying public infrastructure improvements brought into Hayfork investments of approximately $1.6 to $2 million, which was an astounding achievement considering it all began with a grant worth $25,000 and the vision of a few local resident. Imagine how much larger that investment could have been had other business owners been willing to compromise and be a part of the downtown's development.

Source: Miller-Adams, Michelle, *Owning Up: Poverty, Assets, and the American Dream*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., (2002), p. 80-1.

redevelopment, change will be inevitable. If the community and downtown stakeholders are unprepared or unwilling to accept this then it should reconsider any desire to organize a revitalization effort.

2 Appearance & Property Redevelopment Barriers

While a downtown is often defined by what is there, in many instances it can also be characterized by what isn't. Having a plan, a vision, and organized leadership are important elements to a downtown revitalization effort. However, the image that residents, visitors, developers, property owners, merchants, and customers have of the downtown is highly influenced by its physical environment and the level of investment that takes place by the city, property owners, and other stakeholders. In turn, a lack of investment poses a serious threat to economic development opportunities, since business owners considering potential site locations are not drawn to areas where they perceive apathy on the part of those already there. Moreover, few business owners would want to locate their business or invest in a particular area if they felt their future neighbors and the condition of their properties would pose an obstacle to their success. When considering physical barriers to redevelopment in Downtown Taunton, stakeholders and community leaders must be willing to confront three major challenges: absentee property owners, the visibility of storefront vacancies, and the downtown's physical and aesthetic environment.

Absentee Property Owners

Many urban communities across the Commonwealth and throughout the United States are currently forced to contend with the growing problem of absentee property owners. While the term "absentee landlord" often carries a negative connotation, absentee property owners are not inherently poor property managers. Many of these individuals or families were once residents of these urban centers and increased prosperity allowed them to move out and build homes in suburban communities. When they left, however, they decided to retain their properties, rather than sell them, in order to earn additional income. As such, there are numerous examples of individuals who, despite not living in the community in which their property is located, care deeply for their investment and for the families or establishments that occupy their property. Unfortunately, those who have not lived up to their responsibilities as property owners have left the communities in which these properties are located at a tremendous disadvantage.

The current analysis of absentee property owners in Downtown Taunton is closely linked to subsequent assessments of vacancies in the downtown. Some of the themes mentioned here may therefore be echoed in the following section. This potential repetition is no error on the part of the research team. Rather, it is a reflection of just how closely intertwined these two challenges are

since, in several instances, the vacant properties that pose the greatest challenge to Downtown Taunton's redevelopment are owned by individuals who either do not live or operate businesses on the property itself or who do not live in the city at all.

Using the City of Taunton's online Geographical Information System (GIS) and the Assessor's Online Database, the research team identified a total of 280 properties that are either entirely or partially located within what is considered the downtown or "Central Business District" (CBD). In order to determine the number of privately owned properties, all state, federal, county, and municipal properties were removed from the list. This process yielded a total of 237 privately owned properties. Of these, 59 of the property owners did not have mailing addresses located in the City of Taunton. As such, the research team estimates that a quarter (24.9 percent) of all properties in the CBD are owned by non-Taunton residents. The research team also believes this estimate to be conservative, especially when one considers that of the 125 commercial properties located in the CBD, 42 of them list the actual address of the property as the owner's mailing address rather than the owner's personal home address.

For the purpose of comparison, the research team selected the City of Pittsfield, Massachusetts and conducted a similar analysis of absentee owner rates in Downtown Pittsfield. While Pittsfield's downtown is much smaller than that of Taunton, containing only 114 properties, the results of this inquiry demonstrate the challenges that urban downtowns face with regard to a preponderance of absentee property owners regardless of scale. Of the 114 properties in Downtown Pittsfield, 24 are owned by state, federal, or municipal entities. Therefore, there are 90 properties in Downtown Pittsfield that are privately owned. Of these, 27 properties (30 percent) are owned by individuals or firms listing mailing addresses outside of the City of Pittsfield. Although Taunton's rate is lower, they are still comparable and demonstrate the fact that Downtown Taunton is not alone when confronting the possible challenges that can arise as a result of absentee property owners.

Within the context of this report and its intended use to inform future economic development and marketing efforts in Downtown Taunton, the research team determined it necessary to also assess the absentee rate for commercial properties. As previously mentioned, there are 280 properties within the CBD. In addition to removing state, federal, county, and municipal properties, all residential/housing properties and those properties currently occupied by non-profit organizations were also removed. This process yielded a total of 125 privately-owned commercial properties. Of these, 34 of the property owners did not list mailing addresses within the City of Taunton. As such, the research team estimates that 27.2 percent of all commercial properties in the downtown are owned by non-Taunton residents or corporations.

In addition to assessing absentee owner rates in the entire CBD, the research team analyzed the rate for properties located within the inner-most area of the downtown, which includes properties around the Taunton Green, along the principal stretch of Main Street, along Broadway to Leonard Street, along Weir, Winthrop, and Cohannet Streets to the Taunton River, around Post Office Square, and approximately one-third of Court Street from the Crocker Building to the municipal parking lot. The property lines used to delineate this zone were also selected for their close proximity to these main streets and the sidewalks. The area described can be seen on the map in Figure 10.

The reason for studying this particular area stems from each property's proximity to the Taunton Green, where the bulk of traffic and commercial activity in the CBD take place. In fact, of the 92 properties identified within this area, 78 of them are currently used for some form of commercial activity. With 125 privately-owned

Figure 10: ***Downtown Taunton Core***

commercial properties in the entire CBD, these 78 commercial properties represent a majority (62.4 percent) of all commercial properties in the entire CBD. The concentration of commercial activity and properties within this defined zone of the CBD makes it a valuable area for analysis. In addition, the zone also encompasses an area that features some of the busiest sections of principal streets in the CBD in terms of traffic flow as Routes 44, 104, and 138 all traverse the Taunton Green rotary. As a result, this area of the downtown experiences a significant amount of traffic and its properties are therefore seen by more motorists.

A final reason for analyzing absentee owner rates in this particular area is linked to the issue of vacancies, particularly the visibility of the street-level vacancies seen by motorists and visitors as they travel through this high-traffic part of Downtown Taunton. Of the 30 properties identified throughout the entire CBD as having some level of vacancy, 25 of them are located within this zone (see Figure 11). In addition, of these 25 properties, 17 of them are owned by individuals listing mailing addresses outside of Taunton, making the issue of absentee property owners particularly relevant within the context of redeveloping this important zone.

Several interviewed stakeholders also made reference to the difficulties the community and City have had in their dealings with certain absentee property owners. During several interviews, the research team was informed of instances when certain out-of-town property owners were presented with fair-market offers to purchase their property or rent space but rejected those proposals as being too low. While any property owner is entitled to sell or lease their property at whatever price they wish, the community and downtown's stakeholders must understand the mindset that many absentee property owners in communities across the United States have when they think about such property. For many of them, the property has long been paid for and has been passed down for several generations. As such, from a cost perspective, these properties have little effect on their bottom line. They continue to pay local property taxes and minimal utilities while the property lay dormant until an exorbitant offer is made for its purchase or lease. In many cases, these offers take many years to come or fail materialize at all.

Ultimately, property owners are key stakeholders in Downtown Taunton's future and in any potential revitalization effort. As such, the relationship between the community and downtown property owners and among these property owners themselves is vital to these worthy causes. The distinction made here about absentee property owners is not intended to cast a dark cloud over all downtown property owners with out-of-town addresses. As previously mentioned, falling within this category of "absentee" does not necessarily make an individual a bad property owner. On the same note, having an address within the city does not necessarily make an individual a good property owner. The discussion herein is intended to provide the city and downtown advocates with useful information and to prepare it for potential challenges as it charts a course for downtown's redevelopment and works to successfully alleviate concerns regarding vacancies in the downtown.

Vacant Properties

In its initial discussions with city representatives and throughout its stakeholder interviews, concerns were consistently expressed regarding the number of vacant properties in the downtown. A similar theme was also observed in results from the previously-mentioned mail survey of Downtown Taunton stakeholders by the research team. Among 13 problems that are typical of downtown areas across the nation, "vacant/underutilized space" ranked third as a challenge and second as a priority among Downtown Taunton survey respondents (to see complete results on these particular survey questions, refer to Figures 6 and 7 on pages 13 and 14). Considering the level of unease associated with vacancies among Tauntonians and downtown stakeholders, the research team included within its scope of work a provision to assess the level of vacancies in Downtown Taunton.

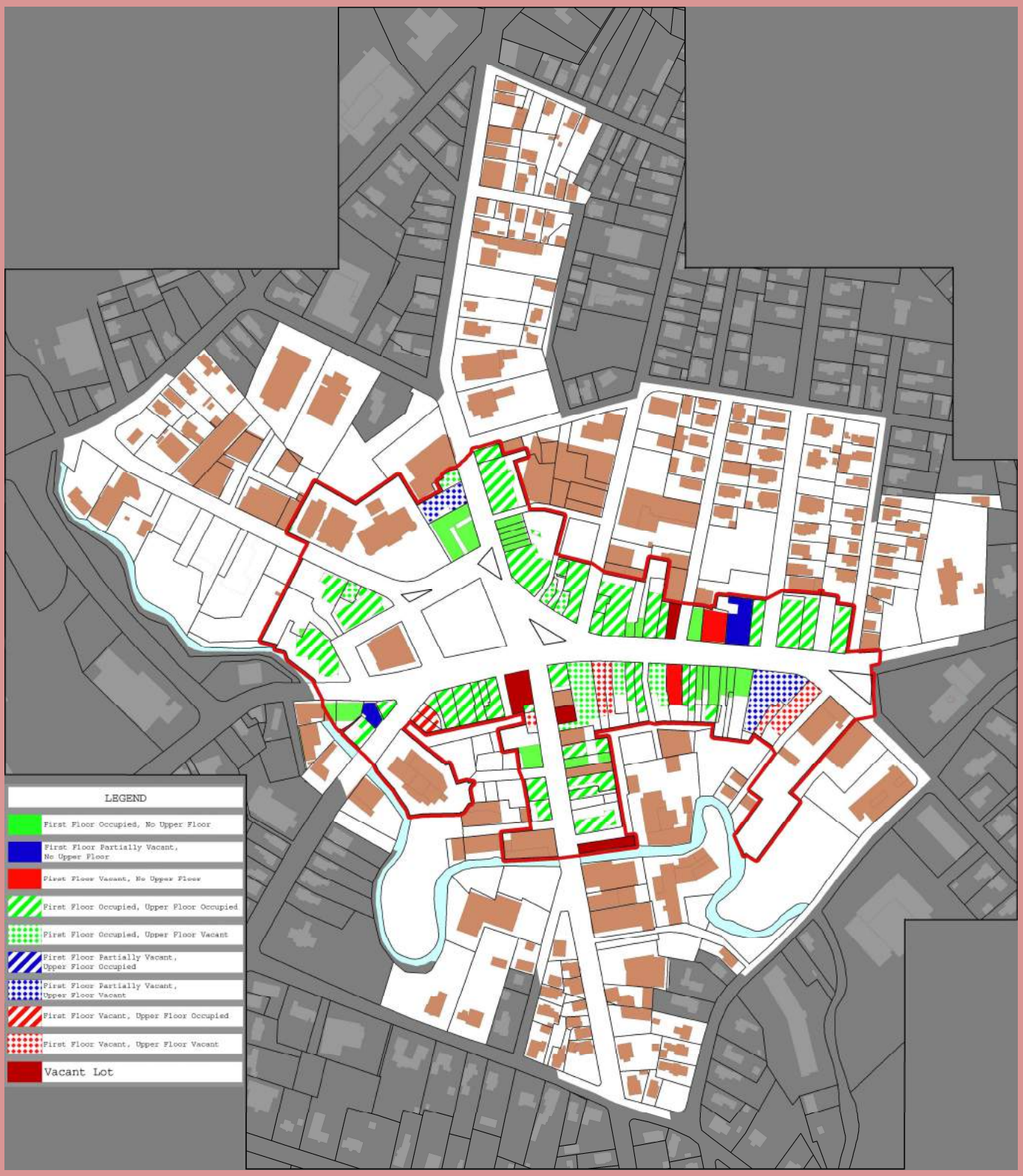
While a complete inventory of vacancies in the downtown can be seen in Chapter 4 of this report, the research team believes that a cursory examination of this particular concern within the context of this discussion on challenges to downtown revitalization is appropriate. While zoning regulations in Downtown Taunton allow for a variety of uses and also allow buildings to contain mixed-uses, the research team focused solely on those properties currently or previously used for commercial activity since these properties hold the potential for economic activity in the downtown.

Of the 280 properties in the Central Business District, 125 of them were identified as currently or previously containing commercial activity according to land use descriptions on property cards and as verified by visual observations from the research team. Of these 125 commercial properties, 30 are either entirely or partially vacant. Of particular concern to the research team were those properties with street-level vacancies since these are often the cause for greater concern among stakeholders and residents. Of the 30 properties in the downtown with some level of vacancy, 16 of them had at least one vacancy at the street-level. These figures give Downtown Taunton a street-level vacancy rate of 12.8 percent, which is quite typical of many older, urban downtowns. Recall that in Robertson's study of 57 small city downtowns, street-level vacancy rates between 14 and 32 percent were reported along main commercial streets. (Robertson 1999, 274-5). Another factor to consider is that the downtown currently has four vacant lots where buildings once stood that are covered with brush and trees or concrete. Two of these properties are located right on Main Street while the other two are located on Weir Street, making them significant eyesores along streets that are heavily traversed (see Figure 11).

In the previous section, absentee rates were analyzed within the context of the downtown "core" delineated by the research team (see Figure 10). Performing a similar analysis regarding vacancy rates within the context of this zone is also important considering the amount of traffic this area experiences on a typical day. Of the 78 commercial properties identified within this zone, 25 of them had some level of vacancy. More importantly, of these 25 properties, 14 of them currently have street-level vacancies. As such, of the 16 properties in the entire CBD that have street-level vacancies, 14 of them are located within this important area. In addition, the four previously-identified properties that are currently vacant and covered with brush and trees or concrete are all located within this downtown core.

In quantifying the downtown's current level of vacancy, the research team was actually surprised that these figures were not much

Figure 11: ***Downtown Taunton Core with Identified Property Vacancies***



higher considering initial stakeholder interviews raised such a high level of concern over the extent of this problem in Downtown Taunton. The fact that this inventory has been conducted and that vacancy figures were lower than expected does not, of course, minimize the importance of this challenge. Rather, in conducting this research and providing the city and community with reliable data that identifies and measures the extent of this problem, the research team hopes that stakeholders can now fully recognize its

extent, begin to understand that it is a manageable problem, and work toward initiatives and efforts that can fill these vacancies one at a time.

Having to deal with the issue of vacant property and the disinvestment that comes along with it is a phenomenon that is relatively new to cities like Taunton. While some have fought aggressively against this problem and the blight associated with it, others have struggled to decide how to change course. In addition to this, the weak market conditions that currently exist in these downtowns discourages private investment. Major rehabilitation must often take place to redevelop preexisting properties that are often nearly one hundred years old. As a result of this, the private investment that typically funds new development in urban downtowns is no longer available. Instead, local governments have been forced to step in to confront the challenges posed by excessive vacancies. Because local budgets are insufficient to adequately address the scale at which this problem is taking place, many must look toward their state and federal governments for funding resources that are always limited and sometimes non-existent.

While all of these factors make the work of filling vacant space a very intricate and difficult task, the research team offers several basic and fundamental recommendations that can help the city in jump-starting efforts to discuss and plan ways to overcome the challenges posed by excessive vacancies in the downtown while ensuring that accurate and timely information exists to support this work.

Figure 12: ***Downtown Taunton: Vacancy & Absentee Statistics***

	Entire CBD	Downtown Core
Total Number of Properties	280	92
Total Number of Privately-Owned Properties	237	84
Total Number of Properties Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	59	24
Total Number of Commercial Properties	125	78
Total Number of Commercial Properties Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	34	21
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Any Level of Vacancy	30	25
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Both Street-Level and Upper-Level Vacancies	7	7
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Street-Level Vacancies Only	9	7
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Upper-Level Vacancies Only	8	7
Total Number of Commercial Properties with Vacancies Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	20	17
Total Number of Vacant Lots	4	4
Total Number of Vacant Lots Whose Owners List Out-of-Town Addresses	3	3

Update the City's Online GIS. The City of Taunton's Geographic Information System (GIS), currently managed by the city's Planning Department, is an invaluable tool. The system not only helped the research team with efforts to create downtown property databases, but also provided a base tool with which to create the various maps that are found throughout this study. Despite the value of this online system, the research team recommends that the city conduct a thorough review of information within this system as it found several inconsistencies between what the maps were indicating and what really existed on the ground. In several instances, the research team printed maps from the GIS system that showed buildings that did not exist when the research team began conducting its field research in the downtown. An example of this includes the current Court Street lot. According to the city's GIS there are three large buildings located within an area that is actually a parking lot. Providing accurate information within this online system is an important step to providing the public and potential investors and developers with opportunities to understand the layout in Downtown Taunton should they be interested in acquiring property or opening a business. As such, instituting a policy that ensures periodic updates to this online tool should be considered and implemented as soon as possible.

Create a Working Vacancy Database and Mapping System. Secondly, the city needs to build a comprehensive vacant property information database that is easy to update as properties become vacant or are filled with tenants and that is accessible to developers and business owners. Doing so will also allow the city to become more strategic with regard to its decision-making and implementation of a vision and plan for downtown revitalization. The research team recommends that this database become an integrated and cross-agency tool that allows for more information than just basic property characteristics. The database should also include information regarding city activities associated with each property including code enforcement citations, tax delinquency, water and sewer account status, and possible past eminent domain acquisition. Of course, the city will have to determine which information is public and what remains private.

The implementation of such a system would require that essential departments become more computerized, and may require the city to pursue a private contract with software developers to create and implement the system across all departments. In addition, the research team recommends that such a system be tied to the city's GIS mapping system so that visual and geographic information can remain linked to other forms of data. Using such a comprehensive system would allow the city's development officials to access records on a particular property or block, and easily obtain information that can guide and shape development decisions rather than having to spend countless hours calling or visiting various city agencies

The research team's collation of a property database and vacancy database as well as the various maps provided to the city are only the beginning of a truly comprehensive system that can help to support development. A great deal of information exists beyond the public realm that the city should be collecting and centralizing in an easy-to-use format. Doing so is comparable to current efforts in the medical field to computerize patient health records so that any doctor treating a patient can easily access his or her medical

history. As such, the city must expend resources in not only funding but also personnel to ensure that this informational database remains up-to-date and can easily be adapted to changing conditions on the ground.

Coordinate and Streamline Permitting Procedures. In a latter section of this report, the research team identifies the city's permitting process as a challenge to downtown redevelopment. Within the context of vacancies, it is critical that the city begin to work to create a permitting process that is user-friendly and holds city departments accountable for working in the same direction with regard to permitting and development. Investors and entrepreneurs have little time to spend navigating a complicated and multi-layered permitting process that requires them to spend weeks traversing the city to meet with officials in different departments. In fact, the city's own Master Plan specifically recommends that the city consolidate its departments in as few locations as possible. As such, the city should focus specifically on those departments and entities that are part of the permitting process. If the city is serious about becoming an active partner in efforts to reduce vacancy rates in the downtown it must begin by simplifying its permitting process and eliminating the abundance of bureaucracy and confusing administrative apparatus that investors must deal with in order to receive decisions on their development proposals. For this reason, it is also important that the city's departments as well as other development agencies or non-profit organizations begin to work together to achieve common goals with regard to downtown development. In order to accomplish this, the research team stresses the need to develop a vision and strategic plan so that a redevelopment plan can also become the guiding force behind downtown's revitalization and the role that individual entities play in promoting economic development in the downtown.

Develop and Implement a Market-Based Approach to Downtown Redevelopment. Considering the unique conditions that exist in Downtown Taunton, the research team believes that the area requires a redevelopment plan that is market-specific and based upon the downtown's needs and potential. Doing so will allow the city and downtown stakeholders to become strategic in its undertaking of appropriate interventions to address and promote opportunities for vacant property redevelopment as they exist within the downtown market itself. Crafting this approach to redevelopment in the downtown will require that those involved in the process and eventual implementation include a number of individuals with professional experience and a thorough understanding of real estate markets, how they operate, and how Downtown Taunton's market could potentially grow. This is a key part of this recommendation. If the city and downtown stakeholders continue to rely upon information that is not guided by market principles, trends, and data, then it will continue to work in haphazard mode and allow development projects to come into the downtown regardless of whether they are economically sound for the entire area.

Physical and Aesthetic Environment

Many downtown districts across the United States are at a tremendous competitive disadvantage when one considers the wide variety of alternatives that exist for consumers and the relative ease with which they can access these alternatives. Indeed, many of the goods and services offered in a downtown, including Downtown Taunton, can be purchased or accessed elsewhere, and most downtowns lack the popular national retail chains that can offer discounts and ample free parking. Considering these factors, the research team's observations, insights garnered from stakeholder interviews, and the results of the Downtown Taunton mail survey, in which respondents ranked "image" as the number four challenge in the downtown, physical and aesthetic environment was determined to be a significant challenge to Downtown Taunton's revitalization.

The National Main Street Center, a part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, whose downtown redevelopment principles operate in countless communities across the nation, offers four critical and comprehensive strategies for downtown revitalization. The first of these is to establish a "design involving the improvement of the downtown's image by enhancing its overall physical appearance" (Main Street National Trust for Historic Preservation 2000, 3). In referring to physical and aesthetic environment, the research team stresses the importance of a downtown environment that welcomes and attracts people and, in doing so, attracts the new investment needed to overcome the number one and number two challenges identified by survey respondents in Downtown Taunton: "attracting people in the evenings/weekends" and "attracting new development/investment." The research team has divided the goal of improving the physical and aesthetic environment of Downtown Taunton into four key tasks:

- ✧ Create a sense of place
- ✧ Improve the downtown's image
- ✧ Enhance the pedestrian experience
- ✧ Highlight the downtown's heritage

Create a Sense of Place. 'Creating a sense of place' is the art of creating a destination. Luckily, many of the features necessary, such as architecture, heritage, and a waterfront, are often located within a community's downtown. Considering this, and the "downtown's traditional role as a regional center for economic, government, cultural, and community-related activities," downtowns typically possess "the foundation upon which … a sense of place can be established." Kent Robertson of St. Cloud State University in Minnesota adds, "The downtown possesses the building blocks to furnish a distinctive and unique setting that offers a refreshing alternative to the anonymity of place – the 'nowhere syndrome' … characteristic of much of America's built environment" (Robertson 1999, 275). As a result, it would appear that as the draw toward the monotony of the artificial suburban environment and its cookie-cutter malls continues to wane, downtowns are well-positioned to take advantage of their greatest and most natural strengths to recreate a destination that is distinct, innovative, and novel.

To become a destination, Downtown Taunton will first need to find its sense of place. For many, the downtown and the Taunton Green rotary, where Routes 44, 140, and 138 intersect, are merely conduits to some other location. Attracting people to the downtown, where they can stay and shop, and perhaps enjoy a meal, will require more than having the shops and eateries to service those who work in the downtown or already make a habit of frequenting currently-existing establishments. There is a much broader

audience and market to capture and in order to do so, the downtown's stakeholders must be willing to think collaboratively and creatively about how to define Downtown Taunton's sense of place.

Defining a sense of place, of course, can be a difficult exercise. To assist in the process, one can turn to a set of principles put forth by Kent Robertson of St. Cloud State University in Minnesota:

- ✧ The downtown has its own distinct character and heritage that cannot be found or recreated in other places. As such, a downtown should focus and build upon its intrinsic historical, economic, natural, and cultural advantages.
- ✧ The downtown represents the unique heritage of the community and its sense of place is naturally connected to this heritage. As such, searching for themes that are artificial or foreign can detract from downtown's authenticity.
- ✧ Downtowns are multifunctional, unlike shopping centers that focus solely on retail activity. As such, a downtown can serve a variety of purposes including shopping, worship, tourism, housing, government services, dining, entertainment, and cultural attractions, all within one compact walkable area. By serving a variety of purposes, the downtown can attract a larger pool of prospective visitors and become an important sphere of activity.
- ✧ The downtown is best experienced on foot and should therefore be pedestrian friendly and safe. Successful downtowns that have strong sense of place have made efforts to calm traffic while making the needs of the pedestrian a high priority.
- ✧ The downtown should encourage people to linger longer than the time needed to conduct their business. Therefore, if the downtown is interesting, safe, comfortable, and attractive, people will stay longer and visit more business establishments.
- ✧ Downtowns take advantage of open spaces to help foster their sense of place. These open spaces are a key part of encouraging people to stay longer, sit, relax, read, or converse with others. In addition, these open spaces are centers for community and cultural gatherings that can set the tone for increased foot traffic on these open spaces and in the downtown.
- ✧ The downtown should engender a high level of community ownership and pride, values that are directly connected to the degree to which citizens actually use their downtown. The more people use their downtown, the greater the number of stakeholders, the greater the level of interest, the greater the number of opportunities for individuals and organizations to work together through private and public partnerships, and the greater the chance for residents to perceive that downtown is everybody's neighborhood (Robertson 1999b).

Improve Downtown Taunton's Image. How a downtown feels to visitors and shoppers is significantly connected to how it looks. And while "image" has both physical and non-physical aspects to consider, the physical ones can be considerable, require a great deal of consensus and cooperation, and can sometimes be costly. When considering efforts to improve a downtown's image, typical activities and projects include infrastructure improvements like sidewalk repairs, streetscape enhancements like benches, trees, and planters, and the implementation of design guidelines for building facades, particularly at street-level.

With regards to infrastructure, Downtown Taunton contains areas that require a great deal of investment and attention. A comprehensive assessment of sidewalks throughout the CBD, particularly within the zone delineated in Figure 10, should be conducted to determine areas in need of repair or complete renovation. In particular, the city should consider improvements to the sidewalks along Summer Street, Main Street, School Street, Taunton Green, Post Office Square, Court Street, Broadway, Cohannet Street, Winthrop Street, and Weir Street, all of which currently have brickwork along the center. While aesthetically pleasing, many of these areas are extremely uneven and are either higher or lower than the surrounding concrete. In certain areas along these sidewalks, the existing concrete that surrounds this brickwork is in reasonable condition. However, these square patches of brick pose risks to pedestrian safety and detract from the comfort-level experienced by pedestrians . In other areas of the CBD that do not have this brickwork, considerable sidewalk improvements should also be considered. Areas that could be considered as a priority include Cedar Street, Trescott Street, and Leonard Street (see Figure 13). In addition to this, the research team also observed areas along the path that encircles the Robert Treat Paine monument that require repair, as some pedestrians use this path to cross Summer Street in front of City Hall.

An important part of recommending renovations to sidewalks in the downtown includes a need to improve access to and from many of these sidewalks via curb ramps, particularly to promote handicap accessibility and safety. On several intersections, the research team noticed either no curb ramp access or curb ramps that were in disrepair.

With regards to streetscape enhancements, Downtown Taunton has certain positive elements that it can build upon. A number of trees have been planted along the principal streets within the CBD, and in most cases the tree grates at the base of the trunk are still intact or require minor repairs. In addition, the Heart of Taunton and its membership have sponsored the installation of light pole banners that publicize many of the commercial establishments in the downtown and add a touch of color to the environment. Further enhancements could include planters along the sidewalk or hanging planters on each of the light posts. Some communities have even used both. The research team observed two planters on Cohannet Street in front of the Flat Iron Building. These appeared to belong to Isabella's Bridal, as they match planters found at the entrance of the store. As a commercial district, and perhaps with the support of the city or non-profit organizations, the downtown should consider an expansion of this practice throughout the entire area so as to enhance the pedestrian experience and also make visitors willing to return to Downtown Taunton.

Overgrowth of grass and weeds along sidewalks throughout the downtown was also observed (see Figure 13). The city and the downtown's stakeholders should consider creative ways to maintain

Figure 13: ***Downtown Taunton Sidewalk Repair & Maintenance Needs***

Summer Street

Main Street

Court Street

Post Office Square

Weir Street

Weir Street

Weir Street

Main Street

Court Street

Court Street at Post Office Square

Cohannet Street

Winthrop Street

Weir Street

Weir Street

Winthrop Street at Main Street

this on a regular basis while also discussing possible actions to keep the sidewalks clean of other debris. The downtown's stakeholders and merchants must understand that consumers have become accustomed to the clean indoor shopping experience of regional malls. As such, the sidewalks act as an extension of the business establishment. If merchants and stakeholders hope to attract shoppers long enough to have them walk from shop to shop, a serious effort to maintain sidewalks must be considered. Shoppers and visitors will appreciate a clean and well-kept area, will leave with good impressions, and will feel comfortable returning to conduct future business. Considering this, a recognition among downtown property owners and business owners must be established that while improvements to the public space is necessary, these improvements must be paired with enhancements

Enhancing the Downtown Environment

Lessons from the experience of Brandon, Canada

The city of Brandon is located in the province of Manitoba, Canada and has a city population of approximately 50,000 according to 2006 estimates. While it is not located in the United States, the city's history shares similarities with many North American cities, making it a valuable case study for solutions to downtown redevelopment challenges. The following summarizes efforts taken between 1987 and 1999 by the downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) to revitalize Downtown Brandon.

By the late 1960s, Downtown Brandon was beginning to decline as indicated in a report which described the area as "showing signs of decay and obsolescence which reduce its effectiveness and threaten to stifle its future growth and very existence." Over the course of the next ten years, a great deal of discussion took place regarding downtown redevelopment but little action was undertaken. Suburbanization also hit hard on Downtown Brandon's economy as developers began pushing the city's limits by building malls, homes, strip developments, and other commercial centers on the city's fringe.

Tired of the decline in the downtown, merchants organized themselves into a Business Improvement Area in order to ensure that the idea of downtown revitalization did not die in the midst of all the suburban development. Each business within the 85 block area of the BIA became a member while government agencies and non-profit organizations were allowed to join as non-paying members. Once organized, the BIA contained such a diverse and large cross section of the downtown that its political voice was loud enough to push for the needs of the downtown.

The work of the BIA focuses on administering and implementing the Business Improvement Area Revitalization Plan. The goal of the plan is to improve business opportunities by marketing the downtown and by making improvements to the physical environment. The latter objective entails financing enhancements to the public space and helping private developers with improving their properties by providing advice and assistance in obtaining grants.

To finance the BIA's work, businesses within the BIA pay 2 percent of their municipal tax assessment to finance the project. Its 450 members contribute anywhere from $10 to $4,000 annually and total contributions equal approximately $150,000 annually. In addition, the BIA has also worked with the provincial government to change legislation that would allow it to apply for more substantial grants.

The BIA began its program with a marketing effort that promoted awareness of the downtown and attracted shoppers back to the area. One of the BIA's members is the local daily newspaper and using their facilities and distribution network, the BIA produces a tabloid flyer three times per year that promotes upcoming events and alerts readers to business changes in the downtown.

The next step in the BIA's work involved creating special events that would draw people to the downtown. They began by re-establishing the Santa Claus Parade, which has brought an estimated ten thousand people into the downtown and is financed through the sale of Santa hats. They then organized a fall street fair and created their own International Pickle Festival. The event became so popular that it became necessary to close off six blocks within the downtown for the entire weekend. Major financing for the event is also provided by Bick's Pickles, one of Canada's largest pickle producers and distributors. While these events take place, many of the retail shops in the downtown use the opportunity to have sidewalk sales and the closure of streets allows pedestrians to wander freely and see the new stores that have opened.

A major undertaking of the BIA has been the redevelopment of the public space in the downtown. BIA members quickly realized that if they attracted people to the downtown for special events, the experience would have to be positive and pleasant enough to convince them to return. The aim of the BIA's streetscaping work is to make the downtown more attractive and pedestrian friendly and to create a unique image for the area. This project began with the planting of up to nine mature trees on each block along the main streets and continued with the development of a heritage theme in the downtown's core area. Certain street signs were replaced with slightly larger signs in green and yellow, the city colors, and a wheat sheaf, the city's emblem, on each sign. The standard concrete sidewalks were replaced with decorative concrete with a wheat sheaf pattern. Wrought iron benches were set up and matching garbage containers were installed while antique fire hydrants were also put in. The lamp posts were designed to support hanging flower baskets in the summer and banners, ribbons, and Christmas lighting in the fall and winter.

Finally, the BIA also recognized the need to link public space enhancements with private space improvements and obtained provincial government funding for a ten-year Storefront Improvement Program during which 71 businesses improved their façades. The BIA encouraged merchants to use the heritage theme and continues to offer design advice on structures and materials to encourage further development. Sign regulations controlling sandwich boards, overhanging signs, murals, and canopies have also been produced to ensure that they do not overpower the streetscape.

Source: Horne, William R. "A Multifaceted Approach to Downtown Revitalization in Brandon Canada," Michael A. Burayidi, ed., *Downtowns: Revitalizing the Centers of Small Urban Communities*, Rutledge, NY (2001) p. 89-96.

to the private space; hence the need for the private-public partnerships mentioned in previous sections of this report.

The Taunton Green itself is a tremendous asset to the downtown. Very few urban downtowns have the luxury of such a piece of property in the heart of their central business district. The Green is well-maintained with trees providing shade and plants that provide aesthetic beauty in the midst of the often unruly traffic that envelops it. Despite mentioning the Green within the context of downtown challenges, the research team in no way implies that the Green in itself is a challenge to downtown revitalization. The challenge, however, is in defining its role, purpose, and use within the context of a downtown revitalization effort. The Green is an historic property with a great deal of open space that very few downtowns can boast. Unlocking its potential will require a great deal of planning and discussion considering the traffic flow and patterns that currently exist around it. In order for the Green to be a centerpiece of any beautification effort in the downtown it must become more easily accessible and the community must determine what forms of activity could potentially take place within it so that it can serve as a boon for economic development within the entire area. In addition, while the Green is well-kept, the city should consider replacing or painting the iron bars that act as a fence around the entire Green. A few of these iron bars have also fallen from the stone supports and should be fixed.

In addition to the Taunton Green, the downtown is the location of the Liberty & Union Plaza, a small plot of land on Main Street directly across from the former Star Theater. The plaza has excellent shade from the trees that are growing there and it also has large planters as well as picnic tables and tables with checker/ chess board mosaics on them. The area itself requires maintenance and cleanup but holds significant potential as an area where small-scale art or cultural activities can take stage or where downtown employees, shoppers, and visitors can enjoy their lunch. With some attention to cleanup and enhancements to planters, the plaza could be promoted as an urban oasis that can be advantageous in a downtown revitalization effort (see Figure 14).

Downtown Taunton is also a hodgepodge of architectural styles, with building façades of varying materials and colors. In addition, while a few establishments located side-by-side have adopted uniform signage or awnings, there is no universal theme or style. The intense variety of sign colors and sizes often detract from the downtown's beauty. In Downtown Taunton, the effect can be significant, especially when considering some of the historic architecture that lines its main streets. Establishing downtown design guidelines can be a proactive way to bring some uniformity to signage and storefront appearance. While doing so can spark intense dissent from property owners and merchants, downtown stakeholders must realize that shoppers are used to the orderly design of regional malls and that individual business success is tightly linked to the overall success of the downtown. As such, working cooperatively on such design matters is in the interest of all property and business owners in the downtown. Furthermore, these design guidelines need not be rigorous or prescriptive. In many communities, the design guidelines are voluntary and to promote the design guidelines, these communities offer incentive programs such as low-interest loans or grants to those who volunteer to follow them in enhancing their storefront.

Image also has as much to do with self-image as the image the downtown portrays visually to visitors. In their article entitled *10 Keys to Create a Competitive Downtown*, Segal and Ray (2002) admit that much of the work around creating and projecting a healthy self-image is psychological. "If existing stakeholders do not believe in the community, it is unlikely that newcomers will" (Segal et. al. 2002, 8). Self-image will be an important part of downtown's future and there will be challenges in promoting a good self-image that are rooted in issues such as absentee property owners and the consensus-building barriers previously discussed. In addition, this self-image must be supported and accepted by the community's political leadership who share responsibility in realizing the downtown's aspirations and potential. In several of its interviews with stakeholders, property owners, business owners, and community leaders, the research team was troubled by the level of disappointment with the lack of progress in the downtown over the last decade and the perceptions of hopelessness that were often expressed in the downtown's future. Overcoming these sentiments will be a significant challenge. And despite any disillusionment on the part of downtown stakeholders everyone must be open to efforts to improve the downtown rather than dismiss these efforts or predict them to be failures before they're allowed to be implemented. Attitudes such as these will not contribute to a healthy self-image for the downtown and will actually work to ensure failure.

Figure 14: ***The Liberty & Union Plaza***

Enhance the Pedestrian Experience. Healthy downtowns encourage people to experience their services and amenities on foot and to linger long enough to purchase goods, dine, or otherwise contribute to the downtown's economy. Enhancing the pedestrian experience in Downtown Taunton will require stakeholders to tackle two important challenges: (1) upgrading the

visual and aesthetic environment, and (2) improving pedestrian safety.

With regard to the first challenge, significant upgrades to the visual and aesthetic environment, many of these issues have already been covered in the previous two sections on creating a sense of place in Downtown Taunton and improving its image. Within the current context, the research team aims to further stress the importance of overcoming these two challenges because they play a significant role in how pedestrians and visitors feel as they walk through and conduct their business in the downtown and what impressions they will walk away with as they leave. Considering this, it is in the downtown's best interest and in the best interest of its merchants, property owners, and stakeholders to create a truly inviting and comfortable environment that encourages visitors and customers to stay longer and provides enough interest to convince them to return. Typical methods for addressing these concerns include the previously-mentioned streetscape improvements, such as trees, planters, benches, lighting, and banners.

An additional amenity that promotes a pedestrian-friendly environment includes the printing or posting of a downtown directory that informs visitors of where specific services can be accessed, where certain goods can be purchased, or where entertainment venues are located. In several face-to-face interviews with downtown stakeholders, the idea of creating a downtown directory with a map was mentioned. This idea is supported by the fact that Downtown Taunton's courthouses bring in many people from across the region on a daily basis, and that these individuals should be encouraged to experience Downtown Taunton. Since many may be visiting the city for the first time, it would make sense to provide them with an informational directory that identifies parking facilities, restaurants and cafés, banks and ATMs, and other businesses and venues. Even if these individuals are unable to stay in Downtown Taunton, the information on the brochure might attract them to return when they have more time.

Human activity is also a key part of enhancing the pedestrian experience. Buildings, street lamps, water fountains, monuments, trees, flowers, benches, and sidewalks alone cannot create the sense of place that will keep and attract people to Downtown Taunton. To foster human activity, Downtown Taunton must take advantage of one of its most unique and significant assets: the Taunton Green. Open spaces and parks are a draw for people, and because of this, they contribute significantly to the downtown's sense of place. It is hard to think about or mentally envision Downtown Taunton without considering the Taunton Green. As such, the downtown's stakeholders should consider ways to bring entertainment, festivals, farmers markets, and other community events to the Green at an even greater level and in ways that will significantly bolster economic activity in the downtown.

With regard to pedestrian safety, the focus here is mainly on how current traffic conditions impact pedestrian activity in Downtown Taunton. While vehicular traffic is important, a downtown benefits more from pedestrians frequenting and doing business in its shops, restaurants, and service centers. Certainly, cars and trucks do not buy things, people do. As such, pedestrians and the uninhibited movement of pedestrians are central to a downtown's economic survival. In assessing pedestrian concerns in Downtown Taunton, the research team has once again focused on the downtown's inner zone, identified previously in the discussion regarding absentee property owners and vacancies. Throughout this zone, there are 25 crosswalks that connect sidewalks along the downtown's principal streets marked in green in Figure 15. Every crosswalk, except for one located on Cohannet Street that connects the sidewalk behind Post Office Square to the sidewalk on the corner of the *Taunton Gazette* property, has been painted green so as to be viewed clearly by motorists. In addition, many of these crosswalks also have bright orange construction barrels in the center with signs affixed to them instructing motorists to yield to pedestrians in the crosswalk.

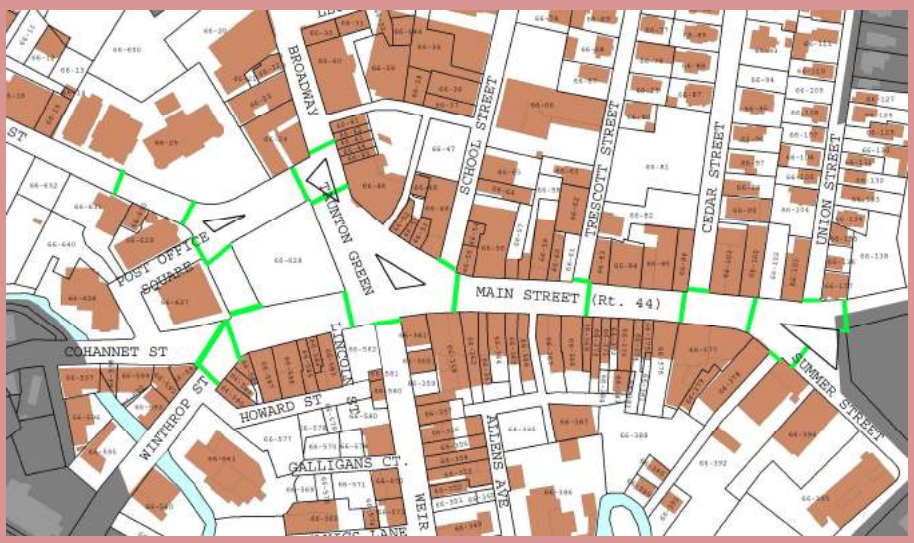
During the course of several interviews, the research team listened to a variety of concerns regarding pedestrian safety and the inability of the current system to ensure pedestrian comfort in crossing many of the downtown's busy intersections and streets. As it currently stands, of the thirteen intersections in the central downtown zone, only two are currently regulated by traffic signals. The first set of traffic signals is located at the intersection of Main Street and Weir Street and the second set is located on Main Street near the Robert Treat Paine monument and Church Green.

While the green crosswalks act to alert drivers of the potential for pedestrians to cross, they do not force drivers to slow down altogether as they drive through the downtown. In its 2002 report, *Traffic around the Taunton Green*, the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) also noted that, "The heavy traffic volumes traversing the Green combined with the width of the roads surrounding the Green, make it rather difficult to cross the streets, particularly for elderly and handicapped pedestrians" (SRPEDD 2002, 16). Kent Robertson of St. Cloud University in Minnesota also argues that fast moving traffic is one of the top deterrents to pedestrian activity and perceptions of safety. This, in turn, undercuts the perception among shoppers, visitors, and other pedestrians that the downtown is an enjoyable place to walk around and conduct their business (Robertson 1998).

In addition, safer access to the Taunton Green must be provided if it is going to become a place where people can congregate, read a book, sit on a bench, or walk their dog. Currently, there are five crosswalks that connect the Taunton Green to sidewalks on the opposite side of the four streets that border it. While this is plenty of access, four of these crosswalks are located on intersections that are not regulated by traffic signals and can be highly dangerous for pedestrians and drivers alike. According to SRPEDD's 2002 traffic study, which presented accident data for the years 1997 through 1999, a total of 126 accidents occurred around the Taunton Green in that three-year period. Of these, 113 involved two or more moving vehicles, eight involved fixed objects or parked cars, one involved a bicyclist, and four involved pedestrians (SRPEDD 2002, 11-15). This means that over this three-year period, the Taunton Green was, on average, the site of 42 accidents per year.

Some options for addressing these problems include placing additional traffic signals at particularly confusing and unsafe intersections that operate solely to ensure safe pedestrian crossings, additional signs warning motorists of pedestrian activity, the conversion of several crosswalks into speedtable-style crosswalks, particularly the mid-block crosswalks along Main Street

Figure 15: ***Downtown Taunton Core Crosswalks***



and in front of City Hall on Summer Street, blinking lights at each crosswalk not currently regulated by traffic signals, and the installation of a small elevated center median at the intersection of Broadway and Taunton Green that would allow pedestrians to cross to and from the Taunton Green halfway and wait until it is safe to cross the other half of the street (similar to the square built around the Robert Treat Pain monument).

In addition to these pedestrian concerns, the research team has identified an additional matter to consider. While a good supply of parking in the Central Business District is currently located on-street, the majority of the CBD's parking resources are found in off-street lots and the municipal parking garage on Leonard Street. Because of the number of individuals visiting Downtown Taunton, many of whom are from out of town and conducting business in the county courthouses, the city's four lots and garage are critical to the downtown. Frequent usage, combined with the fact that these lots are located behind buildings (except for the Court Street lot), means that pedestrian activity is increased between these parking facilities and the downtown's core. As such, the city and the downtown's stakeholders may want to consider the conversion of alleys that currently allow for vehicular traffic into pedestrian-only links between the parking lots and the main streets. This suggestion could apply to both Leonard Court and Merchant's Lane as they provide pedestrians parking in the Allans Avenue lot behind City Hall access to Main Street. By re-surfacing and lighting these alleys it would provide for greater pedestrian access and usage of these lots.

Considering the importance of pedestrian activity to the downtown's economic success, the research team recommends that the city and the downtown's stakeholders discuss ways to ensure pedestrian safety in this critical zone of the Central Business District. Of course, any discussion regarding pedestrian activity and safety will have an impact on traffic flow and patterns within the central zone. Despite this, the community must be open to new ideas and proposals if the downtown is going to be an inviting place to people and not just cars. Organizing a task force of professionals, city officials, downtown merchants, and other stakeholders to specifically study the issue of downtown traffic and pedestrian issues and offer recommendations to the community may be of benefit as a way to find creative approaches to address and build consensus around these concerns.

Highlight the Downtown's Heritage. Taunton's downtown is among the city's most historic areas. The CBD contains several historic structures and much of the architecture that has been a part of the downtown for over a hundred years still exists and it is a place where monumental events in local, state, and national history occurred. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many cities across the Commonwealth and the United States underwent a great deal of urban redevelopment supported by federal funding. As a part of this redevelopment, these communities tore down old buildings of significant historic value in their downtown and replaced them with modern architecture that paled in comparison to the design detail of previous eras. Downtown Taunton, however, has avoided much of these ill-fated urban redevelopment efforts and has retained a great deal of the rare architectural designs and details that can no longer be found in other urban downtowns. As such, tapping into the community's history and heritage can be a significant way to create a unique sense of place.

As a part of the mail survey conducted by the Urban Initiative, participants were given a list of 11 downtown assets and opportunities and were asked to check off (in no particular order) their top five. Among those who responded, 81.3 percent indicated that "history/architecture" was an asset in Downtown Taunton (see Figure 16).

Shining the spotlight on the downtown's heritage as part of the revitalization effort can be done in many ways, both large and small. The most widely recognized approach to preserving heritage in the downtown is through historic preservation of buildings and monuments. In Kent Robertson's survey of small cities across the nation, historic preservation ranked high in terms of both utility and level of effectiveness. Of the 57 cities participating in his survey, 50

of them indicated using historic preservation in an attempt to create a sense of place in the downtown. In Auburn, New York; Bangor, Maine; and Carson City, Nevada, for example, low-interest, revolving loan funds were also used to persuade property owners to complete façade improvements, bringing their buildings in line with a set of design guidelines and allowing the downtown's heritage to be preserved (Robertson 1999, 275).

Today's retail market is so saturated with big box chains and mega-shopping malls that many shoppers no longer seem to value them for aesthetic appeal. Considering this, heritage and history can be powerful tools in creating a unique differential advantage. Very often, a downtown's future can be found in its past and in this regard, the research team believes that Downtown Taunton is poised to make significant improvements that can help it overcome some of its aesthetic challenges.

Figure 16: ***Taunton Survey Results: Downtown Assets & Opportunities***

Asset/Opportunity	% of Respondents Selecting Item
History/architecture	81.3%
Availability of land/buildings	53.1%
Volume of automobile traffic	50.0%
Layout and location	46.9%
Strong downtown association	43.8%
Daytime workforce	43.8%
Community spirit/commitment	40.6%
Government operations/service centers	28.1%
Parking	18.8%
Retail/service mix	18.8%
Parks/open spaces	12.5%

3 Parking & Traffic

Although this study devotes a chapter to the specific tasks the research team was asked to perform with regard to parking inventory and utilization, a discussion of several key challenges with regard to downtown parking and management is appropriate within the context of this analysis regarding downtown's redevelopment. Related to the issue of parking is traffic, which has considerable implications on a downtown's walkability and can hinder revitalization efforts.

To provide further context for this analysis, the research team points to two interesting results from its survey of Downtown Taunton stakeholders with regard to both parking and traffic. Results from survey question one regarding the downtown's challenges ranked the issue of parking as the number seven challenge while "traffic circulation and flow/congestion" was ranked number nine among the list of thirteen challenges. However, results from the following question regarding perceived priorities in Downtown Taunton ranked traffic as the number four and parking as the number five priorities, respectively (see Figures 6 and 7 on pages 13 and 14). The research team believes that the ranking of parking and traffic as relatively minor challenges, but high priorities stems from a possible understanding that while these issues exist, they are areas of concern in which the city and the community can have an immediate impact if creative, committed, and concerted efforts are made to promote improvements to downtown parking and traffic.

Downtown Parking Survey

Initial discussions with project sponsors indicated a growing perception within Downtown Taunton that the area lacks a sufficient quantity of parking spaces. However, as the research team became more familiar with the layout of the downtown and the locations of its various parking resources, it began to question the extent to which this parking dilemma existed and whether other factors were potentially contributing to the general perception of a shortage. To ascertain the extent to which these concerns are warranted, the research team decided to examine the issue from a variety of perspectives. This analysis, using several data gathering methods, will also provide the city with important parking-related information.

After gathering information during stakeholder interviews, the research team included a question on its mail survey to determine the perceptions and attitudes of downtown stakeholders regarding parking. Survey participants were given a list of nine statements relative to parking in the downtown and were asked to select all those that they agreed with. Among those that responded, approximately 66 percent agreed that "better signage was needed to direct drivers to parking." In addition, 56 percent indicated that while Downtown Taunton may have sufficient parking now, it will need more once the new courthouse opens. Fifty percent of survey respondents concurred that Downtown Taunton does not have enough parking, while 25 percent indicated that the downtown does have a sufficient quantity of parking spaces. Additionally, 44 percent agreed that "parking in the downtown is very difficult and inconvenient," with only 16 percent stating that "finding parking in the downtown is easy and convenient." See Figure 17 for a complete breakdown of results on this survey question.

Results from the survey reveal a strong perception that there are critical issues regarding parking in the downtown and that the quantity of parking spaces may not be the only issue for residents and stakeholders. The research team, however, was impressed with initial observations of the size and quantity of lots and parking facilities that surround the downtown's core, something many downtowns of similar size do not have. These conflicting perceptions led the research team to engage in field research to collect quantifiable data to allow for its own conclusions and recommendations to be developed. This included both an inventory of Downtown Taunton's current public on- and off-street parking resources, as well as a limited review of utilization of current parking spaces. Doing so allowed the research team to not only

Figure 17: ***Taunton Survey Results: Perceptions & Attitudes Toward Parking in the Downtown***

Perception Statement	% of Respondents Selecting Item
Better signage is needed to direct drivers to parking	65.5%
Downtown may have sufficient parking now but will need more once the new courthouse opens	56.3%
Downtown Taunton does not have enough parking	50.0%
Parking in the Downtown is very difficult and inconvenient	43.8%
Parking in the Leonard Street Garage is unsafe	37.5%
Better enforcement of the meters is needed to promote turnover	31.3%
Taunton has a sufficient quantity of parking spaces	25.0%
Parking in the off-street lots located behind buildings is currently unsafe	19.4%
Finding Parking in Downtown Taunton is easy and convenient	15.6%

determine the actual number and types of parking that exist in the downtown, but also to estimate the levels at which current parking resources are being used (refer to Chapter 5 of this report to view complete parking inventory and utilization data).

The following is an assessment of several concerns noted by the research team, which it believes the city and the downtown's stakeholders should work together to remedy in the short-run.

Downtown Parking Meters

In its initial discussion with project sponsors in mid-2008, the research team was made aware of an important policy debate taking place around the issue of parking and the effort to review and revise meter rates to establish greater uniformity throughout the downtown. During the course of these discussions and during nearly all stakeholder interviews, the research team was presented with a variety of opinions and reactions to the community-wide discussion that arose over the issue of changing meter rates. Additionally, part of the discussion that grew out of the local debate over meter rates included concerns from stakeholders and merchants over whether Downtown Taunton had sufficient parking. These concerns served as the impetus for a subsequent analysis and inventory of parking in the downtown, conducted to provide city officials with accurate information and data regarding the city's current downtown parking resources (see Chapter 5).

This particular analysis of parking meters in Downtown Taunton is not intended to assess current or previous meter rates or to make an argument for or against any particular set of rates. Rather, the research team aims to provide city officials and downtown stakeholders with information gleaned from external research and from community case studies that can be useful in a self-assessment of meter rates. Additionally, the research team hopes that Downtown Taunton's stakeholders will realize that the setting of parking meter rates is often a task that requires continual evaluation and assessment to determine what truly is the right price for on-street parking, as is the case with any commodity within an existing market that involves an interaction between supply and demand. The research team anticipates that in providing this external research and case studies that recommendations can be offered that will lead to greater consensus and collaboration in setting rates and managing resources and revenues.

The "Free" Parking Myth. In a commercial district like an urban downtown, where the supply of on-street parking is limited and demand for those spaces is high, meters are often necessary to not only promote turnover (and thereby permit more shoppers to do business in the downtown) but to deter those who work or live in the downtown from monopolizing on-street spaces for prolonged periods of time. Some argue that on-street parking should be free to all, especially since malls and other shopping outlets offer their customers almost limitless and hassle-free parking. The research team, however, challenges the downtown's stakeholders and merchants to consider that there is no such thing as "free" parking; rather, the cost of "free" parking is paid in a variety of ways, both monetary and non-monetary.

Dr. Donald Shoup, professor of Urban Planning at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), argues this point in his book *The High Cost of Free Parking*. Dr. Shoup's thesis is based upon the premise that "free" on-street parking creates a problem whereby curb-side parking is treated as a "commons." In fact, he calls this phenomenon the "commons problem" and defines "commons" as land that belongs to the community and is therefore available for use by everyone without charge. Yet, while a great deal of land, such as streets, sidewalks, and parks, falls under "common" ownership, the "neglect and mismanagement of common property can create serious problems." Moreover, Dr. Shoup argues that free parking creates a dilemma whereby everyone, regardless of whether they own a car, is responsible for motorists' use of this "free" parking (Shoup 2005, 7-8).

To understand Dr. Shoup's theory, suppose for a moment that for an entire year no one parks in the Leonard Street Garage for more than one hour. Under the current fee schedule, drivers parking their vehicles in the garage for less than an hour pay nothing. If this were to happen, the city would collect no revenue but still incur the cost of lighting and maintaining the garage and paying the salaries of garage attendants. To cover these costs, the city would most likely have to dip into its property tax revenue, thereby diverting resources from services used by all residents to a service used by a smaller number of people – many of whom may not even live in the city and may only be conducting business in the local courthouses.

While mall parking might appear to be free, its cost is hidden in the merchandise that shoppers purchase. Malls often have a significant amount of surface parking that requires continual maintenance and, in this part of the country, a considerable amount of snow and ice removal due to seasonal weather conditions. To cover the cost of these expected services, the development's owners include these parking costs in the rent they charge to tenants. In turn, the mall tenants factor in the cost of rent, which includes the cost of maintaining "free" parking, as they determine the price of the goods they sell to shoppers. Thus, while malls are able to maintain the appearance of free parking, few consider the fact that maintaining this "free" parking must be financed somehow and that those who

end up paying for it are the shoppers themselves.

The same is true for public parking. If motorists are not required to pay for parking their vehicles, everyone will eventually be forced to pay for it as consumers, workers, residents, and taxpayers. Even those who do not own a car will have to pay for the free parking of others (Shoup 2005, 2). Very often, the public becomes overly preoccupied with the two or three quarters that customers will have to pay for on-street parking and fails to consider the alternative costs to consumers and businesses if parking meters did not exist. For every potential shopper that chooses not to go to the downtown because of meters, there are, perhaps, many more who drove to the downtown to shop but failed to find an available on-street space despite free parking and decided to leave in frustration. Communities that charge nothing for on-street parking in their downtown face the potential for abuse and a parking shortage as demand swallows the supply. When this happens, potential customers are forced to drive around the block several times in the hope that another driver will eventually vacate their parking space. Eventually, they may get an open space and while parking there may be free, a cost still exists for the motorist in terms of time, fuel, and frustration. In addition, another cost exists for the community since these drivers contribute to traffic congestion and potential accidents.

Considering all of these factors, the research team challenges Downtown Taunton's stakeholders to consider one last point: if an abundance of hassle-free parking is the main reason why shoppers are attracted to malls, how would a free on-street parking system, which encourages selfish use and abuse of a limited resource, reduce the very frustration with downtown parking that is often cited as the greatest challenge to redevelopment? Downtown parking is a key concern for communities across the country, but it is important not to misdiagnose the problem. On-street parking is like any other commodity in that a market exists for its use. Unfortunately, a fixed supply, which is the true problem, cannot be overcome by the price of parking. If only 300 on-street parking spaces exist, this will not change regardless of whether the rate is one penny per hour or one dollar per hour. Rather, finding the right rate to encourage movement and make it easier for potential customers to find an open space will significantly improve the downtown's image as a convenient and worthwhile place to shop.

The Downtown Pasadena Renaissance. The revival of Downtown Pasadena into "Old Pasadena" has become a classic case study for downtown revitalization, particularly as it relates to the role and impact of parking policies in the overall redevelopment effort. Between the 1930s and 1980s, Downtown Pasadena, California experienced a significant decline from the prosperous commercial district that it had been during the early 20th century. Aside from the effects of the Great Depression, a lack of parking caused many of the downtown merchants to move to larger retail centers located outside of the downtown. Soon, its buildings suffered extreme deterioration and the area became famous for pawn shops, porn theaters, and tattoo parlors (Shoup 2005, 403).

Until 1993, Old Pasadena had no parking meters. On-street parking was free and motorists were allowed to park for up to two hours. These conditions created a situation in which downtown employees would park in the convenient on-street spaces and periodically move their cars to avoid citations. At the same time, shoppers faced difficulties finding a place to park. When the city's officials proposed installing parking meters, local merchants and property owners strongly opposed the idea. Although many knew that their employees were occupying most of the curb-side spaces, they feared that the meters would deter what few customers they had from coming to the downtown (Shoup 2005, 405).

The debate between downtown stakeholders and the city continued for two years before a compromise was reached. To placate the opposition, the city proposed that all of the meter revenue would be spent on public investments in Old Pasadena. Upon hearing this suggestion, business and property owners quickly opened up to the idea of installing meters since they would realize a direct benefit. Eventually, the desire for infrastructure improvements overcame fears of driving potential customers away. Interestingly, the city and downtown merchants and property owners agreed to set the meter rate high, at $1 per hour, and instituted a policy whereby meters would operate in the evenings and on Sundays. The city then worked with the Old Pasadena Business Improvement District (BID) to establish boundaries for the Parking Meter Zone (PMZ). Parking meters were installed only within the PMZ, and only those blocks within the PMZ directly benefited from the meter revenues. In addition, the city established the Old Pasadena PMZ Advisory Board, which was made up of merchants and business owners. This advisory board met to formulate parking policies and to establish spending priorities for the zone's meter revenues (Shoup 2005, 406).

In 1993, the city finally installed the parking meters and immediately borrowed $5 million to finance the "Old Pasadena Streetscape and Alleyways Project." The meter revenue was then dedicated to repaying this debt. Proceeds from the bond allowed for the purchase and installation of street furniture, trees, tree grates, and historic lighting fixtures throughout the downtown. In addition, decrepit alleys were turned into pedestrian spaces that were safe and functional with access to shops and restaurants. With 690 meters in 2001, Old Pasadena collected $1.3 million in meter revenue, as well as an additional $158,000 in valet parking services and investment earnings, for a total of approximately $1.4 million. Expenses incurred for the collection and handling of revenues, materials and supplies, and capital expenditures equaled $264,000. This left the city with approximately $1.2 million in net revenues to pay its debt service on the initial loan and also fund additional services that included additional foot patrols and two horseback officers from the Police Department, parking enforcement officers to monitor meters in the evenings and weekends, additional sidewalk and street maintenance, and marketing services like maps, brochures and advertisements in the local newspaper. Best of all, this was funded by drivers parking in Old Pasadena at no cost to the downtown business owners, property owners, or the city's taxpayers (Shoup 2005, 406-407).

Ultimately, what has taken root in Old Pasadena is a healthy cycle of economic activity that has generated the need for more amenities and maintenance and a process of continuous improvements to the downtown. As the area attracted more pedestrian activity, additional maintenance was needed to keep the sidewalks and streets clean and safe. If the downtown were forced to rely on the city for regular sidewalk cleaning and maintenance,

this would have caused problems. Now, the downtown BID is able to use the meter money to arrange for daily sidewalk and street sweeping, trash collection, and bi-monthly steam cleaning of the main street's sidewalks. As a result, "the meter revenue pays for public improvements, the public improvements make the area more attractive for visitors who pay for curb parking, and more meter revenue is then available to pay for the public improvements." To remind everyone during the initial phases of where the meter revenues go, posters were placed throughout the downtown detailing how the money was to be spent and a sticker reading, "Your meter money makes a difference in Old Pasadena" was affixed to each meter (Shoup 2005, 408).

The San Diego Compromise. While the stipulation requiring meter revenues to be returned to Old Pasadena created enough support to see through the installation of parking meters, the policy of giving those revenues to the local BID also received little resistance from the city since the lack of parking meter revenue meant no lost money for the city's general fund, which is typically where most cities deposit their parking meter revenues. What happens, though, when a city already has over 5,000 parking meters that bring in a considerable amount of revenues to the general fund? This was the situation that San Diego, California found itself in when efforts began to require the city to return those revenues to the neighborhoods in which they were generated.

Until 1997, meter revenues collected by the City of San Diego were deposited in the general fund and were used to finance citywide public spending projects and services. The BIDs in the city's older commercial areas argued that this policy was unfair since the newer business districts had ample parking and no meters while the older districts faced parking shortages and no resources to help address the problem. Working together, they convinced the City Council that part of the meter revenues should be returned to the neighborhoods that generated them in order to solve local problems. Initially, the City Manager was reluctant to go along with the plan, warning that it would seriously impact the city's general fund. But a compromise was struck and the City of San Diego now returns 45 percent of parking meter revenues to the districts where they are collected. Additionally, Parking Meter Districts (PMDs) were established to serve as the mechanism for distributing the funds. In the case of San Diego, the City Council appoints members to each PMD and provides final approval on spending (Shoup 2005, 418-419).

While it may appear that the city loses out, this may not necessarily be the case. While San Diego's general fund continues to receive 55 percent of total meter revenues, there now is an incentive for the PMDs to install additional parking meters, extend their hours of operation and raise the rates in order to earn higher revenues for their neighborhoods. This incentive creates a situation in which the city's 55 percent can continue to grow as more meters are installed. In addition, if the local stakeholders use their portion of the meter revenues to fund improvements to current business conditions, additional taxable sales activity can generate further sales tax revenues for the city and infrastructure and property improvements can generate additional property tax revenue. Furthermore, the diversion of meter funds to the commercial districts can eventually help to create an environment whereby the general fund is significantly augmented (Shoup 2005, 425-427).

Downtown Pasadena Renaissance
Parking Meter Revenue Promotional Strategies

Changing the Politics of Parking. As mentioned previously, parking spaces are a commodity that operate within a market highly influenced by supply and demand. But because parking exists solely within the public realm, powerful political forces converge over this issue to create inefficiencies, as local governments often

Comparing Success and Failure

Lessons from the experiences of Old Pasadena and Westwood Village (Los Angeles)

To examine how parking policies affect urban outcomes, one can compare Old Pasadena with Westwood Village, a business district in Los Angeles that was once as popular as Old Pasadena... Since the early 1980s, the Village has declined as Old Pasadena thrived. What explains these different outcomes?

Except for their parking policies, Westwood Village and Old Pasadena are similar. Both are about the same size, both are historic areas, both have design review boards, and both have Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Westwood Village also has a few advantages that Old Pasadena lacks. It is surrounded by extremely high-income neighborhoods (Bel Air, Holmby Hills, and Westwood), and is located between UCLA and the high-rise corridor of Wilshire Boulevard, which are both sources of many potential customers. Old Pasadena, by contrast, is surrounded by moderate-income housing and low-rise office buildings. Tellingly, although Westwood Village has about the same number of parking spaces as Old Pasadena, merchants assume that a parking shortage explains the Village's decline, just as merchants everywhere do whenever a business district has difficulty attracting customers. In Old Pasadena, however, parking is no longer a big issue.

Consider the two cities' curb parking policies. A study in 2001 found that the average curb-space occupancy rate in Old Pasadena was 83 percent, which is about the ideal rate to assure available spaces for visitors. The meters thus reduce the congestion previously caused by drivers cruising for free parking. Because all the meter revenue stays in Old Pasadena, the merchants and property owners understand that market-priced curb parking helps business. The meter revenue has financed substantial public investment in sidewalk and alley improvements that attract visitors to the stores, restaurants, and movie theaters.

In contrast, Westwood's curb parking is underpriced and overcrowded. A parking study in 1994 found that the curb-space occupancy rate was 96 percent during the peak hours, making it necessary for visitors to drive around searching for a vacant space. Nevertheless, the city reduced meter rates from $1 to 50 cents an hour in response to merchants' and property owners' plea that cheaper curb parking would stimulate business. Because off-street parking in any of the 18 private lots or garages in Westwood costs at least $2 for the first hour, drivers have an incentive to hunt for cheaper curb parking rather than park off-street. The result is a chronic shortage of curb spaces, underutilization of the off-street ones, and loud complaints about the parking shortage. The 1994 study found that only 68 percent of the Village's 3,900 off-street parking spaces were occupied at the peak daytime hour (2:00 p.m.). Nevertheless, the shortage of curb spaces creates the impression of an overall parking shortage. Westwood's meter revenue disappears into the city's general fund, and its sidewalks and alley's are crumbling.

The Old Pasadena – Westwood Village comparison suggests that parking policies can help some areas rebound, and leave others in a slump.

Source: Shoup, Donald, *The High Cost of Free Parking*, Chicago: Planners Press, The American Planning Association (March 2005), p. 413-418.

cave into public sentiments that fail to recognize the need to balance the supply of on-street parking with the demand for access and use. In addition, local governments often manage and operate their parking resources within a vacuum by setting meter rates haphazardly, with little consideration for how actual demand should drive the price set for its use. When meter revenues are deposited into the general fund, the incentive for setting meter rates is often to raise revenue to sustain citywide services rather than the efficient allocation of a limited resource (i.e., parking spaces). As such, a fundamental change in the purpose and role of parking meters is necessary to ensure that its regulation is focused on providing convenient access to customers. Convenience, of course, has its price, which requires those who set that price to understand what is happening within the market for downtown parking.

One of the key lessons that Taunton should take under consideration from the experiences of Old Pasadena and San Diego, as well as its own recent experiences, is the ability to "change the politics of parking" by making the downtown neighborhood a stakeholder in its parking meters. This would require, first, that some or all of the revenues generated from the meters be returned to or earmarked for public improvements in the downtown. Additionally, this would require merchants and property owners to become organized in order to set spending priorities for meter revenues. Most downtowns that return meter revenues to the neighborhood have established "parking benefit districts" that delineate where those meter revenues are to be spent for amenities that can attract customers, visitors, and new development. Doing this would also lessen the pressure to create more off-street parking by first maximizing use of on-street parking.

Maximizing use of on-street parking requires stakeholders to set the right price for its use, which is much like setting the price of any good sold in a retail store. Most business owners understand that when the inventory of a particular good sits on the shelf for a prolonged period of time, its price should be reduced to entice shoppers to buy it. In this case, price exceeds demand, resulting in a surplus and the need to reduce the price of the product. Similarly, if a store's supply of a good is short while demand for it is high, the store owner understands that he must raise the price to avoid a shortage. Therefore, "*the right price for curb parking is the lowest price that keeps a few spaces available to allow convenient access*" (Shoup 2005, 398). In other words, if a downtown experiences near 100 percent on-street parking occupancy at peak demand times, then lowering its price makes no sense, since the limited supply cannot bring in more customers and more revenue. Setting the price for on-street parking at below-market price will only lead to congestion and a parking shortage that frustrates potential customers and keeps them away from the downtown. "The goal of pricing is to produce about 85 percent occupancy, so that drivers can find places to park near their destination." Furthermore, the "purpose of charging market prices for curb parking is not to maximize meter revenue, but to allocate curb spaces more efficiently to drivers who are willing to pay for parking if they don't have to waste time cruising for it" (Shoup 2005, 399).

Factors to Consider in Downtown Taunton. With the establishment of a Parking Commission in early 2008, Taunton is moving in the right direction. In addition, conversations with members of the Parking Commission have indicated that revenues collected from meters are in the process of being appropriated for improvements

to the downtown's parking amenities. This, of course, is an important undertaking, since a number of the downtown's parking lots and facilities are in disrepair or are not being utilized to their full potential. However, the revenues collected from the downtown's meters should be allocated for more than just improvements to parking lots. An array of infrastructure improvements are needed throughout Downtown Taunton that could be funded by meter revenues. Doing so would ensure that this money remains in the downtown, contributes to its economic development and maintenance, and would help garner support among local merchants and property owners for the use of meters.

Another factor that Downtown Taunton must consider is what the research team observed as an almost complete lack of enforcement throughout the downtown. According to discussions with city officials, the Police Department is currently in charge of meter enforcement and the issuance of fines. However, at no time during its many visits to Downtown Taunton did the research team observe police officers monitoring parking meters or issuing fines. This lack of enforcement appears to have also produced an apathy for paying for on-street parking. The research team observed a number of drivers who parked in metered spaces and simply walked away without paying the appropriate meter fee. In addition, as the research team conducted its field research in the Downtown, it observed that many of the meters were expired despite having vehicles in their space.

A final concern that downtown stakeholders should keep in mind as it considers the market principles discussed above when setting meter rates is that despite the low rates of utilization observed by the research team, significant changes are on the horizon for the downtown area once the new courthouse on Broadway is complete. Therefore, while current utilization might prompt some to argue for lowering meter rates, the influx of cars and increased demand for on-street parking that the courthouse could produce might call for an increase in rates if the above-mentioned market principles are to be followed. Unfortunately, a great deal of uncertainty exists as a result of the courthouse's impending completion, which may require city officials and downtown stakeholders to reassess parking conditions in the downtown once the new courthouse has opened so as to accurately ascertain utilization rates under future market conditions.

Lack of Meter Enforcement

Despite all of the controversy regarding on-street parking and parking meters in the downtown, the research team was surprised to observe a pervasive lack of consistent meter enforcement as it conducted its ground-level research and data collection. During several stakeholder interviews many individuals expressed a disdain for the on-street parking meters and the cost of having to park in those spaces. In the same breath, however, many admitted that despite the existence of the meters they know of many individuals who work in the downtown and park in metered spaces all day without paying because they believe they will not get a ticket. On several occasions when the research team was conducting its work in the downtown, it intentionally parked in expired meter spaces to test whether a citation would be issued. After several hours and repeated tests, no citations were ever issued. In addition to this, the research team observed on numerous occasions motorists simply parking their vehicles at metered spaces and walking away to conduct their business without even glancing at the meter. In many instances, the research team observed that these meters were indeed expired and that motorists exhibiting this behavior felt no apparent fear of potentially receiving a fine.

Considering the research team's observation of this phenomenon and its identification of enforcement as a serious concern, the research team decided to make an effort to quantify the extent of its occurrence throughout the downtown and to measure potential lost revenues to the city from this lack of enforcement.

Expired Meter Survey. On August 12, 2009, the research team conducted three surveys of all 212 parking meters in Downtown Taunton. Each survey count entailed a one-hour walk through the downtown in which members of the research team counted, on a street-by-street basis, the number of on-street metered spaces that were occupied with vehicles and the number of spaces that were occupied despite having expired meters. From 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., the research team counted 75 on-street spaces being utilized by vehicles. Of these, 37 spaces (49 percent) had expired meters. At 10:30 a.m. another count was conducted that showed 102 spaces being utilized. Of these 63 spaces (62 percent) had expired meters. A final count was conducted at 12:30 p.m., which showed that 116 spaces were being utilized and that of these, 75 spaces (65 percent) had expired meters.

In terms of potential lost revenue, there are two ways to look at this issue: lost revenue from individuals not paying the meter rate for their use of on-street spaces and potential revenue from fines issued to those not complying. Altogether, the research team counted 175 expired spaces in the three hours in which it conducted meter counts. Therefore, if we average the number of expired meters over this three-hour period we estimate an average of 58 potentially expired meters each hour. Over an eight-hour period this would give us 464 expired meters over the course of a single day or 2,320 potentially expired meters over the course of a five-day workweek. Over the course a of 52-week year, this comes out to 120,640 potentially expired meters. If all of these individuals chose to deposit the minimum of 25 cents for 20 minutes of on-street parking, the city would realize approximately $30,160 in additional revenue over the course of the year. Of course, this number is only a minimum estimate since many of these individuals might spend more than 20 minutes in the downtown. As such, let's assume they each spend an hour in the downtown and pay 75 cents upon parking. Compliance at this level would yield $90,480 in additional revenue over the course of the year.

On the other hand, the fine in Taunton for parking in a space with an expired meter is currently $15. If we assume an average of 120,640 violations per year, the city could realize about $1,809,600 per year in additional revenue if meter enforcement were consistently taking place. Of course, the research team understands that increased enforcement produces increased compliance and that compliance brings in far less revenue than violations. Despite this, full compliance is an ideal situation that does not even take place in communities with some of the most efficient enforcement mechanisms. As such, the research team

believes that the city is foregoing a significant amount of parking revenue that could and should be used for maintaining, updating, and potentially expanding the downtown's parking facilities.

Of course, parking meters do not exist simply to punish violators. However, inconsistent and rare enforcement encourages abuse and actually places the burden of maintaining the downtown's parking resources on law-abiding citizens who pay for their use of on-street parking. As such, the lack of enforcement also invokes concerns regarding fairness and equity and often prompts some to argue for higher meter rates to make up for those who choose not to comply. In fact, the research team would argue that if the city ensured enforcement of the meters, it might actually be able to reduce meter rates comparable to other communities like Fall River and New Bedford that charge 25 cents for 30 minutes and thereby encourage more use of convenient on-street parking and compliance with paying the meter rate.

Space & Necessary Infrastructure Improvements

Unlike many small-city urban downtowns throughout the country, Downtown Taunton has a considerable number of parking lots and a two-story garage with substantial space encompassing the downtown's core. Many communities would enjoy having the same amount of off-street parking that Taunton has in its downtown. Despite the quantity, however, there are growing concerns regarding whether or not the current supply will be sufficient once the new courthouse opens on Broadway. The nearest lots to the county courthouse and office complex are the Court Street surface parking lot and the Leonard Street parking garage.

To assist the city with its plans for parking to accommodate for the courthouse's opening, the research team conducted utilization reviews of each of the five lots that currently exist in the downtown. By conducting the utilization review, the research team hopes to give the city a better understanding of how its lots are currently being used and at what level of usage throughout the day. Aggregate utilization review results including utilization of on-street parking can be found in Chapter 5 of this study.

The following analysis of parking in each of the lots was based solely upon utilization counts of both public parking spaces and handicapped parking spaces so as to eliminate those reserved parking spaces that currently have no impact on public parking. The data presented is based upon parking utilization counts conducted over the course of three days (Monday, February 23; Wednesday, February 25; and Friday, February 27, 2009) from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. In addition, the data is presented in raw form rather than percentages to give the city a clear number of what's being utilized and what remains unutilized. Because of their proximity to the county courthouse and office complex, let us begin with an analysis of the Court Street lot and Leonard Street Parking Garage.

The Court Street lot has a total of 217 spaces, of which, 184 are open to the public and 7 are open to handicapped drivers. This gives us a total of 191 public parking spaces. Occupancy counts conducted by the research team show that demand for use in the Court Street Lot increases at around 10:00 a.m. and then steadily decreases throughout the rest of the day. At its highest level of occupancy, recorded on Monday, February 23, 2009, the lot was still under 50 percent utilization with 92 spaces occupied and 99 spaces available. During the peak demand time between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., approximately 100 to 140 spaces remained available for public use (see Figure 18).

The Leonard Street Garage has a total of 235 spaces, of which, 220 are open to the public and 7 are open to handicapped drivers. As such, the research team's utilization review was based upon a total of 227 spaces. Peak parking demand time in the Leonard Street Garage was observed from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Between these hours, the garage was anywhere from 60 to 73 percent occupied meaning that there were between 62 and 95 spots available for public use. As was the case with the Court Street lot, parking demand peaked at 10:00 a.m. on each day and gradually decreased throughout the rest of the day (see Figure 19).

The Trescott Street lot has a total of 107 parking spaces, of which 103 are open to the public and 4 are designated for use by handicapped drivers. This lot experienced the highest levels of occupancy during the peak demand time between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. On Monday and Wednesday, the lot was nearly entirely occupied between this time period leaving only a few spaces available. On Friday, occupancy rates were still strong leaving only 12 to 25 spaces available during the peak parking demand time period (see Figure 20).

The Galligans Court lot off of Weir Street has a total of 79 spaces. Of these, 68 are open to the public and 7 are open to handicapped drivers for a total of 75 public spaces. This lot also experienced elevated levels of utilization that surpassed 70 percent between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. across all three days. During peak demand times, anywhere from 7 to 21 parking spaces were available for public use (see Figure 21).

The Allans Avenue lot, located behind City Hall has a total of 408 parking spaces that includes a variety of public and private spaces. Of these 211 are open to the public and 10 are designated for handicapped parking, for a total of 221 public parking spaces. At its highest level of utilization, the Allans Avenue lot was approximately

Figure 18: ***Court Street Surface Parking Lot Space Utilization Review***

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
191 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	42	149	33	158	26	165
10:00 am	92	99	69	122	61	130
12:00 pm	73	118	58	133	49	142
2:00 pm	67	124	50	141	53	138
4:00 pm	35	156	41	150	36	155
6:00 pm	7	184	13	178	3	188

Figure 19: *Leonard Street Parking Garage Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
227 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	127	100	101	126	88	139
10:00 am	163	64	164	63	165	62
12:00 pm	160	67	141	86	144	83
2:00 pm	151	76	139	88	132	95
4:00 pm	113	114	128	99	121	106
6:00 pm	33	194	23	204	23	204

60 percent occupied, meaning that there were still about 90 spaces available for public use. Between peak demand times (10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.), there were anywhere between 90 and 110 spots that were unoccupied (see Figure 22).

To provide the city with a snapshot of aggregate parking utilization throughout the four surface lots and one parking garage, the research team has combined the data collected over the course of the three days to show how much parking is being used and under-utilized throughout the day (see Figure 23). Altogether, there are 821 public and handicapped parking spaces in these parking facilities. At its highest level of recorded usage (Monday, February 23, 2009 at 10:00 a.m.) the downtown had 547 spaces occupied while 274 spaces remained available. This reflects a peak off-street utilization rate of 66.6 percent. Demand for parking appears to spike by about 10:00 a.m. and generally holds until 2:00 p.m. Despite this, however, there appears to remain anywhere between 250 and 380 parking spaces in these parking facilities between that span of time.

Figure 20: *Trescott Street Surface Parking Lot Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
107 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	63	44	60	47	35	72
10:00 am	105	2	105	2	95	12
12:00 pm	103	4	95	12	93	14
2:00 pm	100	7	99	8	82	25
4:00 pm	18	89	49	58	30	77
6:00 pm	8	99	19	88	13	94

Figure 22: *Allans Avenue Surface Parking Lot Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
221 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	62	159	74	147	51	170
10:00 am	120	101	131	90	126	95
12:00 pm	110	111	114	107	120	101
2:00 pm	112	109	117	104	108	113
4:00 pm	87	134	95	126	82	139
6:00 pm	53	168	57	164	46	175

Figure 21: *Galligans Court Surface Parking Lot Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
75 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	66	9	34	41	38	37
10:00 am	67	8	59	16	58	17
12:00 pm	68	7	58	17	61	14
2:00 pm	66	9	54	21	58	17
4:00 pm	31	44	48	27	38	37
6:00 pm	9	66	15	60	9	66

Figure 23: *Downtown Taunton Total Off-Street Parking Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
821 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	360	461	302	519	238	583
10:00 am	547	274	528	293	505	316
12:00 pm	514	307	466	355	467	354
2:00 pm	496	325	459	362	433	388
4:00 pm	254	567	361	460	307	514
6:00 pm	110	711	127	694	94	727

Figure 24: *Downtown Taunton Total On-Street Parking Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
253 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	53	200	57	196	71	182
10:00 am	113	140	135	118	134	119
12:00 pm	103	150	130	123	136	117
2:00 pm	100	153	131	122	108	145
4:00 pm	74	179	105	148	108	145
6:00 pm	79	174	113	140	84	169

Figure 25: *Downtown Taunton Total Parking Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
1,074 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	413	661	359	715	309	765
10:00 am	660	414	663	411	639	435
12:00 pm	617	457	596	478	603	471
2:00 pm	596	478	590	484	541	533
4:00 pm	328	746	466	608	415	659
6:00 pm	189	885	240	834	179	895

Figure 26: *Leonard Street Garage & Court Street Lot Aggregate Space Utilization Review*

February 23; February 25; & February 27, 2009
418 Total Public Spaces

	Monday February 23		Wednesday February 25		Friday February 27	
	Used	Open	Used	Open	Used	Open
8:00 am	169	249	134	284	114	304
10:00 am	255	163	233	185	226	192
12:00 pm	233	185	199	219	193	225
2:00 pm	218	200	189	229	185	233
4:00 pm	148	270	169	249	157	261
6:00 pm	40	378	36	382	26	392

The research team also looked at utilization rates for on-street parking, which also makes up a considerable portion of Downtown Taunton's parking resources. Altogether, there are 266 curb-side parking spaces in the Central Business District. Of these, 253 are open for public use and they include both free and metered spaces. In fact, of the 253 spaces open for public and handicapped use, 212 of them are designated as metered spaces. During peak occupancy at 10:00 a.m. across the three days measured, rates for on-street parking did not exceed 62 percent. As such, at any given time during the day, there are, ostensibly, between 117 and 200 on-street parking spaces available (see Figure 24).

In Figure 25, the research team aggregates utilization of both on-street and off-street parking to get a sense as to how downtown Taunton's parking resources are being utilize in the aggregate. Once again, peak utilization occurs between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. At its lowest level of utilization there were 895 parking spots available in the downtown while at its highest level of utilization there were 411 spaces available. This figure reflects a peak utilization rate in Downtown Taunton of approximately 62 percent.

Considering the results of the utilization review and the data gathered from these counts, the research team believes that part of Taunton's perceived parking problems are currently related to space management than actual quantity. In the aggregate, Taunton's parking utilization rates do not imply a current parking shortage crisis. For there to be anywhere from 411 to 533 open spaces within peak times suggests that the supply is currently meeting the demand. Of course, the research team understands that these conditions will change once the new courthouse opens and that the closest parking facilities to the courthouses are the Court Street lot and Leonard Street garage and that the majority of the downtown's parking demand is most likely produced in that area due to the location of county offices. Despite this, a good number of parking spaces still exist in both facilities and combined with space available in other lots, the city may be in a good position to soften the effects on parking in the downtown.

To assist the city it its planning efforts as it relates to the potential addition of parking in that area of the downtown, the research team aggregated utilization counts for the Court Street lot and Leonard Street Garage (see Figure 26). The data demonstrates that during peak demand time between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. that there exists between 160 and 230 spaces in these parking facilities.

Implications of the New Courthouse Opening. In order to understand the potential impact of the new courthouse's opening, the research team presented a set of questions to the state's Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM), which is overseeing the courthouse construction project. According to DCAM, upon opening, the new courthouse will house approximately 138 employees from four different court divisions. These divisions include the Taunton District Court, which currently sits at the old Cohannet Street School in Taunton; the Southeast Housing Court, which has regional jurisdiction and currently holds sessions in Fall River, Brockton, New Bedford, and Plymouth; the Bristol County Juvenile Court, which currently holds sessions in Fall River, New Bedford, Attleboro, and Taunton; and the Bristol County Probate and Family Court, which currently conducts sessions in Fall River and New Bedford. Of these four court divisions, only the District

Court is currently set to hold sessions on a daily basis. The other three divisions are currently scheduled to hold sessions on certain days of the week. According to DCAM, the Housing Court may hold sessions on only one or two days per week while the Juvenile Court may conduct sessions on only three or four days per week. Only the Probate and Family Court currently has the potential to hold sessions every day of the week. Currently, DCAM expects the Probate and Family Court to hold sessions on four or five days every week.

In terms of jurors, data provided by DCAM shows that the jury room being built in the new courthouse will have the capacity to seat 100 jurors for all four court divisions moving into the courthouse. The number of people visiting the courthouse on a daily basis is much more difficult to estimate. However, in June of 2007, DCAM conducted a traffic study which determined that, on a peak day, the courthouse could have approximately 2,000 visitors.

Considering these estimates, three main questions arise: how will this influx of people to the downtown impact parking, to what extent can current parking resources absorb some of this impact, and, finally, how much additional parking will have to be created to accommodate the opening of the courthouse, at least in the short-term? There are several factors that should be considered when evaluating future parking needs in the downtown. First, considering the utilization data presented above, if the city desires to establish estimates for currently open or unutilized space, it should do so by using figures that reflect peak usage. Secondly, the city and downtown stakeholders should be careful not to assume that the DCAM estimates mean that the downtown will need to create additional parking to accommodate 2,000 cars. The reality is that only a fraction of these individuals will be driving their own vehicle to Downtown Taunton. As such, it may be more reasonable to begin first by determine how much parking the city now knows it will definitely need in order to absorb potential parking needs for court employees and jurors.

From DCAM's estimates, it is known that there will be 138 new employees entering the downtown to work at the courthouse. The research team assumes that in this case, the downtown will need to provide parking for each one of these individuals since the majority may not carpool or utilize public transportation. In addition to this, it is known that the new courthouse will have a jury room with the capacity to seat 100 people. Considering that not all four court divisions will operate every day of the week, the chances that the jury room will be full to capacity are quite low. DCAM estimates that the District Court alone, which will operate every day of the week in the new courthouse, summons about 25 to 40 jurors. If this is the case, the city could comfortably presume that the downtown would have to accommodate for about 80 total new jurors parking in the downtown on any given day.

The parking needs of visitors to the new courthouse are much harder to determine. DCAM estimates that, on a peak business day, the new courthouse could see about 2,000 visitors. The research team believes it is safe to assume that while many of these visitors will be conducting "long-term" business in the courthouse (i.e., procedures that consume several hours), a significant proportion of these visitors will also be conducting "short-term" business (i.e., procedures that require about one hour or less). Considering these two types of visitors, the research team assumes that half will be "long-term" visitors and the other half will be "short-term" visitors.

Determining the parking needs of each group is also complicated by the fact that while "short-term" visitors will come in and out of the courthouse over an eight-hour period, the visitation patterns of "long-term" visitors will most likely be tied to morning sessions and afternoon sessions. As such, assuming that half of the 1,000 "long-term" visitors will come to court in the morning while the other half attend proceedings in the afternoon, the court will only see two cohorts of 500 visitors during the course of the day. In terms of parking for "long-term" visitors, it would be unreasonable to assume that all 500 morning or afternoon visitors would be driving their own car to the courthouse. In fact, a considerable portion of these visitors will utilize public transportation, carpool, or walk if they live within a reasonable distance. As such, the research team believes it is safe to assume that only about 60 percent of these visitors might drive a car to the courthouse, meaning that the city would have to accommodate for an additional 300 "long-term" visitor parking spaces (see Figure 27). Before going on, it is important to reiterate that these numbers are extremely generous estimates and that they are based upon a peak visitation rate of 2,000 people per day, well above the average. As such, the research team considers even this estimate of 300 parking spaces for "long-term" visitors to be generous, but uses it to reduce the chances of underestimation.

In terms of "short-term" visitors, the research team assumes that if DCAM estimates are precise, the new courthouse would have approximately 1,000 of these visitors on a peak business day. To assume that all of these "short-term" visitors will drive a car to the downtown is likewise unreasonable. As such, we can also assume in this instance that 60 percent (600 individuals) will actually drive a car, while the remaining 40 percent will utilize other modes of

Figure 27: ***Downtown Taunton: Projected Additional Parking Space Needs***

	Count	% Using Cars	# of Cars	Parking Space Usage Rate*	# of Parking Spaces
Court Employees	138	100%	138	1.0	138
Jurors	80	100%	80	1.0	80
Visitors					
Long-term visitors (morning)	500	60%	300	0.5	150
Long-term visitors (afternoon)	500	60%	300	0.5	150
Short-term visitors	1,000	60%	600	0.125	75
Total					**593**
				Projected Additional Parking Space Needs	593
				Current Underutilized Space during Peak Times	391
				Total Actual Projected Parking Space Needs	**202**

**Usage Rate = Projected hours of space usage / 8 hours per day*

transportation or will be carpooling. In addition to this, the city can also assume that these visitors will create much more turnover in terms of their use of parking, since they will spend far less time in the courthouse than the "long-term" visitors. To determine the potential parking needs of these 600 "short-term" visitors driving their own car, we can divide this number by the eight hours over which the courthouse is in operation each day. Doing so, would mean that the downtown would have to provide at least 75 parking spaces for "short-term" visitors each hour (see Figure 27).

Taking into consideration these estimates (300 parking spaces for "long-term" visitors and 75 parking spaces for "short-term" visitors), as well as the approximate number of new court employees (138 individuals) and potential jurors (80 individuals), the downtown would have to absorb an estimated 593 cars looking for parking once the new courthouse opens (see Figure 27). Again, the research team reiterates the fact that these estimates are generous and are based upon *peak potential visitation rates* provided by DCAM. Despite this, they are still useful in bringing Downtown Taunton's future parking situation into better perspective and are a positive first step in efforts to craft potential solutions.

Another factor that the city and downtown stakeholders must take into consideration is the fact that the utilization study conducted by the research team showed that a considerable portion of the downtown's parking resources are currently underutilized, even during times of peak occupancy. The tables above show, in raw numbers, the extent to which parking currently exists in the downtown and that, at peak occupancy, approximately 274 off-street and 117 on-street parking spaces remain unutilized. These figures should be factored in as Taunton begins to determine possible solutions to the parking problem the new courthouse will eventually create. Moreover, while the research team estimates that the downtown will have to accommodate parking for an additional 593 cars, the fact that the current supply of parking remains underutilized significantly reduces this number. As such, subtracting the 391 on- and off-street spaces currently unutilized during current peak occupancy from the estimated additional 593 cars that will come to the downtown once the courthouse opens means that the city may only have to create an additional 200 to 250 new parking spaces (see Figure 27).

In arriving at the above estimates, the research team has been both generous and conservative in which data it uses so as to reduce the chances of underestimation. As such, the exercise of collecting this data from DCAM and from the research team's inventory and utilization analyses places the city and downtown stakeholders in a better position to determine ways to ameliorate the impact of the new courthouse on parking in the downtown. In the short-run, completely solving the concerns associated with future parking in Downtown Taunton is unrealistic. Arriving at the right balance of parking demand and parking supply will require a certain amount of trial and error that can eventually produce an equilibrium that prevents the city from spending exorbitant amounts of money on building an excessive and unnecessary supply of additional parking. As such, the research team would not fault city officials or downtown stakeholders from moving cautiously with plans to add parking in the downtown. Clearly, the data collected in this report demonstrates a need for additional parking, but there are also constraints that the city must face, including available space, as it determines how much additional parking to create.

Parking Demand Diffusion. To help the city, the research team offers a few straightforward recommendations that can guide short-term efforts to ease the impact of the new courthouse on downtown parking. First, while the downtown has a considerable number of off-street parking spaces in lots that encircle the downtown, the research team recognizes that not all of these lots are conveniently located next to the courthouse. While they are all within about a quarter of a mile of the courthouse, only two of them are actually located within about 600 feet or less of the courthouse. Regardless of distance, the research team believes that part of the city's short-term solution must include a diffusion of the parking demand pressures away from the vicinity of the new courthouse and the two lots located nearby and toward the available space on the downtown's periphery. Doing so will also reduce traffic congestion in the downtown and around the Taunton Green.

To make this work, the city should consider the establishment of incentives to encourage courthouse employees and jurors to park in peripheral lots, thereby affording more space in the nearby Court Street lot and Leonard Street garage. Additionally, the city and downtown stakeholders should consider the creation of a downtown shuttle loop that could, at least in the beginning, be devoted to courthouse employees, jurors, and visitors. Creating a shuttle loop would also allow the city to select a site further away from the downtown where additional space exists to create parking for courthouse visitors, rather than having them drive into the downtown and hunt for parking. Such a system would require informative and clearly visible signage in and around the downtown instructing visitors to the court of their parking options. In addition, it may require that the city reach out to the court offices issuing summons to jurors or witnesses in order to encourage them to provide brief parking information in their mailings. Funding for such a shuttle loop could be provided by a user fee collected as the individual enters the shuttle, so as to reduce the need for a booth attendant at the off-site parking lot. In setting the fee rate, it is important to understand that what a driver would pay to park further away and utilize the shuttle must be considerably lower than what an individual would have to pay to park in lot conveniently located near the courthouse or in the downtown.

Infrastructure Improvements. To lessen the impact of the courthouse's opening, the research team recommends that the city undertake a series of infrastructure improvements to current surface lots in order to maximize unrealized space potential. Specifically, the city should consider a redesign of both the Allans Avenue surface lot behind City Hall and the Galligans Court surface lot off of Weir Street. The pavement in both lots is in serious disrepair, and the lack of clearly visible lines delineating parking spaces creates a confusing arrangement that obscures parking conditions for motorists and walking conditions for pedestrians. The Allans Avenue parking lot is of significant concern due to the fact that an actual street runs through the lot, providing a link between Weir Street and Spring Street. While there are no sidewalks delineating pedestrian space from vehicular space, there is a faded set of yellow lines indicating that the roadway provides two-way driving access. In addition to this, the Allans Avenue lot contains a

confusing mix of public and private parking, as some of the parking located behind buildings are reserved for employees and customers doing business in those particular establishments. Adding to the visual confusion is the existence of several buildings, fencing, and guard rails throughout the lot. The Galligans Court lot is in similar disrepair and offers no standardized arrangement for parking. Most drivers seem to understand the general pattern of parking in that lot, but there are few clearly visible lines. Moreover, there is a great deal of wasted space, but the potential exists for adding more parking if a redesign were to take place. Additionally, the space in these lots could be better utilized if these areas were cleared of overgrowth and other obstacles that consume space.

Aside from repaving and relining these parking lots, the research team also recommends that the city install a sufficient amount of lighting, as several interviewees indicated fears of suspicious activity taking place in these lots after dark. These fears, according to some, deter many female downtown employees from parking in these lots and discourage many more employees from parking there out of concern for the safety of their vehicles. The research team is aware of plans by the Parking Commission to resurface and reline the Galligans Court lot and believes that this should greatly improve space utilization in the area.

The Leonard Street parking garage is also an area of concern that city officials have been aware of for several years. In 2006, an inspection of the garage was completed by the Beta Group, which found that despite remaining structurally sound, the garage required a considerable number of repairs that could add up to approximately $500,000. The research team is aware that the Parking Commission is in the process of implementing recommendations from the Beta Group report and it encourages the Commission to continue this work expeditiously to ensure the garage's continued use for many more years. With concerns over the impending opening of the new courthouse, the Parking Commission is also considering adding a third level to the parking garage and is in the process of having engineers assess the garage's capacity for such an upgrade. Clearly, if engineers deem the structure sound enough to support a third level and the additional vehicles and the funding exists to complete such a project then the Commission would be wise to pursue this option since the garage already exists and would not require having to clear out another parcel of land to pave an additional surface lot.

Computerized Parking Management

According to conversations with members of the Parking Commission, approximately nine individuals are employed part-time to attend to the Leonard Street garage and Court Street surface lot. The research team believes that the Commission could realize a great deal of savings by converting the garage and the lot to a computerized system whereby drivers are issued a ticket upon entering the garage and upon returning must insert their ticket and payment into a computerized payment machine in order to receive another ticket that will allow them to exit the garage.

In the City of Springfield, for example, upon entering municipal garages, motorists press a button that opens the gate and issues a token to the driver. The token is about the size of a quarter and about as thick as three quarters stacked together. Within the token is an electronic chip that records entrance time. The driver then enters the garage and parks his or her car. Upon returning to the garage, the motorist must insert their token into a payment kiosk located at the entrance of the garage. The kiosk shows the amount of time parked in the garage and the amount owed. Drivers can pay with coins, cash, credit cards, or debit cards, and are then issued another token. When leaving the garage with their vehicle, they must insert the second token into an apparatus that opens the gate, allowing them to exit. The system allows the driver to pay while the computerized system removes the need for a booth attendant.

The research team also suggests that the Parking Commission consider a paid parking system for the Trescott Street lot, as there are several concerns that nearby residents are using the lot to park throughout the day as it is free and lacks any sort of enforcement mechanism. In this case, the Parking Commission could still allow residents to acquire residential parking permits that are valid from 6:00 p.m. through 8:00 a.m. After 8:00 a.m. all residents using the lot would be required to vacate the lot or be fined. This would require the city to install a computerized payment system in this lot and to ensure that the appropriate ticketing authority enforces the residential parking rules.

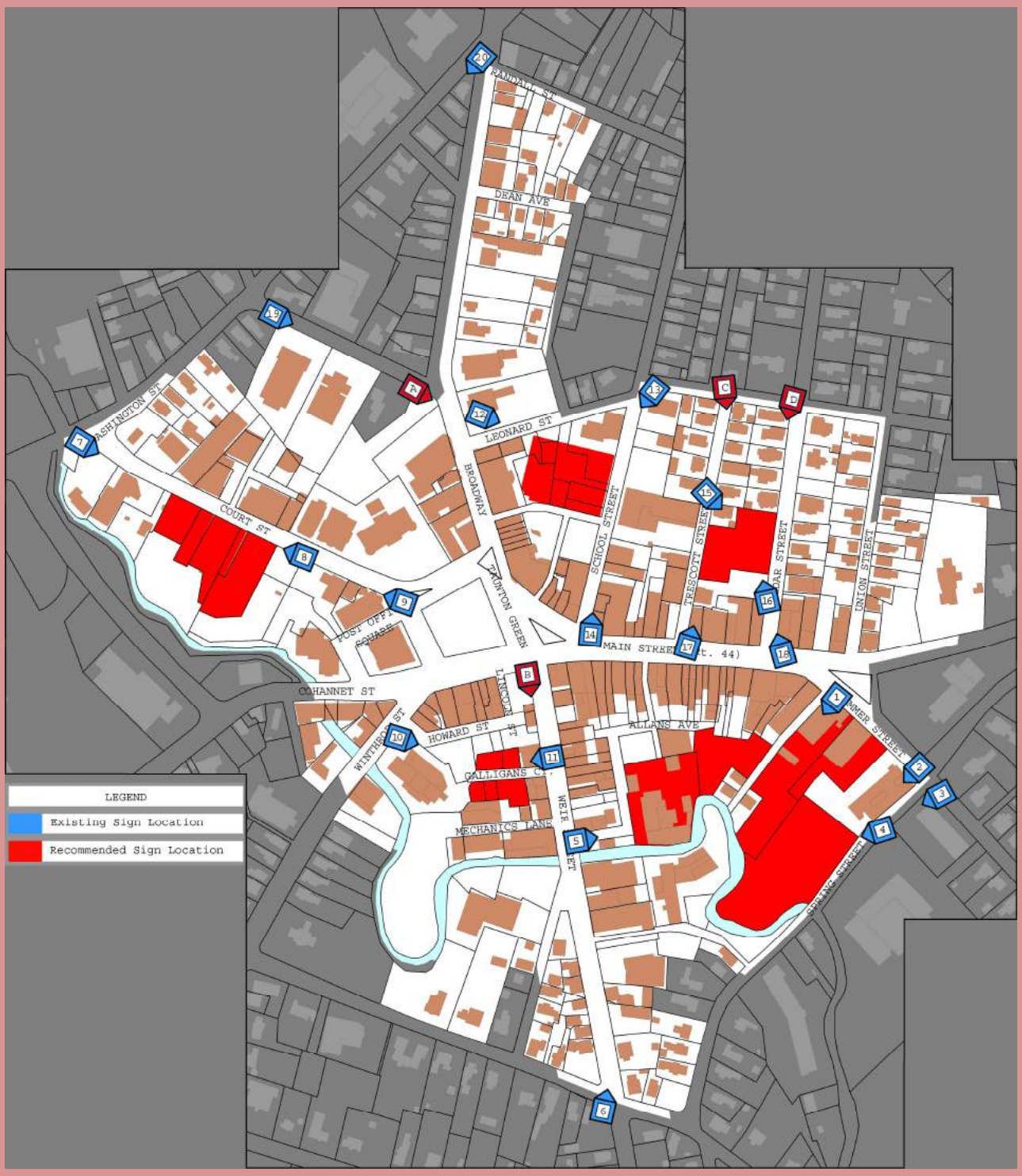
Signage

As previously mentioned, the research team's mail survey of downtown stakeholders indicated that approximately 66 percent of survey respondents feel that the downtown could use better signage. The research team also agrees and believes that the area could use signs that catch the eye of motorists and inform drivers of what type of parking they are being directed to. This is particularly important in the case of free parking, as visitors and customers will prefer to see if there is free parking available before they move on to the paid parking lots or on-street metered parking spaces. In addition, the research team recommends that parking signs should direct drivers to the lots that are closest to the courthouses so as to help individuals from out of town who may be coming into the downtown for the first time to conduct business in the courthouses.

There are currently 20 locations in and around the downtown where parking signs exist (see Figure 28). Many of these are double-sided signs that inform drivers traveling on two-way streets of which direction to turn in order to access public parking. Despite the existence of these double-sided signs, the research team believes that the city should place parking signs on the side of the street which drivers are traveling. Many of the signs in the downtown are located on the opposite side of the street and could easily be overlooked by drivers.

For example, there is a double-sided parking sign in front of City Hall that informs drivers that they are able to turn onto Leonard Court (between City Hall and the Star Theater) to access parking in the Allans Avenue lot. Despite being double-sided, traffic directly in front of City Hall flows in a one-way east-bound direction and west-bound traffic coming from Summer Street (toward Main Street) does not pass even pass directly in front of City Hall. Rather, these cars traveling into the downtown from Summer Street must drive around the Robert Treat Paine monument in order to turn onto Main

Figure 28: *Existing & Recommended Parking Signage Locations*



Street. This maneuver makes it highly improbable that drivers coming from Summer Street will ever see the parking sign in front of City Hall.

Other areas where the city should consider erecting parking signs on the opposite side of the street include the intersections of Spring and Summer Streets, Weir and High Streets, Court and Washington Streets, Winthrop and Howard Streets, Weir Street and Galligans Court, Broadway and Leonard Street, Broadway and Randall Street, Washington and North Pleasant Streets, School and Fruit Streets, School and Main Streets, and Trescott and Main Streets. In addition to this, signs should be erected on the both sides of Weir Street at the entrance of the Allans Avenue lot for drivers traveling in a south-bound direction. Ultimately, the city should place signs

Figure 29: *Parking Signage*
Winthrop Street and Howard Street

Figure 30: *Parking Signage*
Weir Street and Galligans Court

on both sides of the street, as has been done already in the case of speed limit signs in Downtown Taunton.

The research team also recommends erecting several signs where none currently exist. For example, there is a sign on the corner of Broadway and Randall Street that instructs north-bound traffic to turn left onto Washington Street for parking. Drivers who turn onto Washington Street will then see a sign on the corner of Washington and North Pleasant Streets instructing them to turn left onto North Pleasant (toward Broadway). However, when drivers reach the intersection at Broadway, there is no sign instructing them to turn right to access parking at the Leonard Street garage.

In addition, the research team recommends that signs be placed at the intersection of Trescott and Fruit Streets and at the intersection of Cedar and Fruit Streets that directs drivers toward the Trescott Street lot, as well as at the entrance of the Leonard Street garage informing drivers that they have reached their destination. The intersection of Weir and Main Streets is also missing a sign for those traveling in an east-bound direction on Main Street informing drivers that they can turn right onto Weir Street to access parking in the Galligans Court or Allans Avenue lots. The intersection of Weir Street and High Street is also the location of parking signs that inform drivers traveling on High Street that they can turn onto Weir Street to access parking at the Allans Avenue or Galligans Court lots. However, there is no sign instructing drivers going north on Weir Street that they can continue on Weir Street to access public parking (see Figure 28 to see locations of proposed additional parking signs).

In addition to placing more signs in the downtown, the research team recommends that signs indicate free parking when applicable, as is the case with signs at Winthrop and Howard Streets (see Figure 29) and at Weir Street and Galligans Court (see Figure 30). Furthermore, the city should also conduct a review of all signage in the downtown, as many signs that post time limits for parking and other restrictions have faded lettering and are therefore indiscernible to motorists.

Post Office Square Parking

The research team observed a lack of enforcement of the 15-minute limit on those spaces located along Post Office Square. On several occasions, the research team observed cars parked in these spaces for significantly longer time periods. As such, the research team recommends that the city convert these spaces to paid parking spaces by installing parking meters and also limiting drivers to the 20 minutes that one quarter can purchase in other parts of the downtown. Of course, the effectiveness of this measure will hinge upon the enforcement of meter fees throughout the downtown. While there are many other spots in the CBD that allow for 15-, 30-, or 60-minute free parking, the research team believes that the proximity of these spots to the Post Office warrants a system that promotes greater turnover and convenience for Post Office customers.

Expanded Jurisdiction for the Parking Commission

The research team applauds the city's efforts to transfer downtown parking management from the Police Department to an established municipal Parking Commission. This arrangement allows the police to free up additional resources to focus on their law enforcement duties while ensuring that an entity exists within the downtown that focuses exclusively on setting appropriate parking policies and overseeing necessary infrastructure improvements. However, the research team believes that the city has not gone far enough to ensure that the Parking Commission can carry out its duties effectively, as it lacks the power to enforce on-street parking on a daily basis. Despite allocating meter revenues to the Parking Commission to fund projects that it deems necessary for improving downtown parking, the Commission cannot enforce driver compliance with meter payment, nor can it collect the revenue from fines issued to those found in violation. In conversations with members of the Commission, members expressed an interest in being able to hire "meter monitors" with the authority to issue parking tickets to vehicles in expired meters. Other city officials have also expressed support for this idea but have reported the

need to negotiate the matter with the local police union. While the research team is not privy to these negotiations it strongly encourages all parties involved to reach an agreement that would place all aspects of parking regulation, enforcement, and revenue collecting under the authority of the Parking Commission. The Commission would then become the sole entity for setting policy, parking rates, collecting revenues, issuing fines, and reviewing citation appeals.

Downtown Traffic

High levels of vehicular traffic can be both a blessing and a burden in small urban city downtowns that were not originally built with the automobile in mind. While the movement of cars in and through a downtown is a sign of life, excessive amounts of traffic can often hinder the promotion of another important form of traffic in a downtown: pedestrian traffic. In addition, excessive traffic can foster a negative perception of the downtown among residents and outsiders alike, who may begin to feel that the area is inconvenient, unsafe, or a nuisance.

In Downtown Taunton, the convergence of several main routes on the Taunton Green results in a continuous flow of high traffic that is of particular concern to the research team, due to its impact on driver safety and pedestrian safety. In order to understand the driver's perspective in driving through Downtown Taunton, members of the research team spent several hours over a number of days driving into and through the downtown from a variety of directions. Doing so allowed the research team to identify the various challenges and potential dangers that motorists face when driving through the downtown.

The roadway that encircles the Taunton Green acts as a rotary with vehicular traffic flowing in a counter-clockwise direction, as is the case with nearly all rotaries throughout the state. Typical rotaries have approximately three or four entrance and exit lanes at various points, and incoming traffic is forced to yield to or merge with traffic already in the rotary. In addition, lanes providing exit from the rotary do not impede or traverse traffic attempting to merge into the rotary. The Taunton Green rotary, however, is a special case; its shape is square rather than circular, and it exists in the middle of the city's downtown commercial area. In addition to this, there are six points of entry into the rotary and six points of exit from the rotary that often traverse one another or are located close together so that entry into and exit from the rotary can become a confusing and intimidating experience.

Posted speed limits throughout the downtown instruct drivers to reduce their speed to 20 miles per hour, which is similar to the speed limits of school zones. While the posted limit of 20 miles per hour is appropriate for the downtown area, the research team recommends that these signs be accentuated with blinking lights as is the case with school zones. An area of particular concern is the stretch of Main Street between Summer Street and the Taunton Green, where several pedestrian crosswalks are located.

Previous sections of this report have focused on the impact of traffic in Downtown Taunton on pedestrian safety. In this section, the research team focuses more on overall traffic safety in the downtown and its observations of traffic flow around the Taunton Green. Considering the amount of traffic Downtown Taunton sees every day and the presence of several intersections that often produce uncertainty and disorder, the research team believes that traffic in the downtown will have a serious impact on the city's ability to succeed at a downtown revitalization effort. Downtown Taunton is not particularly large, but a high volume of traffic from a variety of directions creates the perception that Downtown Taunton is little more than a throughway for motorists traveling along Routes 140, 44, and 138. In addition, the Taunton Green, one of the Downtown's most significant assets, is constantly surrounded by moving cars coming from different directions, making access to it often difficult and dangerous.

Aside from the sheer volume of traffic in the downtown, there are several intersections around the Taunton Green that are of particular concern to the research team and should be addressed by the city and downtown stakeholders, including the intersection at Court Street, the Winthrop and Cohannet Streets intersection, and the intersection at Main Street and Weir Street. The intersection in front of the Flat Iron Building, where traffic from Cohannet Street, Winthrop Street (Route 44), and the Taunton Green converge is of particular concern to the research team. At this particular intersection, several lanes of traffic coming from three different directions converge onto a small stretch of Main Street adjacent to the Taunton Green (see Figure 31).

Winthrop Street/Cohannet Street Intersection. The small stretch of roadway directly in front of the Post Office receives the majority of its traffic from cars traveling in a south-bound direction on Court Street and vehicles traveling west-bound on the Taunton Green (in front of the Superior Court). In addition, this roadway has three lanes. The far left and middle lanes allow for left turns onto Main Street (continuing around the Green) while the far right lane (closest to the Post Office) allows drivers to turn right onto Cohannet Street or continue forward onto Winthrop Street by traversing in front of oncoming traffic from Cohannet Street (see Figure 31).

Cohannet Street is a two-way street and at the intersection it receives west-bound traffic from cars turning right at the Post Office and away from the Taunton Green. Vehicles traveling on Cohannet Street in an east-bound direction can either turn right onto Winthrop Street (in front of the Flat Iron Building) or continue forward onto Main Street and around the Taunton Green. Traffic coming from this direction is currently regulated by a stop sign. Unfortunately, entering the Taunton Green rotary from Cohannet Street can be particularly frustrating and potentially dangerous as motorists' view of oncoming south-bound traffic is restricted, requiring them to have to pull up into the intersection and thereby block access to Winthrop Street for those cars traveling in front of the Post Office. These concerns are particularly important considering that according to a 2002 study of traffic around the Taunton Green by the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD), the vast majority (between 69 and 77 percent depending on time of day) of traffic coming into the Taunton Green Rotary from Cohannet Street continues eastward onto Main Street (SRPEDD 2002, 7).

Winthrop Street, like Cohannet Street, is a two-way road that does not have any traffic signals at its intersection with the Taunton

Figure 31: ***Taunton Green Traffic Patterns***

Green, but is controlled by a yield sign. Traffic traveling in a north-bound direction toward the Green is only allowed to turn right onto Main Street, forcing it to merge with oncoming traffic from Cohannet Street and traffic coming from the segment of roadway front of the Post Office. In addition, north-bound traffic heading toward the Green is prohibited from turning left onto Cohannet Street and there are two signs on either side of the road just before the intersection indicating "no left turn." Despite the existence of these signs, the research team observed four vehicles over the course of twenty minutes on the morning of August 18, 2009 perform this illegal maneuver. In one instance, a vehicle traveling south-bound in front of the Post Office and heading straight onto Winthrop Street nearly collided with one of these vehicles performing this prohibited left turn.

By and large, the unregulated nature of this intersection and the fact that four of the five lanes of traffic that converge onto this intersection are being funneled in the same direction creates an environment prone to hazard. In particular, east-bound traffic on Cohannet Street faces a great amount of difficulty in entering the Taunton Green rotary because it is sandwiched in between oncoming south-bound traffic from in front of the Post Office and north-bound traffic from Winthrop Street. In addition, it is difficult for motorists on Cohannet Street to see south-bound traffic coming from in front of the Post Office and crossing in front of them to continue southward onto Winthrop Street. In its 2002 report, SRPEDD's assessment of these conditions let it to comment that that "traversing through this intersection [is] very treacherous" (SRPEDD 2002, 7). In addition, SRPEDD also presented accident data for the years 1997 to 1999, which showed that 31 out of 126 accidents (25 percent) took place at this intersection, only second to the 32 accidents that took place at the intersection of Weir Street and Main Street over the same period of time (SRPEDD 2002, 12).

In its attempts to gather more recent data, the research team reached out to the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) for data regarding accidents in Taunton for the most recent years available. The RMV provided the research team with datasets for the years 2005, 2006, and 2007. The research team then isolated those accidents that took place in the Taunton Green rotary and its four intersections. According to the data submitted by the RMV, 166 accidents took place in Downtown Taunton between 2005 and 2007. The Taunton Green was the site of 106 (64 percent) of these downtown car accidents. Additionally, the research team was able to use the RMV databases to determine the location and intersection of these accidents. Doing so revealed that of these 106 accidents, 35 accidents (33 percent) occurred at the Winthrop Street/Cohannet Street intersection. In addition, the other three intersections around the Green experienced accidents at rates nearly 50 percent less than that of the Winthrop Street/ Cohannet Street intersection. Over the same three-year period accidents at Broadway/Taunton Green totaled 17 while accidents at Court Street/Taunton Green equaled 18, and accidents at Main Street/Weir Street also totaled 18 (see Figure 32).

While the research team presents the Winthrop Street/Cohannet Street case as an example, the level of danger motorists experience at each of the Taunton Green's three other intersections is just as important to consider. In addition, SRPEDD has already indicated in its 2002 study that traffic in Downtown Taunton and around the Taunton Green will only increase because, unlike many other urban communities, the interstate highways that were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s are so far removed from the state highways that run through Downtown Taunton that demand for use of Routes 140, 138, and 44 have not and will not decline. These are important factors to consider in Taunton's efforts to spur economic redevelopment in the downtown. Vehicular traffic, especially the kind that is perceived to be unruly and unsafe, can

act as an adversary to the development of a critical mass of pedestrian activity that can sustain the downtown's economy. Undoubtedly, Taunton is blessed by the fact that it does not have interstate highways cutting through its downtown commercial district. However, this does not mean that traffic in the area is negligible. On the contrary, Downtown Taunton enjoys a steady flow of traffic from all directions that demonstrates its importance to the region.

While the research team recognized that a variety of studies analyzing traffic around the Taunton Green have been conducted and that numerous proposals for improving traffic in the area have been presented and discussed over the past several decades, a serious, professionally managed, and multi-agency effort must be made to align the demands of traffic throughout the downtown area with the economic needs of the downtown's merchants, customers, and residents. As such, the research team recommends that the city establish a downtown traffic taskforce of approximately 12 to 15 members that includes representatives from SRPEDD, Mass Highway, the City Council, relevant city department heads, the Parking Commission, the Heart of Taunton, the Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development, and local merchants to work over the course of approximately nine to twelve months on developing solutions to traffic concerns around the Taunton Green. The research team believes that approaching the difficult task of improving traffic in the downtown in this manner will facilitate an inclusive process and ensure the necessary support to see potential recommendations through to implementation.

Figure 32: ***Vehicular Accidents in Downtown Taunton by Intersection***

Data from the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles 2005 – 2007

	2005	2006	2007	Total
Downtown Total	56	56	54	166
Taunton Green Rotary Total	31	44	31	106
Cohannet/Winthrop	12	13	10	35
Court/Taunton Green	4	8	5	17
Broadway/Taunton Green	4	9	5	18
Weir/Main	5	8	5	18

4 Shortage of Arts & Entertainment Venues

While commercial and retail activity are principal elements of a downtown's economic vitality, they are not the only ingredients necessary to ensure a downtown's overall long-term survival. Creating an environment that offers visitors a variety of things to do and see will make the downtown a place where people come to do more than simply serve on a jury, pay their property taxes, or mail a package. The success of malls in attracting shoppers and keeping them for extended periods of time is often due to the mix of venues offered, including arcades, movie theaters, restaurants, and the typical retail activity. Downtowns have the capacity to offer so much more, such as art galleries and artists' studios, seasonal parades, farmers' markets, festivals, sidewalk sales, and outdoor entertainment. Establishing these services and venues in the downtown will take a great deal of planning and coordination among stakeholders and city officials. Fortunately, the payoff on such investments will be felt throughout the entire downtown economy as the spillover effect reaches the retail and commercial sectors.

Although entertainment venues are important to a downtown revitalization, two factors must be considered. First, expanding these venues in the downtown is not an easy task, and will require a great deal of persistence, particularly in the early stages of a downtown revitalization effort. Very often, downtowns have an image problem that must be overcome before investors and entrepreneurs are willing to bring their restaurants, cafés, theaters, or studios into an area that is traditionally viewed as serving a very limited market between a set timeframe. In Downtown Taunton, this challenge is particularly noticeable as a great deal of the activity that takes place revolves around the courthouses, non-profits, and other government offices located there. In addition, very few establishments are open beyond 5:00 p.m. and those that are open, such as bars and restaurants, serve a limited market. These two features of Downtown Taunton's current state create an environment that is focused solely on the work cycle of individuals who are employed locally or whose businesses are located in the downtown. To be sure, the recent opening of Devito's Pizzeria and El Mariachi Restaurant on the Taunton Green as well as the Ugly Duckling on Weir Street have introduced a much needed nightlife into the downtown. However, if attempts are not made to incorporate other venues that can support these establishments such as art centers, theaters, street festivals, and evening retail activity, a few establishments focused solely on food service will not be able to sustain a downtown redevelopment effort.

The second factor to consider is actual market demand, which can be difficult to assess under current economic circumstances. As Downtown Taunton begins to work on expanding its arts and entertainment offerings, understanding what types of venues people of all ages want in the downtown will be an important part of the process. Being realistic about what the market for arts and entertainment will bear may prevent entertainment venues that produce little effect, in terms of spawning new development and generating spillover, from entering the downtown.

In his research brief for the Brookings Institute, Christopher Leinberger accurately asserts that the goal of bringing arts and entertainment to a downtown should be to get "feet on the street," particularly in the evening and on the weekends. Doing so will allow the downtown's reputation as a destination to spread rapidly. "Just as a crowded restaurant is the best recommendation … [so too do] crowded sidewalks recommend a downtown" (Leinberger 2005, 14). In this regard, Downtown Taunton has an advantage with its compact size. More feet in a small area creates a buzz that can lead to a self-sustaining critical mass. In addition, its size allows for a good variety of establishments and venues to be located within a walkable distance from one another.

Enhancing Arts & Entertainment: AHA! Nights

Lessons from the experiences of New Bedford, Massachusetts

AHA! (Art, History & Architecture) is New Bedford's free Downtown Cultural Night and collaborative cultural organization. A project of the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts, a 501(c)(3), the AHA! mission is to be a cooperative venture dedicated to invigorating the downtown New Bedford cultural scene. The project has five main components:

- presenting second Thursday FREE cultural nights
- inviting local and regional artists, cultural groups, and educators to present their work and ideas
- spearheading cooperative marketing
- being a forum for the AHA! partners to convene around shared topics
- contributing to the City's Creative Economy initiatives

AHA! began in July of 1999 and its monthly events have taken place continuously since that time. These flagship cultural nights are themed, are held on the second Thursday of each month from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., and currently involve forty-nine downtown museums, galleries, arts organizations, merchants, and restaurants. On a typical AHA! night, several art exhibits open, live music is presented, theater skits or a lecture take place, and interactive family and adult cultural experiences abound.

AHA! is funded in part by The City of New Bedford, The Massachusetts Cultural Council, The Island Foundation, local business community sponsorship, individual donors, and partner venue dues. The City of New Bedford has also been awarded several grants from the John and Abigail Adams Arts Program for Cultural and Economic Development, for new initiatives and ongoing expansion of the city's free arts and culture nights.

Since its inception, AHA! has been a catalyst for downtown development. AHA! began with 14 partners in 1999, and now has 49 partners in various industry sectors, including museums and attractions, galleries and studios, restaurants, retail shops, and cultural organizations. In conjunction with the growth of AHA!, over 500,000 square feet of commercial space in downtown New Bedford has been renovated for commercial use or converted to residential use since 2000, for a total value of $55 million. An additional $25 million in renovations and construction is underway or in the planning stages.

The number of visitors to AHA! and the quality of programming continues to grow each year, as does the excitement and energy generated by the event. AHA! estimates an average attendance of 900 individuals per event. The total economic impact of the AHA! for the 2007 program year is estimated at $527,765, including $199,827 of attendee expenditures in a variety of categories, including galleries and art purchases, food and drink purchases, other retail purchases, and parking. AHA! spent a total of $143,500 on activities in 2007, not including in-kind contributions, meaning that every dollar spent by AHA! created 3.7 dollars in economic impacts.

Source: UMass Dartmouth Center for Policy Analysis, AHA! Economic Impact Analysis and Program Evaluation, 2007-2008.

Downtown Taunton currently lacks a large-scale venue for theater and the arts. The Taunton Arts Association (TAA), a well-known community organization that offers art classes, workshops, demonstrations, and art shows, is currently located on Williams Street, which is well beyond the boundaries of the Central Business District. In addition, theater groups that perform in Taunton typically hold performances at the Croteau Theater at Friedman Middle School or at the Taunton High School Auditorium, both of which are also outside of the downtown. While the Star Theater may have once served as the city's main venue for this type of entertainment, rebuilding a theater in the downtown – either from the remnants of the Star or in a different location – may require a great deal of time and funding. As such, the city should focus on its current strengths and bring those existing assets, like the TAA, into the downtown in a way that might extend the hours of operation for some establishments and spur additional activity.

Within the downtown there are a few establishments, such as the BaHa Brothers Sandbar Grill and Steve's Backstage Pass, that are open late and feature live music entertainment for customers. While the existence of these types of establishments is a positive for the downtown, whether they act as catalysts for economic activity throughout the downtown is another question. To make these types of businesses and other establishments like them stimulate activity in other sectors of the downtown economy, stakeholders must work together to develop a coordinated marketing campaign for the downtown that publicizes events and services in a variety of venues. In addition to publicizing events and attractions, marketing efforts could also feature what the area's retail establishments have to offer, thereby encouraging them to stay open later to serve customers who may be dining in the downtown or attending an event in the evening. All of this takes a great deal of coordination among the downtown's business owners, stakeholders, and organizers and mirrors coordinated marketing efforts undertaken traditionally by regional malls or retail outlets.

While bringing the arts and other entertainment venues into the downtown may seem like a difficult or daunting task at first, a downtown revitalization effort can only be sustained if its purpose is to create a *multifunctional* district that includes services and venues that extend beyond the traditional retail, commercial, and governmental activities associated with a downtown. In addition Taunton already has a variety of assets to work from. With a good deal of coordination and marketing, the downtown could once again be the place where the entire community gathers for an evening of entertainment and amusement.

5 Permitting Process

In the course of its face-to-face interviews with downtown stakeholders and property owners, the research team was informed on various occasions that the city's zoning and permitting process was a particular challenge for downtown development. These sentiments were expressed to an even greater degree among business owners, developers, and those closely involved in economic and commercial activities and development within the city

and the downtown. Specifically, there were two areas of contention that were mentioned frequently: first, that the permitting process and the personalities involved can often be unfriendly toward businesses, and second, that the process itself is overly complex, multi-layered, and involves a variety of city entities and departments that are not centrally located.

To determine if this matter warranted further investigation, the research team included two questions on its mail survey regarding the permitting process and respondents' perceptions of it. The first question asked respondents to indicate the level of frequency with which they have utilized the city's permitting process. Four options were provided and participants were asked to select one: (1) Never, (2) Rarely; 1 to 3 times, (3) Often; 4 to 7 times, and (4) Very often; more than 7 times. The second question asked respondents to rate the level of ease or difficulty they experienced in utilizing the permitting process. In this question, five options were provided and participants were asked to select one: (1) Very simple and convenient, (2) Somewhat simple and convenient, (3) Moderately difficult/complicated, (4) Very difficult/complicated, and (5) Extremely difficult/complicated. Survey respondents were also provided additional space following the second question to further explain their experiences with the permitting process. These questions were asked concurrently in order to establish a certain level of consistency in interpreting the results of the second question as the research team's goal was to determine perceptions of ease or difficult based upon first hand use and experience with the permitting process.

As mentioned previously, the Urban Initiative mailed approximately 230 surveys to various downtown property owners, merchants, and stakeholders. Of these, 33 individuals returned completed surveys to the Urban Initiative. Twenty-seven of these responded to at least one of the two permitting questions, with only 17 individuals responding to both. As such, the research team focused on interpreting survey results from these 17 individuals in order to ensure relevance. The research team wishes to repeat its previously stated disclaimer that the limited number of respondents precludes generalizations as to the thoughts and opinions of the downtown community as a whole.

Despite this disclaimer, however, the research team maintains its inclusion of the permitting process in its list of challenges to downtown redevelopment. Together with stakeholder interviews and its independent evaluation of Taunton's Zoning Ordinance, the survey responses were simply a minor part of the research team's decision to include the permitting process in its list of downtown challenges. In addition, recall that the "permitting process" ranked sixth out of the thirteen challenges presented in Question 1 of the survey, implying that downtown stakeholders see it as an important issue (see Figure 33).

To analyze results from the two questions regarding the permitting process, a cross-tabulation chart was produced using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical analysis software. The chart presented in Figure 33 cross-tabulates responses from the 17 individuals who responded to both questions regarding frequency of use and perceptions of ease or difficulty with regards to the city's permitting process. Of the 17 respondents, the majority (14) indicated using the city's permitting process "rarely" (1 to 3 times). Of these 14 respondents, half indicated that the city's permitting process was either "very simple and convenient" or "somewhat simple and convenient," while the other 7 indicated that in their experience the permitting process is "moderately difficult/complicated." In addition, two other individuals indicated using the city's permitting process "very often" (more than 7 times). While one indicated that the process is "moderately difficult/complicated," the other asserted that the permitting process is "extremely difficult/complicated." By eliminating the lone respondent who indicated that he or she had never used the permitting process but assessed it to be very simple, 16 respondents remained who reported having actual experience using the permitting process. Of these, nine (56.2 percent) indicated some level of difficulty while seven (43.8 percent) indicated some level of ease and convenience.

In addition to the results of these questions, the research team would like to point out that several individuals provided comment regarding their rating of the permitting process. These comments ranged from indicating that the process was simple and convenient to indicating the need to hire attorneys or having to go to court to resolve permitting or licensing issues. Other comments recounted extreme difficulties with the permitting process in simple matters such as erecting a sign in the downtown, while other statements indicating that some city departments were much harder to deal with than others.

Again, the research team stresses that its inclusion of the permitting process in its list of challenges was not based solely on the results of this survey. A review of the City of Taunton's Zoning Ordinance (revised December 7, 2007), which describes other permitting and licensing policies and procedures, was conducted to determine if the concerns expressed during stakeholder interviews and on the surveys possessed any merit.

As is the case in other communities throughout the Commonwealth, the City of Taunton requires anyone intending to build or alter a structure to apply for a written permit. The Zoning Ordinance contains the city's policies and procedures for submitting such a request as well as the process for appealing decisions or applying for special permits and variances. In addition, the Zoning Ordinance identifies all of the relevant city entities, agencies, and departments that must be consulted if approval is to be granted on any of the above application processes.

Members of the research team spent several hours examining pertinent sections of the Zoning Ordinance – namely sections three (Administration), five (Permitted Uses), seven (General Provisions), ten (Uses Authorized by Special Permit of the Municipal Council), eleven (Uses Authorized by Special Permit of the Planning Board), and fifteen (Site Plan Review). Initial reactions to the document included a certain degree of confusion and uncertainty, leading the research team to suppose that only those developers, business owners, or contractors who have had significant past experience navigating the permitting process would be able to understand its numerous provisions and the myriad entities involved in every aspect of it. Those who are new to the process, in particular those whose projects may require a variance or special permit, are likely to experience apprehension as a result of the complex nature of the conditions and the often confounding manner in which certain procedures are described and organized within the document itself.

This initial assessment led the research team to question whether

Figure 33: ***Taunton Survey Results: Level of Frequency Utilizing Permitting Process and Level of Ease/Difficulty Using Permitting Process***

		Level of Ease/Difficulty Using Permitting Process					
		Very simple and convenient	Somewhat simple and convenient	Moderately difficult/ complicated	Very difficult/ complicated	Extremely difficult/ complicated	Total
Frequency Utilizing Permitting Process	Never	1*	0	0	0	0	1*
	Rarely (1 to 3 times)	1	6	7	0	0	14
	Often (4 to 7 times)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Very often (7 or more)	0	0	1	0	1	2
	Total	2	6	8	0	1	17

*Observation ignored due to no prior experience utilizing the city's permitting process.

or not the city offers an easy-to-use guide that would assist developers or anyone looking to build or renovate property through the city's multi-layered permitting process, since city ordinances are not always written in an easy-to-read or user-friendly fashion. The only guide that could be found was published in 2007 by the Pioneer Institute. This guide, entitled *Navigating Through Regulations and Licensing Requirements: A Guide for Taunton Entrepreneurs*, is "designed to guide Taunton's aspiring entrepreneurs through the municipal, state, and federal regulations surrounding the opening of a Taunton small business." The guide focuses on twenty different types of businesses, ranging from art galleries to TV/radio/computer repair shops, and provides checklists that explain how to meet the various local, state, and federal requirements (Pioneer Institute 2007, 4). Unfortunately, this guide was not designed to serve as a comprehensive guide through the city's zoning, permitting, and licensing ordinances. Rather, its steps are much more general in nature across all twenty businesses, and it fails to provide any guidance on procedures for permitting mixed-use properties. In almost all twenty cases, the steps provided in the guide were exactly the same, and its contents failed to provide further information for individuals needing to apply for zoning variances or special permits. In fact, special permits are not even mentioned in the guide, nor are important permitting entities such as the Municipal Council or the Development Impact Review Board.

During several interviews with city officials and developers familiar with the permitting process it was indicated that the creation of an easy-to-use zoning and permitting guide had not yet been completed. Several interviewees expressed regret that such a guide did not yet exist and felt that the publishing of such a guide would serve to foster greater clarity for permit applicants. While the research team agrees that at a minimum an easy-to-understand guide should be made available, there are other areas of concern regarding the permitting process that the city and downtown stakeholders should review if the downtown is going to be an area that welcomes new investment and business opportunities in an efficient and timely manner.

The Zoning Ordinance describes the application and decision process for variances and special permits. In addition, it identifies the city's three main "Special Permit Granting Authorities" (SPGAs): the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Municipal Council, and the Planning Board. Aside from issuing special permits for specific types of projects, a certain SPGA's permit granting authority may only be valid within certain districts. For example, entrepreneurs looking to build a drive-through establishment can apply for a special permit within five of the city's zoning districts. If the establishment is to be located within a Business District, the Central Business District, or an Office District, the SPGA is the Municipal Council. However, if the developer decides to build the establishment within the Highway Business District or the Industrial District, the SPGA is the Zoning Board of Appeals. There are several examples of this sort of division in the Zoning Ordinance, which increases confusion and frustration for new developers.

The myriad city entities and the confusing division of permit-granting authority between them reduces efficiency within the process and acts as a hindrance to new development. For example, in listing the powers of the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Zoning Ordinance states that it is authorized to approve use variances for uses that are not otherwise allowed in the district where the project is located. However, they are not allowed to issue variances for "condominiums, apartments, two-family dwellings, or row houses containing two or more dwelling units" in any district throughout the city. Also, the ordinance instructs readers as to who *does* issue variances in these cases (Zoning Ordinance 2007, 16). Referring to the Table of Use Regulations in Section 5 of the Zoning Ordinance created further confusion. The table indicates that while the Zoning Board of Appeals is allowed to issue special permits for single-family, two-family, and three-family dwellings, the Municipal Council is the SPGA for multi-family dwellings consisting of four units or more, unless the multi-family dwelling (four units or more) is part of a mixed-use building, in which case the Zoning Board of Appeals is the SPGA. In addition, according to Section 11 of the ordinance, if a developer is looking to build a mobile home park then they must deal with the Planning Board to obtain a special permit.

Aside from the confusion caused by the variety of permit granting authorities and the complicated way in which the various permits are divided among them, the Zoning Ordinance does not

completely outline all of the permit-granting authorities for each SPGA, aside from land use, which the Table of Land Use Regulations provides. For example, in section three, the Planning Board is empowered to "hear and decide applications for special permits as the SPGA as provided in this Ordinance, subject to any general or specific rules therein contained and subject to any appropriate conditions and safeguards imposed by the Planning Board." However, no comprehensive list of special permits follows, nor are there any specific references to other parts of the ordinance where readers can see exactly which special permits are granted by the Planning Board. Section 11 of the Zoning Ordinance, titled "Uses Authorized by Special Permit from the Planning Board," only covers mobile home parks, while in the Table of Land Use Regulations, which contains 128 different land uses, only one (cluster residential development) falls within the jurisdiction of the Planning Board (Taunton Zoning Ordinance 2007, 31).

In addition, in reviewing the Zoning Ordinance the research team discovered that the Planning Board also issues special permits for common driveways. This, however, was not located in any specific list of special permits. Rather, it was noticed while reading the definition of a common driveway in Section 2 of the Zoning Ordinance. In no other part of the Zoning Ordinance are common driveways even mentioned (Taunton Zoning Ordinance 2007, 8). Thus, anyone looking to build a common driveway and relying solely on this document would have go to the section providing definitions to find out what entity issues the special permit, which seems to make little sense.

In identifying these concerns, the research team hopes to highlight the possible frustration developers may experience when reading the Zoning Ordinance document or when trying to navigate the permitting process. The process is further complicated by the fact that any application for a special permit that requires the approval of the Municipal Council triggers a "Full Site Plan Review" process. During the Full Site Plan Review process, the Municipal Council is considered to be the "Site Plan Review Committee" (SPRC) but the Council is also authorized to establish a "Development Impact Review Board" (DIRB) made up of representatives from five city departments and citizens residing in the area of the proposed project. The purpose of the DIRB is to advise the Council on projects requiring their approval on a special permit.

For those projects that require a special permit from other permit-granting authorities, a "Departmental Site Plan Review" process is set up, which mirrors the Full Site Plan Review except for the public hearing requirement. The Departmental Site Plan Review is utilized when certain conditions exist within a project plan that could have an impact on the neighborhood or the city. During this process, the Development Impact Review Board acts as the reviewing and approving authority before a special permit can be issued.

Further confusion and excessive division of authority can also be seen in the policies and procedures that govern the "construction, alteration, repair, maintenance, and erection" of signs within the city, a process that was mentioned with particular disdain during several stakeholder interviews. According to Section 7 of the Zoning Ordinance, depending upon where a sign is to be located, its construction can be regulated by either the City, the Taunton Redevelopment Authority (TRA), or the Historic District Commission. To add further uncertainty, the sign regulation provision goes on to state that for "any sign that falls under the jurisdiction of the Historic District Commission and/or the Taunton Redevelopment Authority and the City of Taunton, the most restrictive requirements shall prevail and be controlling for all purposes" (Zoning Ordinance 2007, 47). The work of having to determine where a sign will be located and who to contact to apply for a permit is an additional and perhaps needless hoop for business owners and developers to jump through. While it is clearly necessary to regulate signs, the City may want to consider an approval process in which one entity is authorized to issue sign permits, regardless of location, while allowing the TRA and the Historic District Commission to participate, when necessary, by contributing comments and/or recommendations to the permit-granting authority.

In a 2004 report entitled, *The Rebirth of Older Industrial Cities*, the Center for Urban and Regional Policy (CURP) at Northeastern University investigated key "deal-breakers" that pose challenges to development in urban communities. Their list of deal-breakers was developed from interviews with over 50 business leaders and commercial real estate professionals in six cities (Boston, Chelsea, Holyoke, Lawrence, and New Bedford) and across six key industry sectors deemed strategic by the state (biotechnology, information technology, financial services, traditional manufacturing, and travel and tourism). The fourth deal-breaker listed in the report was "state and local review processes [that] add excessive costs to doing business in older industrial cities." In defining this deal-breaker, the report goes on to mention that "the cost of an extended approval process can discourage firms from choosing such locations [in older industrial cities], resulting in lost development opportunities. The extent to which municipal officials are perceived as partners in the economic development system and, more importantly, can manage the review process fairly, effectively, and efficiently, plays a significant role in successful economic development." The research team at CURP discovered that companies are still willing to consider sites in older industrial cities if municipal leaders are willing to work in partnership with them to overcome problems related to zoning regulations and permitting (Soule, *et. al.* 2004, I-IV).

Aside from the confusion and frustration described during stakeholder interviews, many also stated that the dispersed locations of various departments involved in the permitting process posed a significant challenge. Some business owners and developers described experiences of having spent large portions of their day traveling between various city agencies and departments to meet with city officials and sometimes being bounced back and forth between departments providing contradictory information. In a global economy that is changing rapidly and under market conditions that are in constant flux, municipal leaders need to understand that they must develop the capacity to provide clear and up-to-date information within a framework that simplifies the process for investors, developers, and entrepreneurs, as these individuals often lack the time to navigate complicated permitting procedures.

Many interviewees suggested, and the research team agrees, that the city begin efforts to centralize its permitting process so that it can operate along the lines of "one-stop shopping" rather than a

scavenger hunt. Doing so would also fulfill one of the recommendations within the City's Master Plan to "consolidate its departments in as few locations as possible." Within the context of the downtown, the research team also recommends that the city and the downtown's stakeholders work together to set up a system whereby one individual with sufficient training and experience with the city's permitting process can act as a development coordinator for the Central Business District. This individual would serve as the initial contact for business owners and entrepreneurs looking to introduce new projects into the downtown and would take care of the legwork involved in contacting city departments. Being business-friendly does not mean having to accept any and all projects proposed without practicing due diligence. Rather, it means fostering an environment that demonstrates to developers and those who might even be looking to expand their business within the city that their time will not be wasted and that decisions will be rendered fairly and expeditiously.

While the research team recognizes and understands the community's efforts to ensure that growth takes place gradually and in an orderly fashion so as to preserve open space and ensure efficient municipal services it also believes that the community can achieve these goals while providing a permitting process that will attract rather than frustrate new development opportunities. The challenges that urban centers in Massachusetts face when competing for new development are well documented and recognized. Considering the additional challenges that exist in urban downtowns, the struggle to attract new commercial and retail investment becomes particularly daunting and begs for reforms that create an environment that maximizes limited city resources while attracting opportunities that will enhance the downtown's economic viability.

6 Current Economic Forces

The final challenge that the city and downtown stakeholders will have to face are the current economic challenges that communities and states throughout the U.S. are currently experiencing. Financing a downtown revitalization effort is a major undertaking that requires funding from a variety of public and private sources. On the public side, communities are having to close unprecedented budget gaps with layoffs and service reductions while many in the private sector are also facing very similar difficult circumstances. Unfortunately, the community cannot turn to the city to fund the bulk of a revitalization effort. It simply does not have the revenues to sustain current service levels throughout the city while funding projects to redevelop the downtown.

This, however, does not preclude the community and the downtown's stakeholders from taking any action on downtown revitalization during the current global economic crisis. Rather, challenges breed creativity and opportunities. In fact, small steps are already being taken in Downtown Taunton to address some of the challenges already mentioned. From private investments, like renovations to the Flat Iron Building and the former Woolworth's Building, to public investments like the new courthouse and impending plans to resurface and improve the Galligans Court parking lot, action is taking place that warrants serious efforts at coordinated planning for Downtown Taunton's future.

As the national economy continues to change over the next few years and in anticipation of better economic circumstances, preparing for those brighter days now will be a critical part of Downtown Taunton's viability in the next three to five years. Setting the stage for future investment and fostering the conditions that will facilitate new development will set Downtown Taunton apart from other downtowns and make it attractive to those who seek to capitalize on today's weaker market conditions to create long-term profitable investments under stronger market conditions. Projects that can prepare the downtown include infrastructure improvements like repairs and improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian amenities, and parking facilities, planning initiatives like the establishment of a downtown master plan, asset and property inventories, and the creation of a downtown management organization, as well as financial programs like small business loan assistance, rehabilitation loans, investment tax credits, and tax increment financing.

Ultimately, what Downtown Taunton chooses to do today (or fails to do today) will determine the course of its future development. While the current economic forces that challenge communities around the globe are daunting, the perception of their severity should not trigger paralysis. Overcoming the "not in this economy" mentality that prevents individuals, stakeholders, governments, and firms from engaging and partnering in creative and positive efforts will be a tremendous challenge as downtown activists work to enlist the support of the local business community and the general citizenry. The famous American statesman Benjamin Franklin once wrote that "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." Heeding the advice of these words within the context of today's economic challenges would significantly advance the downtown's redevelopment needs in the years to come and serve to establish a forum for stakeholders to ensure that the downtown is continuously prepared to succeed.

In previous sections of this report, the research team presented its assessment of various challenges that the city and downtown stakeholders will have to overcome as a part of any effort to revitalize the downtown area. While many of the concerns raised by this study might appear daunting, the research team wishes to argue that challenges can, indeed, be transformed into opportunities – opportunities for the community to creatively think about the future of the downtown and how their efforts to overcome these challenges fit within a plan for a new, vibrant, and exciting Downtown Taunton.

When working on downtown revitalization it is very easy to overlook the assets and opportunities that exist, as if they have simply become a part of the downtown background. To be sure, the downtown has a number of assets and advantageous qualities that can and undoubtedly should be harnessed and intrinsically tied to revitalization efforts. Very often, part of the challenge with downtown redevelopment is simply identifying the assets and treasures that already exist and utilizing them in creative ways. Building off of these assets and promoting them as unique opportunities to attract private investment will be a critical part of moving the downtown in the right direction. The research team hopes that by pointing out some of these advantages, the community and the downtown's stakeholders will begin to perceive the mission of revitalization as both possible and worthwhile.

In its mail survey to downtown stakeholders, the research team asked participants to identify five assets/opportunities in Downtown Taunton from a list of eleven items developed by the research team following ground-level observations and initial face-to-face interviews with several community members. Among those who responded, 81.3 percent indicated that "history/architecture" was one of Downtown Taunton's greatest assets. No other item received this level of recognition among survey respondents. The next item receiving high marks was "availability of land/buildings," which was selected by 53.1 percent of survey respondents. This was followed by "volume of automobile traffic" (50.0 percent), "layout and location" (46.9 percent) and "strong downtown association" and "daytime workforce" (both selected at a rate of 43.8 percent) rounding out the top six downtown assets. (See Figure 34 for complete results of this survey question.)

The research team hopes that, in presenting these survey results and its own assessment of downtown assets and opportunities, the city and downtown stakeholders will creatively and collaboratively establish a set of priorities that offer the greatest opportunity for initiating and anchoring revitalization efforts.

Figure 34: ***Taunton Survey Results: Downtown Assets & Opportunities***

Asset/Opportunity	Percent of Respondents Selecting Item
History/architecture	81.3%
Availability of land/buildings	53.1%
Volume of Automobile Traffic	50.0%
Layout & location	46.9%
Strong Downtown Association	43.8%
Daytime Workforce	43.8%
Community spirit/commitment	40.6%
Government operations/service centers	28.1%
Parking	18.8%
Retail/service mix	18.8%
Parks/open spaces	12.5%

1 Physical Environment & Infrastructure

In the previous section of this report, concerns were raised by the research team regarding certain elements in Downtown Taunton's physical environment that posed potential challenges to downtown revitalization. In this section, the research team will identify several important strengths and opportunities related to the downtown's physical environment and infrastructure that can and should be recognized and utilized in efforts to overcome some of those challenges during a revitalization effort.

Unique Architecture & Historical Character. Downtown Taunton is distinctive in that, despite many years of federally-funded urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s, a good number of buildings with their original façades have survived and thereby preserved the area's unique New England character and feel. Many communities used urban renewal funds to pay for the wholesale demolition of entire blocks in order to construct modern-style office buildings or parking garages that do little to display the community's heritage. Considering the ample supply of historic properties, including the

Taunton Green, Church Green, and Superior Courthouse, it is no surprise that 81.3 percent of survey respondents agreed that the downtown's history and architecture are the area's most important asset and opportunity for future development. Indeed, a community's cultural and historic resources are a critical part of making it unique and distinct. Moreover, the buildings and open spaces where important events took place are the physical remnants of that history and the modern world's connection to its past.

In the past, historic preservation was seen simply as a means of restoring and protecting buildings, public areas, and monuments of significant architectural or historic worth. In recent decades, however, a fundamental shift in thinking regarding the purpose of historic preservation has taken place, linking it to economic development. Across the country, countless communities have made historic preservation a part of their economic development strategy and the research team believes that this approach could play an important role in Downtown Taunton's revitalization. The economic benefits of historic preservation include job creation, tax revenue, increased private investment in property rehabilitation, rising property values, small business development and expansion, and heritage tourism.

In *The Economics of Historic Preservation*, a report published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Donald Rypkema writes that "very few of the five hundred or so categories of economic activity have as much economic impact (measured as jobs created, increase in household income, and demand created on other industries) as the rehabilitation of historic buildings." He goes on to write that "virtually every example of sustained success in downtown revitalization – regardless of the size of the city – has included historic preservation as a key component of the strategy" (Rypkema 2005, 2).

Considering its compact size, long history, and unique buildings, the research team recommends that efforts at historic preservation in Downtown Taunton focus on the adaptive reuse of older commercial and office buildings so as to reap the greatest economic benefits from preservation projects. Adaptive reuse can also include the creation of residential space. However, the community should be careful of what type of residential space is created to prevent a preponderance of affordable housing particularly under the current market conditions, which make the construction of market-rate housing unfeasible for developers and affordable housing much more attractive due to the subsidies offered by the state's housing department.

An additional matter to consider is Congressman Barney Frank's filing of legislation to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a "special resources study regarding the suitability and feasibility of designating certain historic buildings and areas in Taunton as a unit of the National Park System" (H.R. 1021). While the legislation has passed the U.S. House of Representatives, it appears to be indefinitely stalled in the Senate, despite being introduced by the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy. The research team believes that this would be a great opportunity for Downtown Taunton to be officially recognized as a place of significant national historic value and to secure potential federal and other external funding to finance future efforts at historic preservation. However, unless the proposed legislation is passed by the Senate and signed by the President, it cannot become law. As such, the research team recommends that local leaders and community stakeholders press their congressional delegation for answers with regard to this matter in order to determine the likelihood of National Park status being achieved.

Compact Layout and Scope of Redevelopment. As challenging and complex as a downtown redevelopment effort can be, the actual size of the redevelopment area itself often adds to the intimidation and prevents stakeholders from actually believing that a concerted revitalization effort might achieve its mission. In Downtown Taunton's case, however, size could really work in the community's favor.

The entire Central Business District is less than one square mile in size and contains a total of 125 commercial properties. In addition, only two of these buildings have more than three floors. These conditions create a comfortable human scale that shoppers and visitors are often attracted to, especially when compared to large cities like Boston. In addition to this, the downtown is anchored by the Taunton Green at its center and its layout seems to move outward in all directions from this central point, giving the downtown a well-defined, almost circular, layout.

As mentioned in previous sections, while the downtown stretches far north toward Randall Street and to the south toward High Street, the downtown core is much smaller and encompasses an area that contains a significant portion of the entire CBD's commercial activity. The entire downtown core, as defined in Figure 10 on page 25, encompasses an area that is less than one half square mile and provides the city and downtown stakeholders with a well-defined area within which to begin revitalization efforts and property redevelopment. The density of buildings along Main Street, Weir Street, Taunton Green, and Broadway presents significant opportunities to spark private investment by making targeted public investments. Moreover, as public investments generate private investments, this activity will eventually trigger further public and private investments that can be sustained by the fact that this downtown core is so compact in its size and layout. In addition, because of the core's compact layout, the impact of even small investments and improvements is magnified significantly.

While the data presented with regards to vacancies in the downtown might appear to create a daunting challenge for the city and downtown stakeholders, the research team reminds readers that of the 28 properties in the downtown that currently have some level of vacancy, there are only six properties in the entire CBD that are completely vacant, and that these six properties are also located within the downtown "core," thereby presenting the community with a measurable challenge that it has the capacity to get its hands around and overcome. The research team believes that the main purpose of conducting its vacancy inventory for the city was to help it determine the extent of the challenge. After having collected and analyzed all of the data, the research team strongly believes that the scope of the redevelopment necessary to improve activity in the downtown is absolutely manageable if it focuses on the actual numbers rather than the often-inflated perceptions of Downtown Taunton's vacancy problem.

Existing Space for Upper-Floor Housing Units. To sustain a downtown redevelopment effort, it is also important to foster the creation of a local market that garners a healthy level of its consumer demand from people living within the downtown itself. Considering the fact that space for new construction in Downtown Taunton is limited, the research team recommends that the city focus on opportunities for infill development in buildings that currently have sufficient vacant space on their upper floors. According to the research team's vacancy inventory, there are approximately fourteen properties in the Central Business District that have upper-floor vacancies, thirteen of which are located within the downtown core.

Upper floor residential opportunities can be attractive to single or married young professionals with no children who work in or near the downtown and who might gravitate toward an opportunity to be able to live in an area that allows them to walk or ride a bike to work and be able to purchase necessities in nearby establishments. Current and projected trends in energy costs, particularly those associated with maintaining private means of transportation, suggest that more and more individuals will soon seek residential opportunities that allow them to find work and basic necessities within a walkable distance. Downtown Taunton would be wise to begin strategically planning by setting the groundwork to become an area that attracts these individuals.

Of course, there will be many challenges in these efforts to rejuvenate the downtown housing market. The first of these is the actual cost of rehabilitating these buildings, many of which might have previously served non-residential purposes. New construction allows developers to anticipate construction costs more easily. Infill construction and conversion of existing structures almost always provides investors with a host of unanticipated costs influenced by structural conditions that must be remediated for the project to move toward completion.

While developing residential units in the downtown is an important undertaking, the research team also recognizes the current difficulties that exist within the housing market and the challenges that developers face in trying to make market-rate housing financially feasible. Despite this, it is important the city act wisely as it considers opportunities for expanding residential units in the downtown in order to ensure that downtown housing fosters a genuinely mixed-income community that will attract reputable long-term private commercial and retail activity that benefits the downtown economically as a whole. Moreover, as a commercial district whose lifeblood comes from consumer activity, it is important that housing opportunities attract individuals and families with sufficient disposable incomes to help sustain local retail establishments, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

2 Parking & Traffic

In the previous section of this report describing significant challenges to downtown redevelopment, the research team identified both parking and traffic as concerns. However, in keeping with its claim that challenges can always become opportunities, the research team has decided to mention both of these topics in a different light in order to generate an appreciation for their existence and potential in Downtown Taunton. Moreover, the research team hopes that by doing so, the city and downtown stakeholders can begin to discuss ways to turn these important issues in their favor.

Existing Downtown Parking Inventory. As a part of this study, the research team conducted an inventory and utilization review of parking in the downtown that is the main focus of Chapter 5 of this report. There, readers can access a more complete presentation and analysis of parking data collected by the research team over the course of this project. Altogether, Downtown Taunton has 266 on-street parking spaces, of which 253 are open to the public and handicapped motorists. In addition, of these 253 spaces, 212 are currently metered spaces. Of course, these numbers require further analysis in order to determine if the current supply of on-street parking is sufficient to meet potential demand. While measuring demand for parking can become a complex undertaking requiring surveys of drivers stopped at red lights, pedestrians, and motorists who have found parking, the research team decided to conduct an occupancy/utilization review of current parking to determine whether a complete study of demand for parking was even warranted. Results from the utilization review conducted over the course of three non-consecutive days in late February 2009 demonstrated that current supply appeared to be meeting potential demand, since rates of on-street parking utilization never exceed 54 percent, meaning that at any given time of the day there were at least 116 available on-street parking spaces for potential shoppers or visitors.

In addition to this, Downtown Taunton contains four surface parking lots and one parking garage that provide the area with an additional 1,046 parking spaces, of which 821 are open to public use or use by handicapped motorists. Of these 821 spaces, 403 are completely free of charge. Altogether, anyone coming into Downtown Taunton to conduct their business can choose from among 1,074 public parking spaces that span the entire downtown. More than one-third of these parking spaces (444) can be accessed at no charge. Additionally, it is important to note that according to utilization reviews of these parking spaces, at no time did the downtown's on- and off-street parking resources exceed 62 percent utilization, meaning that at any given time of the day there were at least 408 unutilized public parking spaces.

It is very easy to assume that a lack of adequate and free parking is the greatest obstacle to downtown revitalization, considering that shoppers can choose to drive to a mall or big box retail store and find ample parking even if they must walk a few hundred feet to get into the store itself. If this is the reality, then perhaps the issue is more about overcoming the perception that there is nowhere to park in the downtown, which can be done by promoting the existence of its many parking resources and facilitating access by improving signage and pedestrian access to off-street lots.

Finally, while the creation of additional parking may be necessary to compensate for the opening of the new courthouse on Broadway, the research team cautions against contriving a crisis situation that leads to the excessive installation of new parking spaces at a high cost to the community. As mentioned previously, utilization counts

conducted by the research team demonstrated that there are about 400 unutilized on- and off-street parking spaces throughout the downtown at any given time and that current parking resources are being used inefficiently due to the high number of individuals allowed to park for long periods of time at expired metered spaces. In addition to this, the research team believes there are significant opportunities in the Galligans Court and Allans Avenue surface lots. By cleaning, resurfacing, and relining them, a significant number of spaces could be added to each lot. Moreover, while construction crews continue to build the new courthouse, the research team recommends that the Parking Commission and the city move quickly to expedite the rehabilitation of these lots so that the downtown can expand its space inventory and capacity. Once these projects are complete, the city should then take another look at how much more parking is potentially needed without haphazardly building a surplus supply.

Stable Volume of Traffic. Although previous sections of this report identified downtown traffic as a serious challenge to promoting a safe pedestrian and driver environment, the fact that so many cars come into and through Downtown Taunton on a daily basis is also a considerable strength. The key to turning this issue into an asset will be finding ways to convince these drivers to stop and visit one or more of the area's establishments or return in the evening or weekends to enjoy a meal at one of the several restaurants that call the downtown home or shop in one of the area's retail establishments.

In order to convince drivers to stop or come back, it is necessary to at least give them an opportunity to find out what currently exists in the downtown. The speed and seemingly unregulated nature of traffic in Downtown Taunton does not allow drivers to take in all that the downtown has to offer in the seconds that they spend driving through it. While traffic-calming measures like traffic lights, stop signs, and speed tables are good to promote a safe pedestrian environment, they also afford drivers an opportunity to read signs, take in the sights, and begin to recognize what Downtown Taunton has to offer.

3 Downtown Advocacy

Since the inception of this project, the research team has been both surprised and impressed by the level of attention the downtown receives from city agencies and downtown stakeholders. In many communities, local officials and business owners pay a great deal of lip service to downtown revitalization, but take little concrete action. In Taunton, the nostalgia that local citizens have for their downtown and its tremendous economic, social, and political history appear to have sustained an underlying current of advocacy for a return to more prosperous and exciting times.

While Downtown Taunton has a good number of assets and natural strengths working in its favor, a key part of harnessing these assets, overcoming challenges, and creating opportunities are the people necessary to sustain these efforts. In several of its interviews with stakeholders, interviewees expressed pride in the commitment of many individuals and organizations that have tried to work collaboratively over the past several years to promote the downtown. From the Mayor's Office to the Heart of Taunton, to the city's Office of Economic and Community Development, the Neighborhood Corporation, and the Parking Commission, many voiced compliments for the commitment these entities and others have demonstrated to the cause of downtown revitalization.

Of course, while the research team believes that advocacy is an important part of redeveloping the downtown, it is time for the downtown's stakeholders to take things a step further by working together to create strong and competent leadership that can get everyone marching along the same road and toward the same goals. Only when the downtown's stakeholders succeed at this task will the many voices of advocacy become one common call promoting a shared vision for the downtown's future. The fact that this impressive group of advocates exists is a tremendous asset that should be utilized. There are many people that genuinely care about Downtown Taunton's future and it is refreshing to observe how local residents, business owners, and community leaders refuse to sit by idly expecting local government to solve all of the downtown's problems. The spirit of cooperation and partnership is a rare jewel in most communities, but in Downtown Taunton it is a part of almost everything that happens. Harnessing this spirit effectively will reap tremendous rewards for the community.

4 Stable Market Conditions

Although many might characterize Downtown Taunton as having a weak market, the research team believes that there are several market elements that work in its favor and could help to support revitalization activities and promote new opportunities for private business development.

Established Core of Stable Uses. Downtown Taunton is where City Hall, the Post Office, the Public Library, and various county courthouses are located. The existence of federal, state, municipal, and county offices in the downtown provides the area with a considerable amount of foot traffic that could be encouraged to shop or dine in nearby establishments. In addition to this, the downtown is home to several large banks whose customers do business there on a daily basis. Because these offices and establishments are so vital, it means that there will always be employees who work there and individuals who need to do business there. Essentially, the concentration of such important government and financial functions adds to the many elements that help make a downtown a "destination" for countless people.

Existing Consumer Market with Disposable Incomes. In many ways, because of the existence of the above-mentioned stable uses, Downtown Taunton has a consumer market of employed professionals who have disposable incomes. These are the people who come to Downtown Taunton on a daily basis and spend a majority of their day in the downtown. Efforts should be made to survey this sizable consumer market to determine what type of

goods or services they would like to see or would utilize in the downtown. Doing so would significantly help in guiding city development officials in attracting potential private investment.

Array of Well-Established, Locally-Owned Firms. During its numerous stakeholder interviews, the research team was told on various occasions that one of the Downtown Taunton's greatest strengths were its long-standing and closely integrated businesses, many of which are family-owned and -operated, that share a deep concern for the health and future of the downtown. These firms and their proprietors are vital partners and they offer a strong foundation from which to launch and sustain a successful downtown revitalization effort. It is important for all business owners to understand the intricate forces that connect their economic well-being and recognize the undeniable fact that as a commercial district they must sink or swim together.

5 Encouraging Developments

On a final note, the research team would like to point out several recent developments that it believes are positive forces in the downtown's redevelopment and indicate that a significant amount of work, both in the private sector and in the public sector is already taking place to set the groundwork for a concerted attempt at revitalization.

Considering the importance of parking in the downtown and the growing need to manage the city's resources to ensure their maintenance and maximum utilization, the establishment of a Parking Commission is definitely a step in the appropriate direction. By creating this entity, the city is ensuring that parking revenues are being spent wisely on projects that improve and potentially expand the downtown's parking resources. In fact, the creation of the Parking Commission and its current jurisdiction partially fulfills items in the city's 1998 Master Plan, which states that the city should "utilize parking fees and fine revenue to maintain accessible, available, and safe municipal parking areas." Thus far, the Parking Commission has demonstrated an eagerness to use the revenues it collects to do just this. In fact, in discussing the working of the Commission during interviews with Commission members, plans to fund a redesign, repaving, and complete rehabilitation of the Galligans Court parking lot were described to members of the research team. Transferring the authority to issue fines from the Police Department to the Parking Commission would achieve the Master Plan's provision that all parking revenues fund parking infrastructure improvements in the downtown.

In the private sector, the research team has observed several developments that show signs of activity and the potential to improve the downtown's image. Among these are the renovations to the Flat Iron Building on the corner of Cohannet and Winthrop Streets by its new owner, Isabella's Bridal, the rehabilitation of the former Woolworth's building by Homes for Our Troops, the opening of El Mariachi Restaurant and Devito's Pizzeria on the Taunton Green, and the opening of the Ugly Duckling Restaurant on Weir Street. Many of the buildings being renovated through these private investments hold significant places in Downtown Taunton's economic history. To see them coming back to life despite the myriad construction and renovation challenges is not only a credit to those willing to take these risks but a sign to other potential investors that Downtown Taunton is a place worth becoming a part of.

Additionally, the City of Taunton recently received a Gateways Plus Action Grant from the state's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). In applying for this grant, the city indicated that it would use the planning grant to fund a study of potential development opportunities in key downtown properties. Taking the lead in conducting this study for the city has been the Neighborhood Corporation, which earlier this year changed its name from the Weir Corporation and expanded the scope of its mission to include the Greater Taunton area. Since receiving the grant, the Neighborhood Corporation has worked with various architects, engineers, and consultants to analyze potential development opportunities in the Allans Avenue parking lot behind City Hall, the Leonard Block (also known as the former Star Theater), and the Union Block, which currently has multiple owners and is the site of the Taunton Antiques showroom.

Chapter 4: Downtown Taunton Vacancy Inventory

A hundred years ago, cities like Taunton experienced levels of growth and prosperity that sustained their residents and families and were places that individuals and entrepreneurs from across the world sacrificed everything to call home. The intensity of the commercial and economic activity that characterized the downtown area of cities, combined with the investment in infrastructure throughout these commercial districts, made them ideal locations for business owners. In addition, the negligible use and reliance upon automobiles and trucks made the density of downtown relatively unimportant with regard to location decision-making.

The past 50 years, however, have served as a period of gradual decline for Downtown Taunton and similar urban downtowns, resulting from the rapid sprawl facilitated by increased use of the automobile, creation of an interstate highway system, and rising prosperity that allowed middle- and upper-middle class families to seek homes in the privacy of nearby suburban communities. Along with these changing forces came the subsequent movement of retail and other forms of commercial activity away from downtown areas and into suburban malls and industrial parks located on the city fringe. Unfortunately, the combination of these forces has created a situation in which weak market conditions produce very little demand for downtown business locations, leaving a considerable number of property owners with little incentive to develop or market their properties.

These market realities result in a number of buildings remaining dilapidated and vacant for long periods of time, and represent one of the most critical policy challenges that urban local governments face in their attempts to recreate the economic vitality once enjoyed during prior industrial eras.

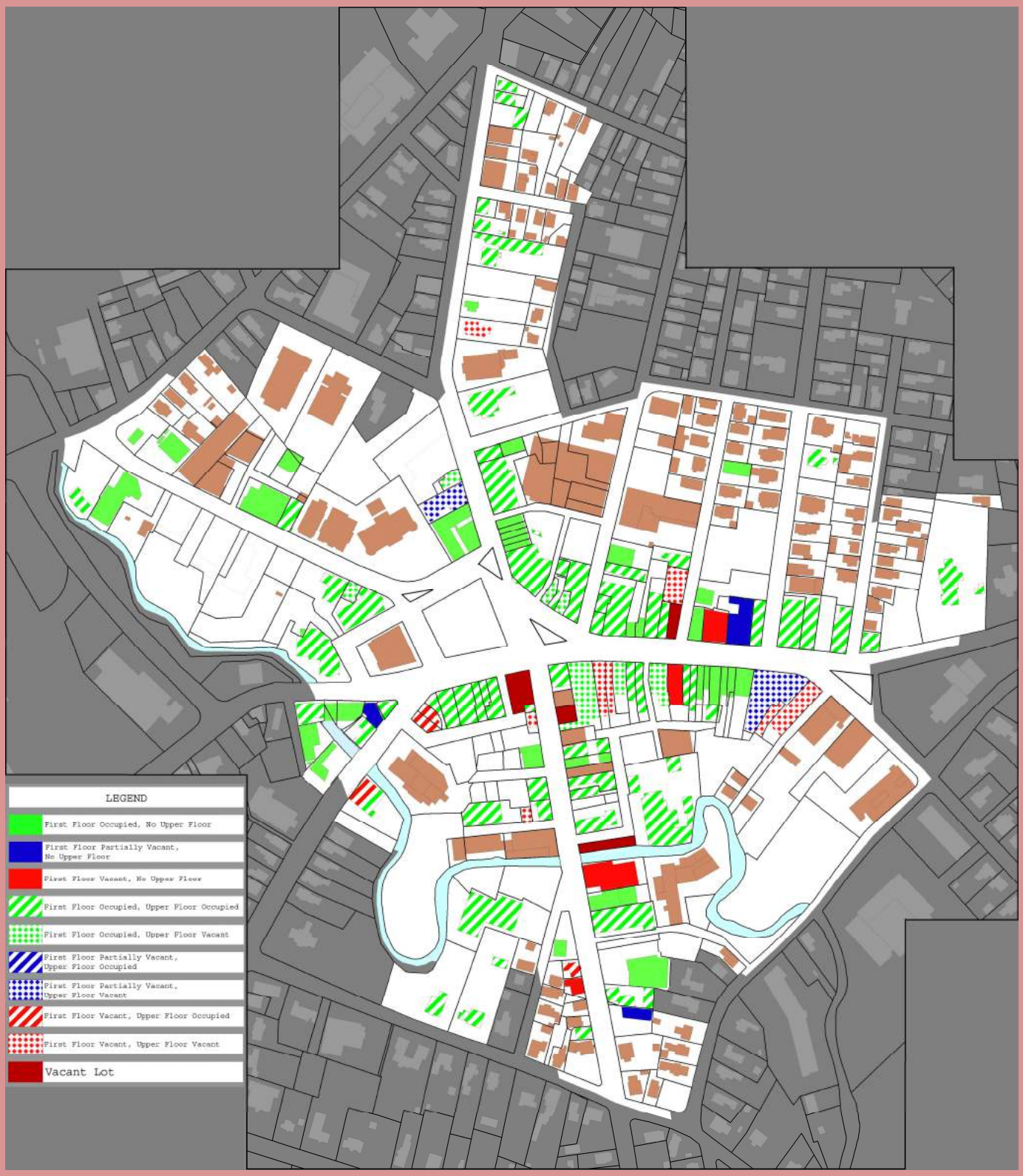
In conducting this study for the City of Taunton, the research team was asked to not only assess the level of vacancy in Downtown Taunton, but also to create an inventory of available space that the city could use in efforts to attract potential investors, determine opportunities for parcel development and assembly, and measure the effectiveness of its efforts to fill vacant space with prospective tenants. In constructing this vacancy inventory for the city, the research team naturally created a database of all properties in the Central Business District (CBD) that included a variety of data and information culled from property cards accessed through the city's online Geographic Information System (GIS), as well as first-hand observations made over the course of several visits to Downtown Taunton.

In performing this vacancy inventory, the research team focused its energy on those properties that were currently used for or possessed the potential to contain commercial activity, as these properties were of the greatest interest to the city due to their economic redevelopment potential. As such, efforts to measure the level of vacancy in Downtown Taunton began with a survey of all properties with street-level storefronts. It is important to note that in its description and mapping of storefront vacancies, there were several properties that possessed more than one available storefront. As a result, some properties are coded "partially" vacant, which means that while at least one store front may be currently filled, others are vacant. The property database developed by the research team for the city contains the number of storefronts at each property as well as the number of vacancies observed. In some cases, despite have multiple storefronts, there are properties that are entirely vacant at the street-level. Efforts to estimate the level of vacancy on upper floors were limited to external visual inspections by the research team, interviews with individuals working in lower-level establishments, or observations of activity by members of the research team over several days.

Downtown Taunton currently has 280 properties, representing a mix of public and private, residential and commercial, and government and non-profit interests. Of these properties, 44 are currently occupied by federal, municipal, state, or county offices, which means that there are 237 properties in the downtown that are privately owned. In addition, while 14 properties are occupied by non-profit organization, including churches and other religious establishments, 98 properties are currently used for residential purposes, including a mix of properties that contain single- and multi-family units. This leaves a total of 125 properties that possess some level of (or potential for) commercial/retail activity.

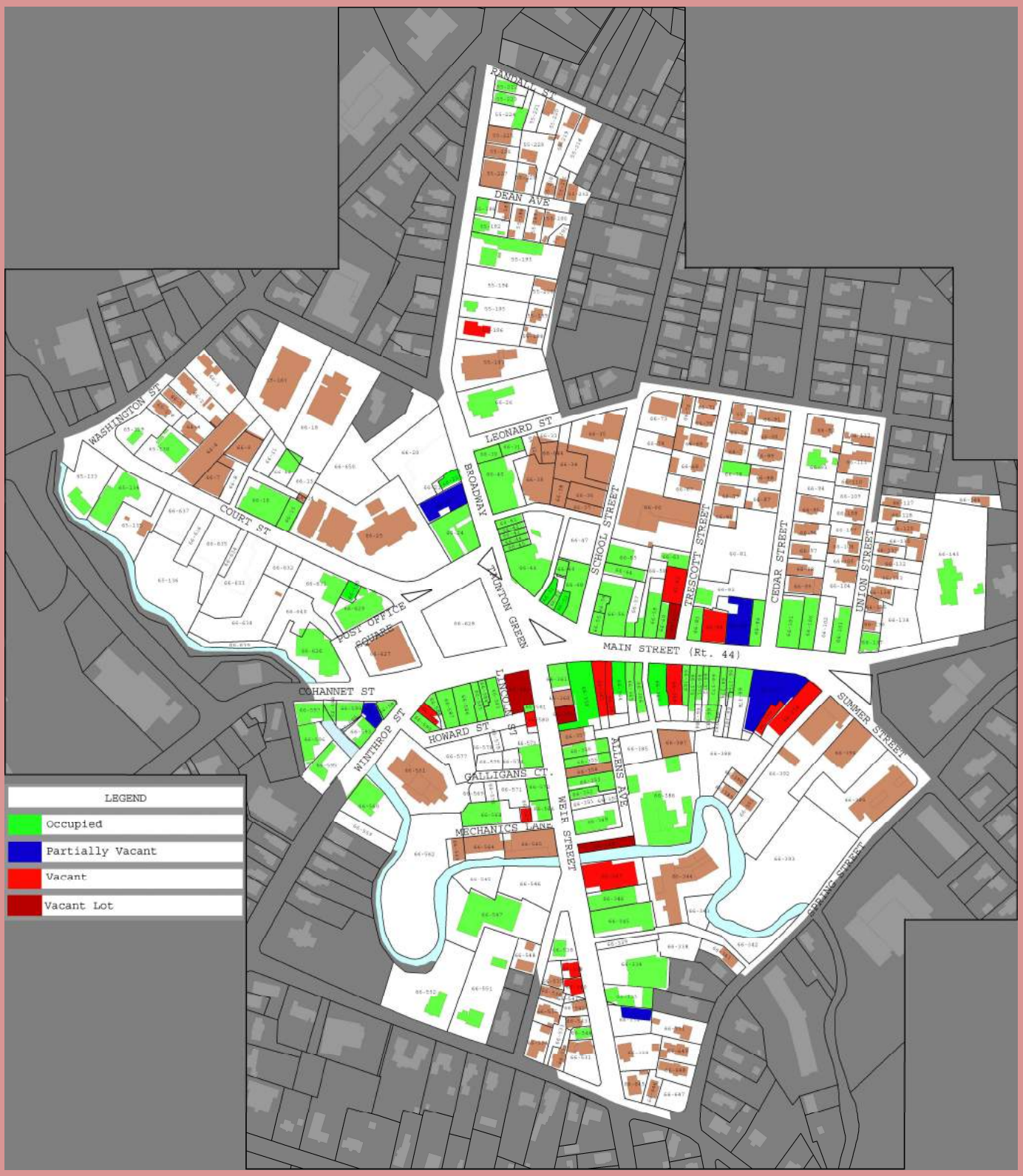
Focusing solely on these commercial properties, the research team estimates that there are 30 properties in the downtown that have some level of vacancy that exist either on the upper floors, lower floor, or both. Of these 30 properties, seven have vacancies on both the lower and upper floors. In addition, nine properties have vacancies limited to the street level, and eight properties have vacancies that exist solely on the upper floor. Another type of vacancy that exists in Downtown Taunton are vacant parcels that once contained buildings but that are currently covered with grass, trees, brush or concrete. There are four properties in the CBD that fall within this category, and they occupy highly visible locations along several main streets. Figure 35 identifies commercial properties in the CBD that have one or multiple floors, and also indicates the level and type of vacancy for each property according to color and stripe pattern. In addition, Figure 36 is limited to only those properties with street-level vacancies, and Figure 37 identifies those properties that only have upper level vacancies.

Figure 35: *Downtown Taunton Commercial Property Vacancies*



In addition to assessing vacancies throughout the entire CBD, as defined by the city's zoning maps, the research team was interested in assessing vacancies for those properties that were closest to the Taunton Green, as well as those that possessed storefronts along the main streets that pass through the downtown. The research team believes that this area represents Downtown Taunton's core and offers the city a zone within which to focus energy so as to spark additional development in nearby properties.

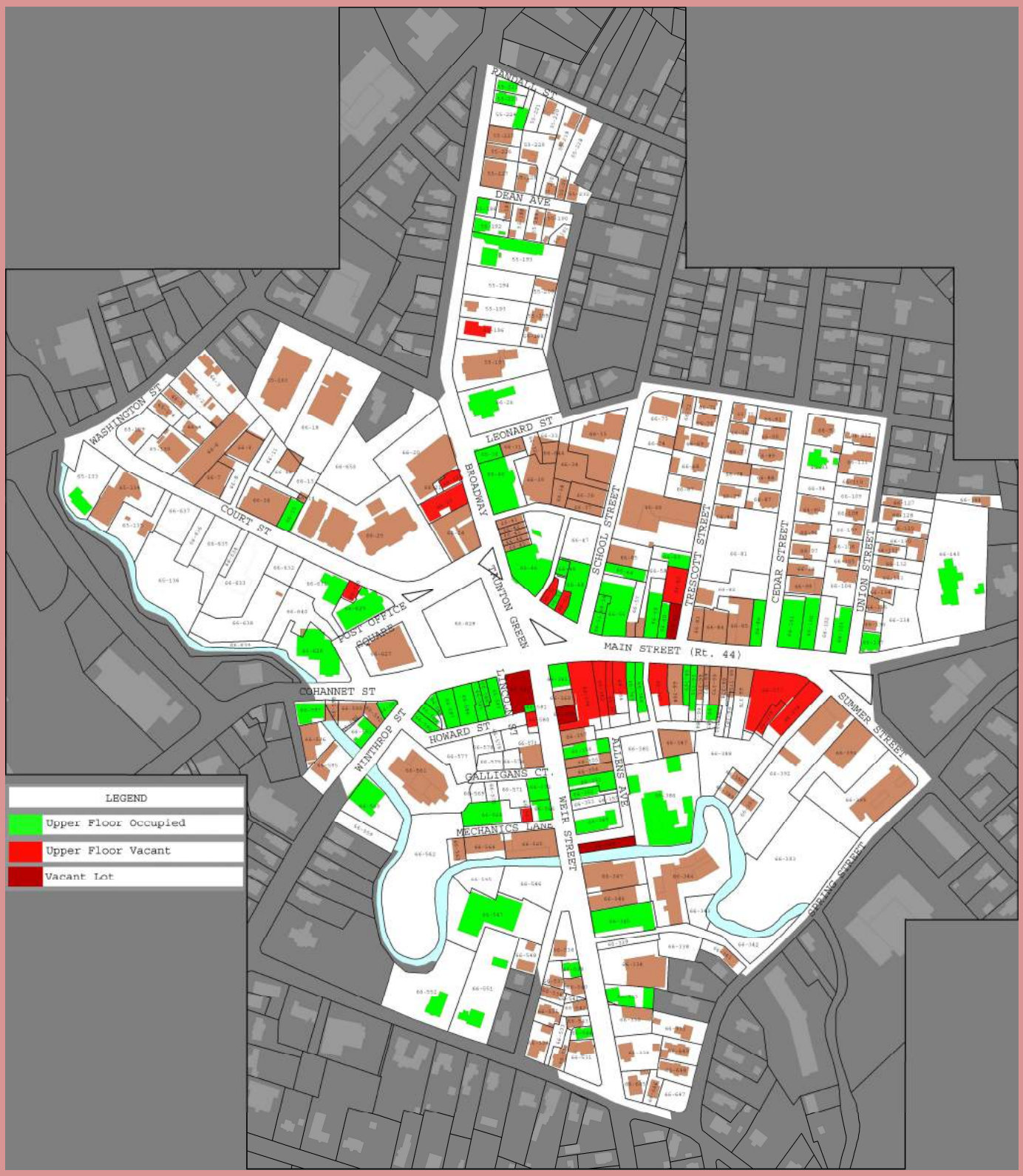
Figure 36: ***Downtown Taunton Street-Level Commercial Property Vacancies***



The density within this zone undoubtedly presents an opportunity to create a domino development effect if the city's efforts are coordinated, targeted, and strategic.

Within this zone there are a total of 92 properties; eight are currently occupied by federal, state, municipal, or county agencies, and two other properties are used by non-profit organizations. The vast majority of properties in this zone (84.7 percent) are currently

Figure 37: ***Downtown Taunton Upper-Level Commercial Property Vacancies***

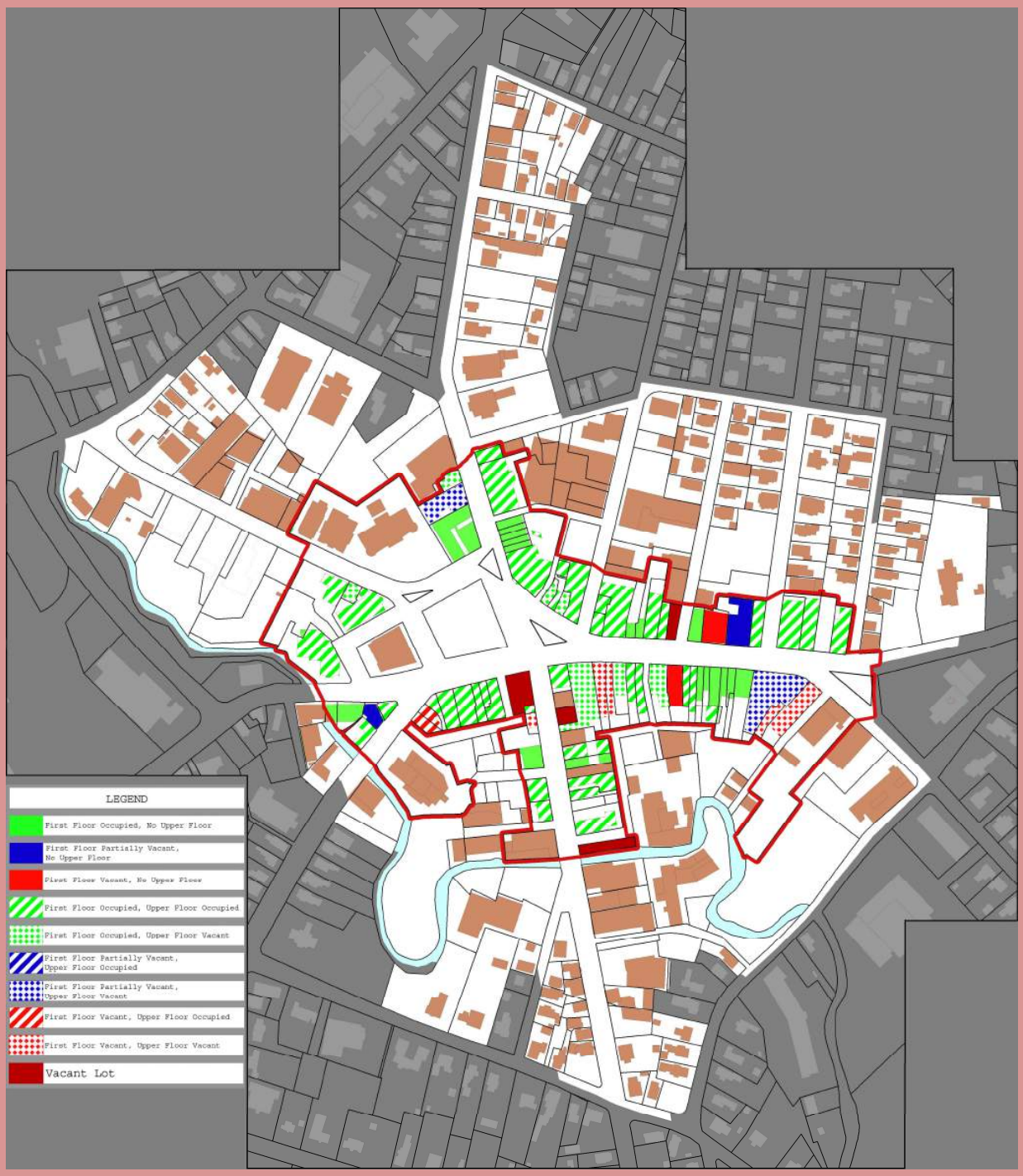


used for or possess the potential to be used for commercial activity. In fact, these 78 commercial properties represent 62.4 percent of all commercial properties in the entire Central Business District. Of the 78 commercial properties in this zone, 25 are currently vacant at some level. As mentioned previously, the entire CBD has 30 properties with vacancies. As such, these 25 properties represent more than three-fourths of all vacancies located throughout the CBD. These two factors alone make this an area that warrants

significant analysis and attention. In addition to the level of vacancy that exists in this zone, the city must consider the types of vacancies that exist. Of the 25 properties with some form of vacancy, fourteen have vacancies at the street level. Additionally, the four previously-identified vacant parcels in the downtown are also located within this zone. Two of these lots are located right on Main Street, with the other two not far from the Taunton Green on Weir Street (see Figure 38).

Considering the volume of traffic through this area and the number of people who walk the sidewalks along this zone in order to access the various commercial and retail establishments and government offices, the research team recommends that efforts to reduce the number of vacancies begin with a concerted effort in this downtown core area. This would serve two goals: first, reducing vacancy levels, and second, improving the downtown's image.

Figure 38: ***Downtown Taunton Core with Identified Property Vacancies***



Chapter 5: Downtown Taunton Parking Resource Inventory & Utilization

1 Background

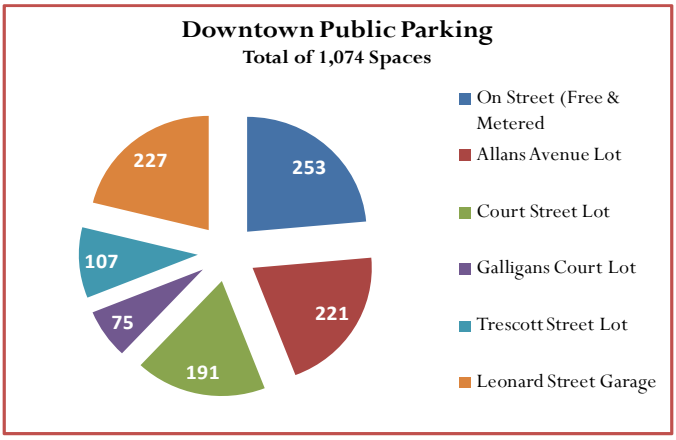
The City of Taunton has a well-defined downtown (or Central Business District) with a variety of available on- and off-street parking resources and facilities. The Central Business District (CBD) encompasses an area that spans from Randal Street in the north to High Street in the south and from the Taunton River in the west to Spring and Summer Streets in the east. Aside from possessing a good quantity of parking spaces, the downtown also offers a useful mix of parking resources that include free on-and off-street parking, metered parking, handicapped parking, and 15-, 30-, and 60-minute free on-street parking.

In terms of parking management, the City of Taunton has a seven-member Parking Commission whose principal jurisdiction encompasses the downtown area, including all of its on- and off-street parking. Prior to the establishment of the Commission in early 2008, the downtown's parking garage, lots, and metered spaces were managed by the City's Police Department. Although the creation of the Parking Commission ushered in several significant changes with regards to the management of parking resources and revenues, enforcement of parking regulations and issuance of fines continue to be the responsibility of the Police Department. While the Parking Commission collects revenues from the on-street meters and fees paid at the Leonard Street Garage and Court Street surface lot, the Police Department continues to have the authority to issue tickets and collect fines. The research team has observed in local news articles that city officials would like to eventually transfer this authority to the Parking Commission so that it might be able to hire full-time "meter monitors" to handle the responsibility of issuing fines. Realization of these plans is currently pending negotiations with the city's police union.

The purpose of this chapter is provide the city and downtown stakeholders with data for use in future planning efforts relative to parking.

2 Downtown Parking Resource Inventory

Within Taunton's downtown district, the research team counted a total of 1,312 parking spaces, of which 1,074 are open to public use and use by handicapped drivers. Unpacking this data further, the CBD contains four city-owned public surface lots and one parking garage that provide a total of 1,046 parking spaces, 821 of which are open to the public and handicapped drivers. This includes 107 spaces in the Trescott Street lot, 75 spaces in the Galligans Court lot, 221 spaces in the Allans Avenue lot, 191 spaces in the Court Street lot, and 227 spaces in the Leonard Street Garage. Aside from the CBD's off-street parking resources, it also contains 266 on-street parking spaces that offer both public and restricted access. Of these spaces, 253 are open to public use, which included a variety of metered, free, and handicapped spaces. Among these spaces, 212 of them (83.8 percent) are metered.



On-Street Parking Inventory. Figure 39 provides a complete inventory of on-street parking in Downtown Taunton. Altogether, there are 266 on-street parking spaces. Of these, 253 are open to public use and the remaining 13 spaces are reserved for municipal vehicles, taxis, and delivery vehicles. In addition, this number includes the 212 metered spaces that are located throughout the Central Business District. Figure 39 on the next page shows the distribution of parking spaces graphically.

There are also several streets within the CBD with the potential for on-street parking spaces that currently do not have on-street parking or have restricted on-street parking. Streets that have no regulated parking spaces include Lincoln Street, Union Street, Spring Street, High Street, Dean Avenue, Fruit Street, and Washington Street. Hill Street currently has "No Parking" signs posted.

Off-Street Parking Inventory. The City of Taunton currently operates four surface parking lots and one two-story parking garage. Three

Figure 39: *Downtown Taunton On-Street Parking Resources*

	Meter Space	60 Min. Free	30 Min. Free	Handicap Space	Taxi Stand	Delivery	15 Min. Free	15 Min. Handicap	Reserved	Free	Total
Court Street	17			1							18
King's Court	5										5
Broadway (Rt. 138)	17	9	3	2							31
Leonard Street	3			1							4
Cedar Street	10			1							11
Trescott Street	5				1						6
School Street	6				1	1					8
Weir Street	37					2					39
Winthrop Street	8										8
Cohannet Street	11			1			5				17
Main Street (Rt. 44)	47			1				1			49
Post Office Square	12						5				17
Taunton Green	24			1	2						27
Randall Street			3								3
Summer Street	10			2					1		13
Howard Street									5	5	10
Total	**212**	**9**	**6**	**10**	**4**	**3**	**10**	**1**	**6**	**5**	**266**

of the city's surface parking lots are free and have no attendants present, while the Court Street lot and the Leonard Street Garage require parking motorists to pay a fee. Altogether, Downtown Taunton has a total of 1,046 parking spaces located within these five parking facilities. Of these, 821 are open to the public and handicapped drivers while the remaining 225 spaces are either private, municipal, or otherwise reserved spaces. Of these 821 off-street spaces, 403 are offered at no charge to motorists, while the remaining 418 require a fee for use.

The Trescott Street surface parking lot offers 107 parking spaces. Of these, 103 are open to the public and 4 are reserved for handicapped motorists. There is currently no charge or time limit for parking in this lot.

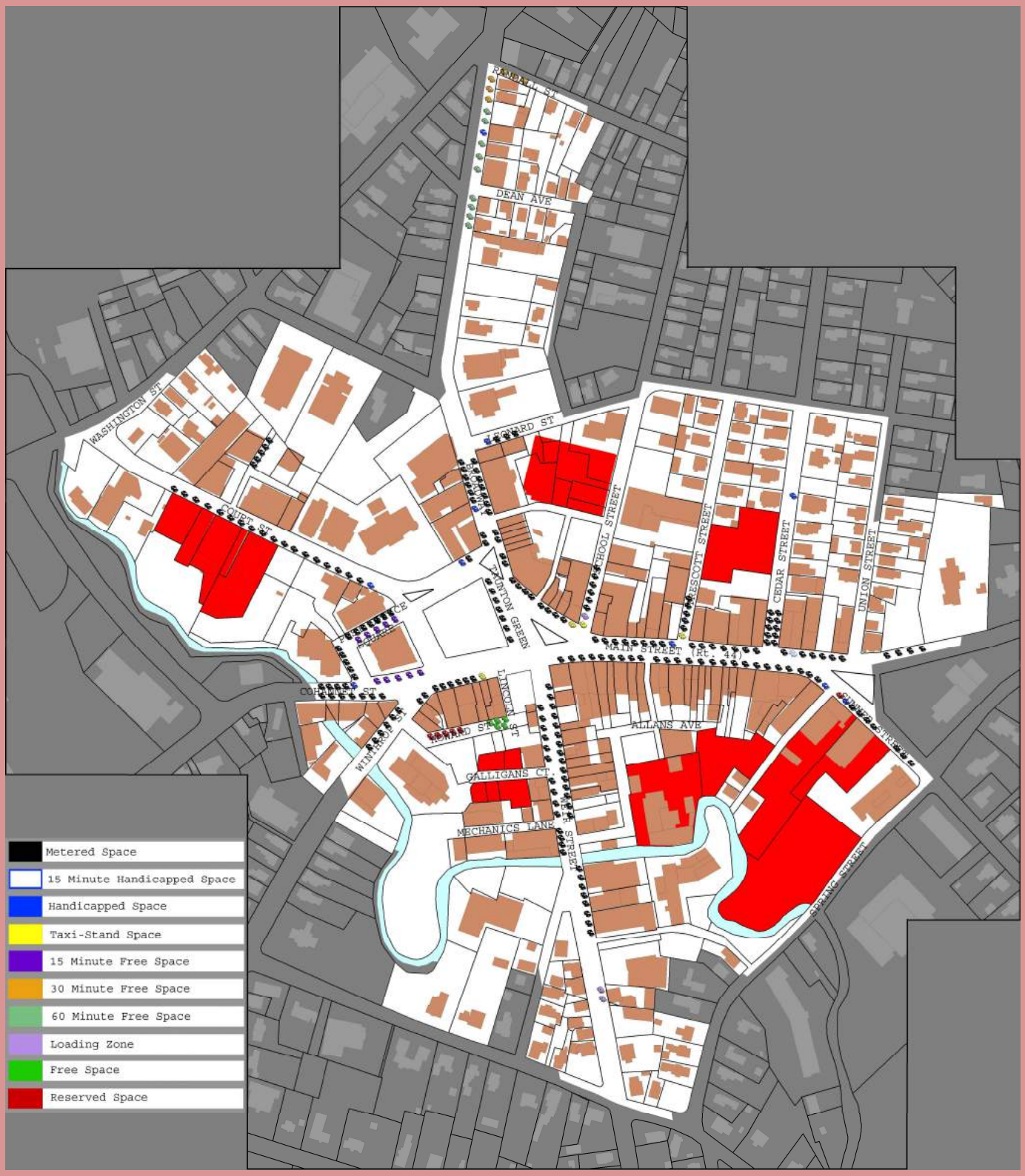
The Galligans Court surface parking lot offers 79 parking spaces, of which 68 are open, seven are designated as handicapped parking spaces and four are posted as reserved for the Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant (TMLP). The four TMLP signs occupy an area that covers six spaces, however, implying that all six are reserved for TMLP vehicles. There is currently no charge or time limit for parking in this lot.

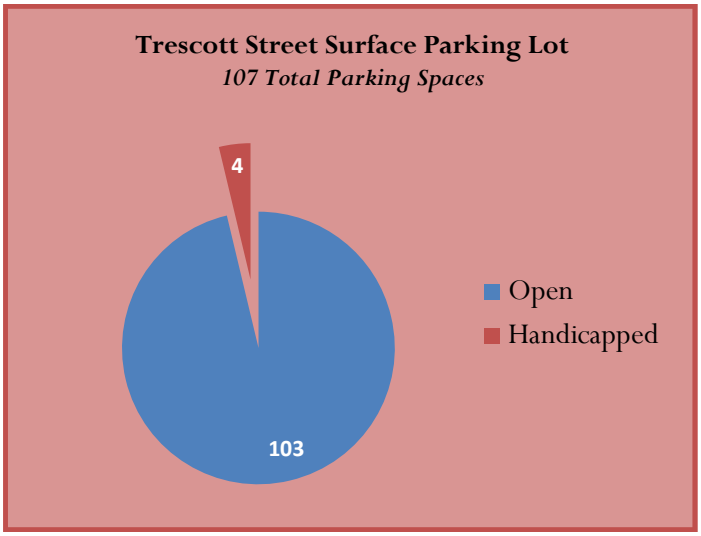
The Allans Avenue surface parking lot offers approximately 408 parking spaces. Of these, 211 appear to be open to the public, 101 are posted private spaces, 14 are reserved for police vehicles, 11 are reserved for ambulance parking, 10 are designated as handicapped parking spaces, and six are reserved for municipal vehicles. In the southwest corner of the parking lot there is a fenced-in surface lot, presumably for Police Department use, with space for approximately 20 vehicles. Also within the Allans Avenue parking lot is a small, privately-owned and unattended parking lot that offers approximately 35 parking spaces. The posted rate for parking there is $2 per hour, $10 per day, or $25 per month. Aside from this private lot, there is currently no charge to park in the public spaces or a time limit for use.

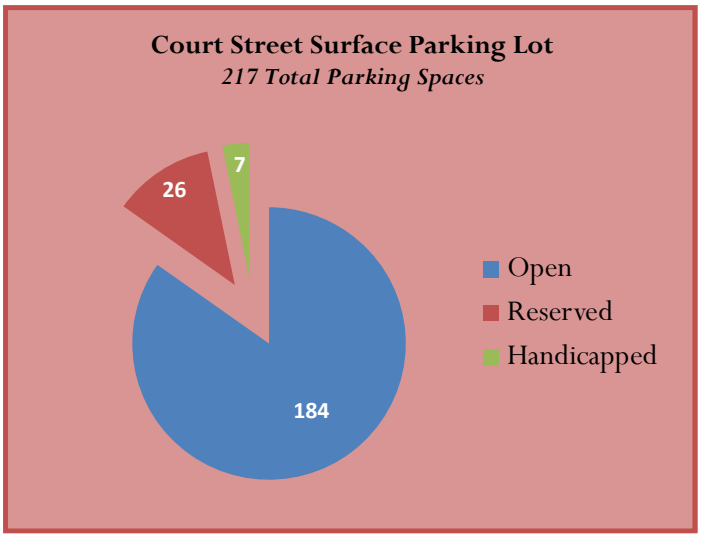
The Court Street surface parking lot offers 217 parking spaces, of which 184 spaces are open, 26 are reserved for employees of the Taunton Registry of Deeds and seven are designated as handicapped parking spaces. A parking attendant occupies a booth at the entrance of the lot, as there is a charge for parking in this lot. A space in the Court Street lot costs $5 for four hours or $30 per month, regardless of residency. After the first four hours, a space costs an additional 50 cents per hour. The lot is monitored from 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. and offers free parking on the weekends.

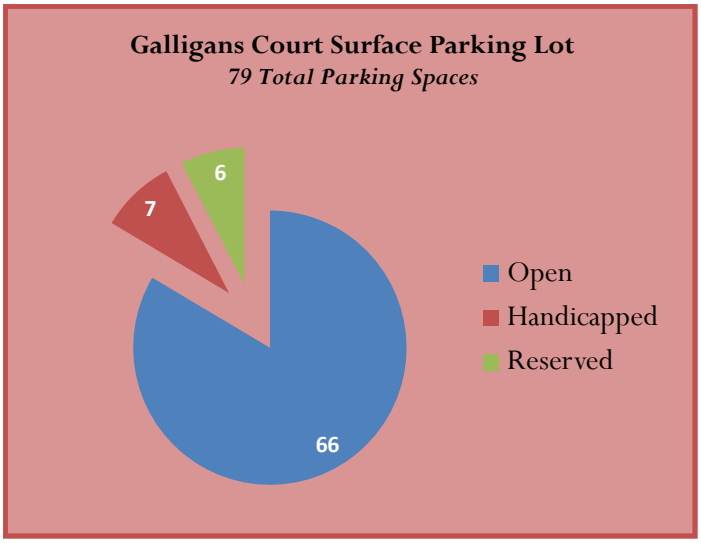
The Leonard Street parking garage was constructed around 1985.

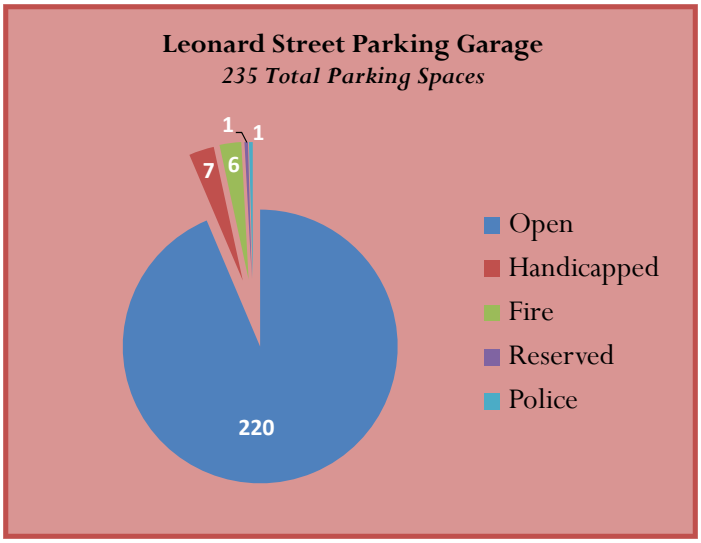
Figure 40: *Downtown Taunton On-Street Parking Resources*

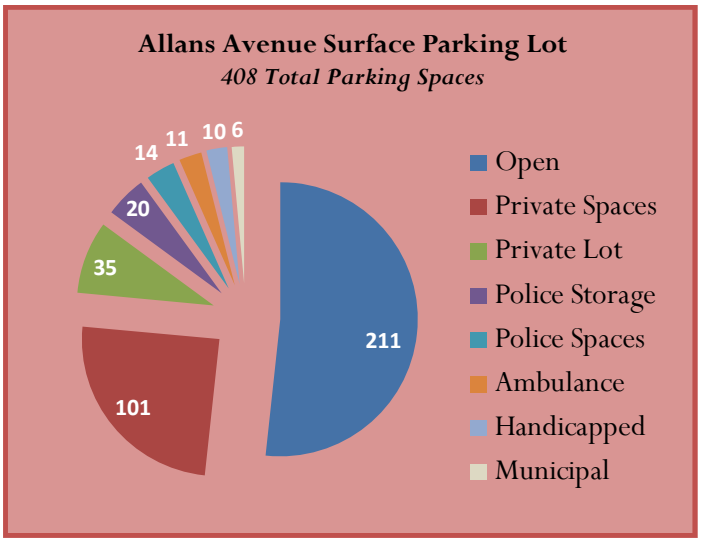












It is a two-story garage that offers 235 parking spaces. Of these, 220 are open to the public, seven are designated as handicapped spaces, six are reserved for Fire Department vehicles, one is reserved for the Police Department, and one is reserved for the parking booth attendant. A parking space in the Leonard Street garage is free for the first hour. After the first hour the rate increases to $1 per hour, with a maximum charge of $10 per day. Individuals can also pay $30 per month to utilize the garage regardless of residency. The garage is monitored from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and offers free parking on the weekends.

3 Downtown Parking Utilization Analysis

A parking occupancy/utilization survey was conducted during the fourth week of February 2009. On Monday, February 23; Wednesday, February 25; and Friday, February 27, the research team counted public on- and off-street parking space occupancy in Taunton's Central Business District every two hours, from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., for a total of six counts per day. The route was

replicated during each of the three days studied to maintain consistency. The survey excluded municipal parking spaces, spaces belonging to private businesses, taxi stand parking spaces, and other reserved parking spaces.

The survey recorded occupancy of metered and unmetered on-street parking spaces, free and paid off-street public parking lots, and the Leonard Street parking garage. The survey collected information on parking usage only. Therefore, parking demand by block cannot be determined with this type of survey. It is assumed that traffic flows and occupancy are constant on similar types of days and during similar times of the day.

The occupancy survey revealed trends in parking volume and space utilization. On each of the days studied, occupancy rate trends remained similar. After 8:00 a.m., occupancy increased, then peaked at somewhere between 50 and 60 percent utilization from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. After 2:00 p.m., utilization rates decreased steadily across each day.

Total CBD Parking Occupancy. On Monday, February 23, 2009, occupancy in the CBD began at 38.0 percent at 8:00 a.m. before increasing to a high of 61.3 percent at 10:00 a.m. Occupancy remained above 55 percent from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. before decreasing to 33.3 percent at 4:00 p.m. and 17.8 percent by 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 41).[1]

On Wednesday, February 25, 2009, occupancy in the CBD began at 33.8 percent at 8:00 a.m. before increasing to a high of 61.6 percent at 10:00 a.m. Occupancy remained above 54 percent from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. before decreasing gradually to 38.6 percent at 4:00 p.m. and 16.7 percent at 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 41).

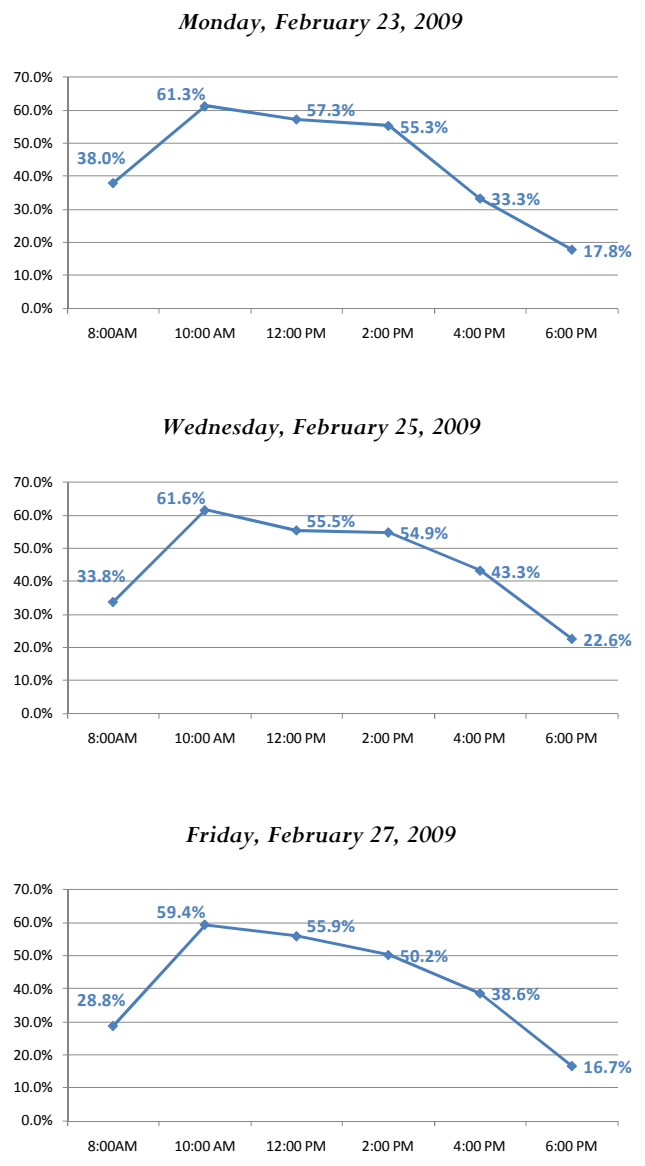
On Friday, February 27, 2009, the occupancy rate in the CBD was 28.8 percent at 8:00 a.m. before increasing to a high of 59.4 percent at 10:00 a.m. Utilization remained above 50 percent until after 2:00 p.m. By 4:00 p.m., the rate had decreased to 38.6 percent and 16.7 percent by 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 41).

On each of the three days studied, occupancy rates remained similar throughout the day with utilization peaking at 10:00 a.m. and continuing through 2:00 p.m. and then decreasing steadily throughout the afternoon.

On-Street Parking Utilization Analysis. On Monday, February 23, 2009, occupancy rates for on-street parking spaces in the CBD were as follows: at 8:00 a.m., the occupancy rate was 19.9 percent, increasing to a high of 44.7 percent at 10:00 a.m. Occupancy remained above 39 percent from 10:00 am until 2:00 p.m. After 2:00 p.m., utilization rates trended downward before settling at approximately 30 percent from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 42 on the next page).

On Wednesday, February 25, 2009, utilization rates for on-street parking spaces were as follows: at 8:00 a.m., the occupancy rate was 24.4 percent, increasing to a high of 53.4 percent at 10:00 a.m.

Figure 41: *Total Central Business District Parking Space Occupancy*



Occupancy remained above 50 percent from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. before decreasing to 41.4 percent at 4:00 p.m. and then increasing slightly to 44.7 percent at 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 42).

On Friday, February 27, 2009, occupancy rates for on-street parking spaces began at 28.2 percent at 8:00 a.m., increasing to a high of 53.8 percent at 12:00 p.m. Utilization rates remained at approximately 53 percent from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. After 12:00 p.m., rates began to decrease and held at 42.5 percent between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. By 6:00 p.m., the utilization rate had decreased further to 33.1 percent. (see Figure 42).

1. At 12:30 p.m. on Monday, February 23, 2009, an underground electrical fire closed a number of parking spaces along Main Street. The research team continued to conduct its occupancy survey and advises readers that occupancy rates measured between 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Monday were approximately 12 percent lower than rates measured on Wednesday, February 25 and Friday, February 27. Despite this, rates on Wednesday and Friday were quite similar.

Figure 42: *On-Street Parking Space Occupancy*

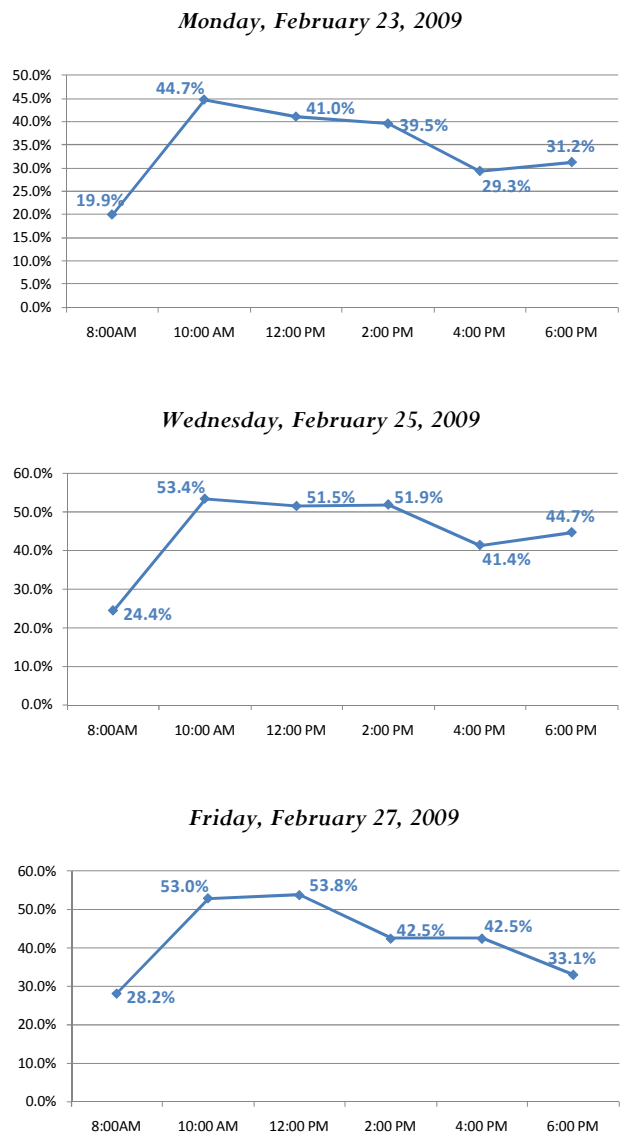
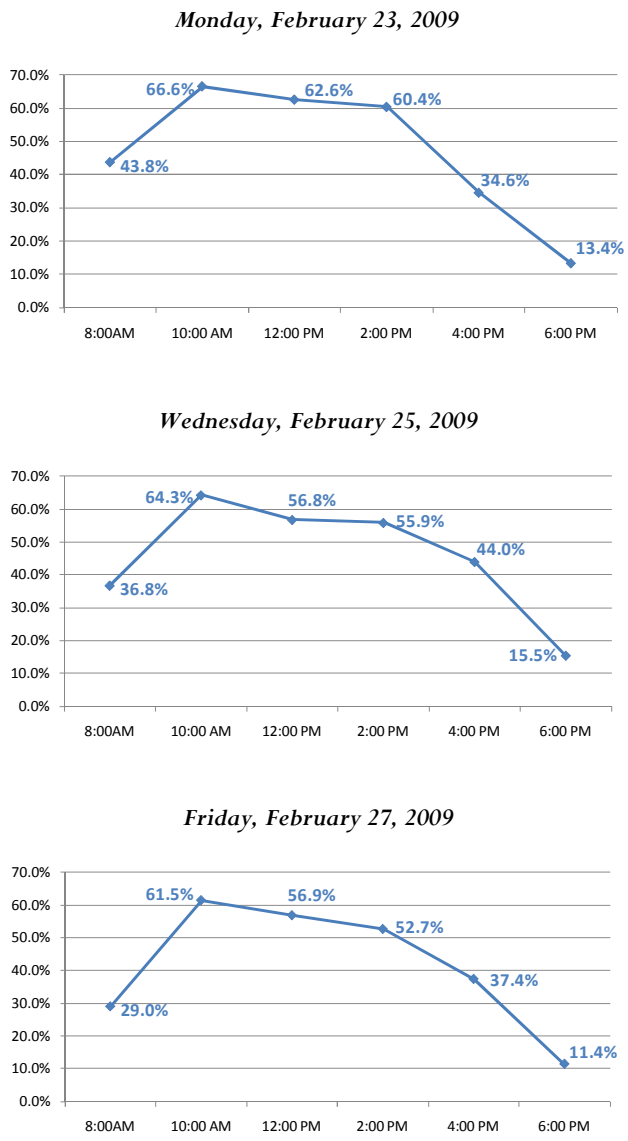


Figure 43: *Off-Street Parking Space Utilization Rates*



On each of the days studied, occupancy remained similar throughout the day, with occupancy peaking at around 10:00 a.m. and remaining steady through 2:00 p.m., then decreasing gradually throughout the afternoon. On Monday and Wednesday, however, the research team observed higher rates at 6:00 p.m. than at 4:00 p.m.

Off-Street Parking Utilization Analysis. On Monday, February 23, 2009, occupancy rates for off-street parking spaces in the CBD were as follows: at 8:00 a.m., the utilization rate was 43.8 percent, increasing to a high of 66.6 percent at 10:00 a.m. Occupancy remained above 60 percent from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. before decreasing sharply throughout the afternoon. At 4:00 p.m. utilization was 34.6 percent and 13.4 percent at 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 43).

On Wednesday, February 25, 2009, occupancy rates for off-street parking spaces in the CBD were as follows: at 8:00 a.m., the occupancy rate was 36.8 percent, increasing to a high of 64.3 percent at 10:00 a.m. Occupancy remained slightly above 55 percent from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. before decreasing to 44.0 percent at 4:00 p.m. and 15.5 percent at 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 43).

On Friday, February 27, 2009, occupancy rates for off-street parking began at 29.0 percent at 8:00 a.m. and increased to a high of 61.5 percent at 10:00 a.m. From 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., utilization rates remained above 50 percent before decreasing to 37.4 percent at 4:00 p.m. and 11.4 percent at 6:00 p.m. (see Figure 43).

On each of the days studied, occupancy remained similar throughout the day, with occupancy peaking at 10:00 a.m. and remaining steady until 2:00 p.m. After 2:00 p.m. utilization rates trended downward throughout the afternoon.

Chapter 6: Partnerships for Redevelopment

1 Background

In Chapter 2 of this report, the research team emphasized the need for short- and long-term leadership in Downtown Taunton. Each form of leadership is unique in its purpose and mission, and requires the participation of a variety of prospective actors and partners. The following section focuses more specifically on long-term leadership and the shape that this leadership structure can take, due to the various organizations and agencies already existing in Taunton, and the potential for establishing new partnerships and associations that can sustain a downtown revitalization effort. Recall that in the section of Chapter 2 defining "long-term leadership," the research team stated that this leadership can be manifested in a variety of ways and that across the world, communities have developed some innovative and novel approaches to organizational leadership structure in an effort to continuously and professionally manage and maintain their revitalization effort.

The research team recognizes that the model and approach eventually adopted by a community rests in the hands of those stakeholders who must support it, finance it, and voluntarily participate in its decision-making processes. Local self-determination, however, should not preclude stakeholders from considering independent research and analysis that, while potentially viewed by some as threatening or controversial, could produce significant positive results for the entire downtown. As such, in performing an assessment of partnerships, the following section outlines the research team's recommendations relative to the establishment of a new Downtown Development Partnership and the role that various entities, organizations, municipal agencies, and private sector interests can play within the context of this Partnership.

The importance of developing a strong, effective partnership in pursuit of revitalizing Downtown Taunton cannot be overstated. The only route to successful revitalization is the one that seeks to bring together entities from the public, private, and non-profit sectors to work toward the common goal of an enhanced, vibrant, and energetic Downtown Taunton.

While significant interest and expertise exists within various stakeholder organizations, partnerships need overarching leadership and an organizational structure that can ensure its effectiveness and maximize efforts towards achieving a common goal. As such, clear objectives and well-defined roles for each partner are essential. Finally, each member of the downtown partnership must ensure that it is prepared to carry out its assigned role and be open to fresh thinking and new ideas.

Efforts to redevelop a downtown cannot simply strive to restore the downtown of the past, given the expansion of shopping and commercial spaces in suburban malls and outlying areas. Thriving downtowns must be places where commercial activity intersects with office space, entertainment and dining venues, housing, and service-oriented businesses, as well as green space and recreational opportunities. Moreover, developing a downtown that encompasses this level of diversity will require a partnership with just as diverse an array of talents and expertise.

Need for Specialization and Fresh Perspectives

The various stakeholders in the Downtown Taunton revitalization effort represent a significant array of skills, experiences, and resources. It is important to fully engage each of these partners and identify the meaningful role each can assume. However, many of these partners share personnel, staff, or executive board members, which poses a potential barrier to role clarification and task implementation as individuals may possess conflicting interests or a lack of focus. In addition, past conflicts and a need for innovative thinking must be addressed as part of a renewed revitalization effort.

Where possible, various stakeholder organizations should seek out new individuals to compliment those with years of experience. If those currently involved can be encouraged to narrow their focus to more specific roles, opportunities for a greater array of participation from the community will arise. Doing so will also attract fresh ideas and allow greater opportunity to keep the focus on pressing tasks and prevent the resurfacing of old grudges, resentment, or conflicts.

The Entrepreneurial Holding Company: A Model for Downtown Taunton

While partnerships often work as informal arrangements, it is recommended that the identified short-term leadership, defined in Chapter 2 of this report, formalize partnership agreements between the various downtown stakeholder groups. These agreements should define roles for each partner, outline decision-making structures, detail the tasks to be accomplished, and identify accountability measures to ensure progress. By combining the effort and resources of each partner the city can advance the cause of downtown redevelopment in a far more effective way.

There are several national and international models of organizational structures used in downtown redevelopment efforts that have proven effective. The research team's analysis of various approaches has led to the identification of the more sophisticated "Entrepreneurial Holding Company" model as an appropriate organizational structure for a Downtown Development Partnership. In an article for *Urban Land* entitled "A New Generation of Downtown Management Organizations," downtown development consultant M. Bradley Segal identifies the Entrepreneurial Holding Company model as a "multidimensional public-private partnership" that "goes beyond the traditional promotional emphasis" and "provides a variety of services and functions, including advocacy of downtown interests, planning to establish and implement a downtown vision, acting as a development catalyst … and managing the downtown environment, including security, maintenance, marketing, and parking." Moreover, within the entrepreneurial holding company is a combination of subsidiaries to meet the diverse challenges associated with downtown redevelopment. These subsidiaries can include a membership organization, a downtown development corporation, a management district, an events corporation, or a parking corporation (Segal 1998, 86-7). For Taunton, such a model would provide an improved context for the formulation of a downtown vision and the kind of shared leadership that has been lacking. It would also incorporate many of the existing entities and organizations as well as those that the City is currently contemplating. Such a model would maximize the talent and expertise that already exists while providing a greater definition for each partner's role.

While forming partnerships may be easy in principle, maintaining them can be much more difficult in practice. By providing some general rules for governing partnerships and an assessment of the strengths of current and potential partners, this report can serve as a guide for the effective use of resources that are already available and the potential resources that a new partnership can yield.

Partnership Roles

To ensure the success of Downtown Taunton, it is vital that a standard for growth and development be established. Several factors, such as neglect, poor market conditions, and the relocation of retail venues, have hindered the downtown's growth and development for many years. Despite this, the downtown still possesses many of the attributes necessary for successful revitalization. Furthermore, each partner has a role to play and the following section assesses each one's potential contributions.

Sustaining success in the Downtown requires a focus on the long term, as well as the capacity to adapt to relevant changes in economic and market conditions. Success can therefore be measured by the downtown's ability to meet the needs of the city, its residents, and its stakeholders. As such, the partners identified are assessed for their ability to contribute to the downtown's continued success.

The following list of current and potential partners is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather represents those currently involved in the downtown, as well as several potential partners that could be of help in implementing some of the fundamental suggestions identified in this report. Unless a specific leadership function is identified, the order of each entity is not indicative of a hierarchy but rather a network of partnerships.

The following section not only speaks to the qualities of each potential partner but does so within the context of the larger, collaborative partnership necessary to achieve the common goal of downtown revitalization. This partnership should evolve over the course of two phases: an initial phase (over the next 12 to 24 months) that establishes the conditions for success, and a second phase that forms the longer-lasting Downtown Development Partnership that will drive the revitalization well into the future.

2 Key Partner Entities

The City of Taunton

Several agencies within Taunton's municipal government have the potential to be integral partners in a downtown revitalization effort. These city agencies can assume a vital role in the short-term efforts leading toward the development of a longer-lasting downtown development partnership. The city's administration, working with the support of the Office of Economic and Community Development, should begin establishing the long-term leadership partnership required for a successful revitalization effort. Once this is established, the city's administration must be willing to relinquish the leadership role and assume the role of a partner.

The Mayor's Office. The Office of the Mayor has the ability to provide the short-term leadership necessary for a successful revitalization effort. As the city's chief executive officer, the Mayor should be at the forefront of the revitalization effort, showing that downtown revitalization is a major priority for the city, while at the same time working to rally support and build consensus among the various partners and downtown stakeholders. Mayor Crowley is well-positioned to lead the revitalization effort, as he has shown significant support for initiatives and projects that seek to improve the downtown. However, it is vital that the Office of the Mayor move beyond supporting individual efforts and initiatives, as a successful downtown rebirth will require the ability to envision and plan for the long term.

In addition to providing such leadership and vision, the Mayor's Office holds the ability to guide the municipal investments required for the physical and infrastructure improvements that can attract and inspire private investors. While the private sector might be interested in becoming involved in downtown leadership planning, many of these stakeholders have made it clear that additional financial investments made on their part are contingent on having a city government committed to providing equal financial support for downtown improvements.

A successful downtown revitalization effort will also require the support of Taunton's taxpayers, which the Mayor is capable of potentially influencing. The Mayor will be largely responsible for convincing Taunton's residents that the benefits of a successful

downtown extend to all city residents. All residents and business owners need to be persuaded that they benefit from the expenditure of city resources in the downtown. The Mayor must also, through policy initiatives, directives, executive orders, and ordinance changes, convey to city employees and department heads that they should also consider the community-wide benefit to assisting, rather than obstructing, development in a way that is consistent with the community goal of having and maintaining a vital downtown.

In his role as the city's chief executive, the Mayor is also able to influence two vitally important factors in downtown redevelopment: permitting and parking. The Mayor should work with private sector interests and other members of the proposed Downtown Partnership to identify barriers to development in the downtown, most notably the complex permitting process. Feedback collected by the research team suggests that the current system tends to have a dampening effect on development, due to the confusing and often counter-intuitive nature of the special permit process.

The Mayor is also able to spearhead an initiative to improve parking in the downtown, including the transfer of all parking enforcement powers to the Parking Commission. Additionally, other efforts to improve the efficiency and organization of parking in the downtown, such as the redesign and repaving of downtown municipal surface lots, will require the support of the city's Mayor.

The Mayor's position as the city's chief executive carries with it a large number of responsibilities, but the creation of a long-term leadership partnership will provide the assistance and support required for a successful redevelopment effort. These suggested recommendations are meant to transcend term limits and individual mayoral administrations and be implemented and sustained by whomever occupies the mayor's office. In addition, they should be carried out using an approach that is collaborative and involves both public and private partners dedicated to the cause of a revitalized downtown.

The Office of Economic & Community Development. The Office of Economic and Community Development (OECD), working on behalf of the Mayor's Office and the City of Taunton, should take the lead role in convening available partners during the next eighteen to twenty-four month period. Using the combination of economic and community development tools at its disposal, this agency is uniquely positioned to bring entities together while promoting the notion that downtown redevelopment is equal parts economic development and community building. Additionally, the OECD will play an integral role in many of the tasks ascribed to the Office of the Mayor, due to its areas of expertise and oversight.

Community development is an important part of any downtown redevelopment effort, and is just as important as attracting private investors and new businesses. Improving the downtown's economic climate and bringing additional activity and energy to a downtown provides benefits to business owners and a greater sense of cohesiveness for an entire city, particularly for a city like Taunton, whose neighborhoods revolve around the city's center. A thriving downtown provides a city with a healthy center that serves to support its neighborhoods.

The Community Development Office should take primary responsibility for the planning of public infrastructure investments and the development of public amenities in the downtown. Additionally, due to its role as the conduit for state and federal community development funds, the Community Development Office will play a central role in the distribution of these funds for use in the downtown, particularly those related to housing programs. While there are many programs in place for the development of housing through the Community Development Office, these funding sources should be incorporated into a larger, broad-view plan for the development of a healthy mix of economic activities in the downtown.

The city's Economic Development Office must strive to play a greater role in the downtown redevelopment process. While the Economic Development Office has enjoyed great success in growing and expanding Taunton's industrial base, as evidenced by the success of the Myles Standish Industrial Park and the Liberty and Union Industrial Park, it has been less than successful in attracting developers to Taunton's downtown.

The research team expresses concern over the possibility that the Director of the Office of Economic Development is in a very difficult position and could face competing priorities due to his dual role as both the city's Chief Economic Development Officer and the Executive Director of the Taunton Development Corporation (TDC). The TDC is responsible for marketing and developing the city's two non-profit industrial parks. In doing so, it directs prospective businesses and developers to contact their Executive Director, who is also the head of Economic Development for the entire city. The TDC has a direct link to the city's website and marketing, whereas no such link or marketing message exists specifically for the downtown, or businesses to locate in the downtown. It would appear that the city's Economic Development Director, if contacted by a prospective business, particularly if through the TDC, has a responsibility that may place him at odds with the responsibility of attempting to fill empty downtown storefronts, even if his role with TDC is limited to referring commercial businesses to one of the broader commercial ventures in the Industrial Parks.

While the challenge of managing such competing priorities may not have existed when the focus of industrial park growth was primarily, if not exclusively, industrial, the introduction of broader commercial ventures at the Liberty and Union Industrial Park may have brought about a situation that the city should re-examine and rectify, if necessary, with a restructuring of existing arrangements.

The Economic Development Office should be a key player in any future Downtown Partnership, and hold the primary responsibility for marketing the downtown to prospective businesses and consumers. By utilizing information collected and published in this report about available space and usage issues, as well as collating it and updating it on a regular basis, the Office of Economic Development should be well-equipped to serve as the primary source of information for those seeking to invest in Downtown Taunton. Additionally, the Office of Economic Development should endeavor to establish a plan of proactive marketing of the downtown, designed to work in concert with privately-led efforts. Finally, the Economic Development Office should also assist the

Mayor's Office in creating the "one-stop shopping" permitting structure required for a successful downtown revitalization.

Taunton Municipal Council. The Taunton Municipal Council is poised to play a significant role in helping to lay the groundwork for the long-term downtown revitalization partnership. The Council should fulfill its legislative role by supporting funding for the enhancement of infrastructure and aesthetics in the downtown, and should both support and advocate for projects that fit within the long-term redevelopment strategy for the downtown. The Council should also consider supporting a plan for transportation and pedestrian improvements designed to enhance the viability and accessibility of the downtown district. Additionally, the Council should undertake actions to review those permitting ordinances relevant to the downtown, with the goal of defining standards for development that will provide the type of synergy required for a bustling central business district.

By its very nature, a municipal council will play an integral role in activities related to downtown development. As such, the Taunton Municipal Council will play a vital role in laying the groundwork for a lasting Downtown Partnership and helping to establish the entities that will guide redevelopment efforts in the future. The Taunton Municipal Council should do so while respecting and not interfering in the work proscribed for others. Even though the Municipal Council will only hold a leadership role in the short term, it will always maintain for itself a responsibility as a guardian of the new Partnership, and endeavor to serve as a role model for restraint and discipline.

The following entities are important contributors to the Partnership, and will likely provide support for the Office of the Mayor and the Office of Economic and Community Development.

The City of Taunton Planning Department. The city's Planning Department, responsible for determining and implementing planning and zoning ordinances, has an important role to play in ensuring that Downtown Taunton welcomes development. The last Master Plan for the City of Taunton, completed in 1998, contains many references to the downtown, suggesting it is a place within which the city wants to encourage development. However, as happens in many communities, and as indicated in several stakeholder interviews, the Master Plan does not appear to be a document that drives decision-making and planning decisions relative to the city's growth. In fact, there are several zoning regulations and ordinances in place that might put Taunton at a competitive disadvantage when attempting to attract development.

The Planning Department should be a place where those interested in investing in the Downtown feel welcomed and supported, within the ordinances as they exist. This is not to suggest that this is currently not happening in Taunton. The warning comes in a general sense as many communities, in charging their planning and permitting agencies with "enforcement", sometimes erect unseen barriers to the kinds of positive development necessary to keep their cities healthy.

In Taunton, the Planning Department should lead efforts to implement the zoning reforms outlined in Chapter 2, as well assisting in the creation of a "one-stop shopping" permitting structure.

The Taunton Redevelopment Authority. Like most local Redevelopment Authorities, the Taunton Redevelopment Authority (TRA) came into being in the 1960s as part of a statewide effort to redevelop blighted parcels and neighborhoods. Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 121B outlines the various powers and responsibilities of these entities, including the buying and selling of property on behalf of its city or town, the receiving of grants and provision of lending for the purpose of redevelopment and, under certain restrictions, the taking of property by eminent domain subject to an approved Urban Renewal Plan. Redevelopment Authorities allow communities the flexibility to act like an entrepreneurial, private sector entity and to be free from many of the municipal and governmental restrictions governing the purchase and disbursement of property, providing they act within an overall goal of promoting growth, redevelopment, and economic development within their communities.

The TRA is similar to most redevelopment agencies. It thrived due to government funding throughout the 1970s and early 1980s and it utilized these funds to lend to businesses, purchase and redevelop sites through a transfer to the private sector, and serving as a developer itself for the purpose of preparing and selling properties for business use. In fact, the TRA was particularly active in Downtown Taunton, with much of its activity guided by an approved Urban Renewal Plan dating back to 1978. Today, there are still a number of downtown properties with deed restrictions that require periodic approvals from the TRA.

Similar to many other Redevelopment Authorities, the TRA also became less active as loan revenues dried up, limiting their revenue streams and, thus, their activity level. The TRA is currently a five member board, as proscribed by state law, with four appointees designated by the city's Mayor and the fifth by the Governor. As an entity, they have sincerely expressed a desire to be of assistance in a downtown redevelopment effort.

It is within that context that the research team recommends the creation of a new entity, referred to in this report as the Downtown Development Corporation (DDC). This new agency, described later in this section, should be structured as a 501(c) (3) and could be seen as a spin-off organization from the TRA. It will have responsibilities and jurisdiction similar to a redevelopment agency, but affiliate with the TRA to execute those redevelopment projects that might require certain activities that only the TRA can undertake under the law, such as the acquisition of property by eminent domain.

The TRA should assist the city in developing the Downtown Partnership over the next eighteen months, helping to create a new development entity whose activities will focus exclusively on the downtown. Once established, with a separate board of directors, this new Downtown Development Corporation (DDC) will become a major participating partner in the new Downtown Partnership.

The city, acting through the TRA, can participate in grant and loan solicitation from state, federal, and private sources, assist with

providing the DDC with funding to carry out its mission, transfer properties of interest to the DDC, and participate in those projects that require eminent domain capabilities in partnership with the DDC. In this way, the TRA will continue to be a necessary and vital player in the overall downtown redevelopment effort.

This effort to create a private, non-profit development entity is not designed to diminish the role of the TRA as a lead development agency in the city, but is reflective of several realities. First, today's funding paradigms and sources of revenue favor private sector participation over public sector entities, making it more likely that the DDC could secure the operational funding necessary to be successful. Additionally, the downtown redevelopment mission would benefit from having an entity whose sole focus is the downtown. Finally, the synergy that could be created through a public-private partnership could be dynamic in terms of a partnership that gives the city tremendous flexibility in an era of complex project "deal-making".

The city, for its part, should seek to bring the TRA to a position of strength. This could be achieved in many ways, including transferring tax-title property or other resources under its control to the TRA. A renewed and re-energized TRA, acting as a development tool for city leaders and working in concert with the city's administration, within the scope of a clearly defined program for redevelopment, could be of significant assistance to the city as it seeks new economic and quality of life improvements.

The TRA would continue on as an ancillary partner within the larger, long-term Downtown Partnership by providing support for the DDC and assisting the Partnership in carrying out its agenda. It is important for the TRA to avoid actions that conflict with the Partnership's Downtown Agenda, which can be ensured by the city's appointment of individual members. Further, future appointments to the TRA should place a preference on individuals not already associated with other boards within the Downtown Partnership, in order to maintain the diversity of opinion necessary for a successful downtown revitalization. If utilized properly, the TRA has the potential to be of great utility to the city as it seeks to revitalize the downtown.

The Taunton Parking Commission

Established in early 2008, the city's Parking Commission should be expected to play a central role in the Downtown Partnership. Responsible for ensuring the availability of parking for businesses, their employees and customers, and any other type of development in the Central Business District, the Parking Commission will play a vital role in building successful enterprises. Many stakeholders interviewed believe that the creation of the Parking Commission was a positive development for the city, and its creation shows an appreciation for the importance of parking in a successful downtown revitalization effort.

It is vital that the city officially delegate all parking enforcement activities to the Parking Commission. The research team recommends that the city grant the Commission the power to hire parking control officers, funded by parking fines and meter revenues, to enforce parking ordinances through the issuance of fines. At the present time, there is little in the way of parking enforcement. A renewed focus on parking enforcement would result in enhanced revenue that could be used for salaries to hire staff, capital improvements to the parking garage and surface lots, future expansion and regulation of parking, and, possibly, as an additional subsidy for projects that fulfill the mission of the Downtown Partnership.

In order to achieve this it is critical that the enforcement of parking meter rates, which currently fall within the jurisdiction of the city's Police Department be transferred to the Parking Commission. In doing so, the Commission would be responsible for hiring meter monitors to ensure compliance with parking regulations and issue fines to those found in violation. While revenues from parking meters are currently allocated to the Parking Commission, revenues received from fines are directed to the Police Department. Under complete enforcement by the Parking Commission, it would be necessary that the city also redirect fine revenues to the Parking Commission. The research team understands that in order to accomplish this, an agreement with the city's police union will be necessary. As such, it urges the city to work quickly to bring about these changes over the next eighteen to twenty-four months. Ultimately, the city will benefit from having additional police personnel to handle public safety rather than parking enforcement. In addition, the dedication of all parking revenues to the Parking Commission would allow parking improvements and operations to become self-sustaining over time.

Having taken the positive step to create the Parking Commission, the city and its Municipal Council should allow it the discretion to operate without interference. Otherwise, the openly public and political conflicts that are often a part of parking policy discussions and decision-making may divert attention from the more important issues that need to be addressed and splinter the alliances necessary for collaborative success.

Downtown Business Improvement District

As proposed, the research team supports the city's efforts to create a Business Improvement District (BID) in Downtown Taunton. However, it does so with a caveat: If the city and those advocating a BID fail to garner the necessary 51% support within the next twelve to eighteen months, then the effort should cease in order to shift energies toward other pursuits.

The research team believes that a BID, with a dedicated revenue stream for downtown investments and activities, would be a very positive development for Downtown Taunton. A BID would place a positive focus on the downtown area, something that is often hard to discern as the city struggles to meet its myriad responsibilities. It would also help unify the various downtown entities and property owners through the process of decision-making around investments that could potentially inspire other private investments. The BID would also be accompanied by a municipal commitment for a base level of investment that will ensure a more continuous flow of public dollars.

BIDs have proven successful in other Massachusetts cities, most notably Hyannis, Westfield, and Springfield, three very different

kinds of communities. The research team believes that a BID could be a particularly effective tool for property owners and local leaders, given the compactness and centrality of Downtown Taunton and the important role it plays in the overall health of the city.

If formed, the BID should be considered an important Participating Partner and, as such, its members should directly participate in determining the agenda of the Downtown Partnership. Its role, within the context of the Partnership and downtown redevelopment, will be to implement infrastructure investments, enhance the aesthetics and cleanliness of the downtown, and manage the provision of services deemed necessary by downtown stakeholders. While many BIDs also engage in marketing the downtown on behalf of businesses, it is recommended that the hosting and coordination of events remain the responsibility of the Heart of Taunton, a local organization that has shown a long-standing capability to perform this function.

The Heart of Taunton

As a private, non-profit organization, formed with the use of a state grant in 1988, the Heart of Taunton has served the city and its downtown well over the course of the last two decades. It has provided much of the activism necessary to sustain public attention to the need for a downtown revitalization effort. To that end, the Heart of Taunton has taken on a variety of roles and tasks that likely exceed their current capacity. This is not the fault of the organization or those who have led it, but is instead a recognition that many of those responsibilities that might otherwise be shared in a strong Partnership model have fallen to this organization alone.

The research team's survey indicated that there is a belief in the community that the Heart of Taunton has played, and should continue to play, a central role in downtown redevelopment. Given its broadly defined mission, and its willingness and desire to help facilitate development, the Heart of Taunton has been involved in a wide range of downtown activities. Most stakeholders interviewed, however, did seem to identify the Heart of Taunton as primarily an event-planning agency. Through the utilization of membership dues and other funding sources, they have organized a variety of events to bring people and activity to the downtown. If expanded and held more regularly, these events could be a vital and necessary part of the Partnership's agenda. Bringing new customers into Downtown Taunton and creating foot traffic, particularly on nights and weekends, should be central to establishing the critical mass necessary to sustain a revitalized Downtown Taunton.

The Heart of Taunton, which has carried the torch of downtown redevelopment for many years, should have a significant role in the Downtown Partnership that allows it to focus on event planning and organizing. In the new Partnership, the Heart of Taunton should become much more effective as an organization whose primary mission is to bring people into Downtown Taunton. While many communities with BIDs handle their own event planning and coordination, it makes sense to utilize the experience already possessed by the Heart of Taunton. Having one specific partner focusing on event-organizing would ensure that this function is not lost amongst other responsibilities. While the creation of a BID may have some effect on the Heart of Taunton's ability to maintain an adequate level of funding from dues-paying members, it should remain well-positioned to carry out its mission through event sponsorships, grants, event receipts, and private, tax-deductible contributions from individuals or organizations. The newly refocused Heart of Taunton should seek to organize, develop, and manage events and entertainment in the downtown, and could contract with private production companies, if necessary, to accomplish larger-scale projects.

It is also recommended that the events schedule for the downtown be expanded and that it should emphasize the promotion of evening and weekend activities. The Partnership may want to model their events schedule after other urban downtown efforts, such as New Bedford's AHA! Nights or the First Friday events of Spokane, Washington, both of which showcase arts, culture, and retail in their downtowns. Similar regularly scheduled events are held in communities across the country.

The newly-refocused mission for the Heart of Taunton will most likely include a marketing component. The Downtown Partnership should determine if this marketing component should include a regional marketing campaign. Taunton is fortunate to have this non-profit organization in place and ready to hit the ground running.

Downtown Development Corporation

The proposed Downtown Development Corporation (DDC), which should be developed over the next eighteen to twenty-four months as a subsidiary of the Taunton Redevelopment Authority and with an independent private-public sector board of directors, will be an important Participating Partner in the new Downtown Taunton Partnership. The DDC will primarily be responsible for taking the lead on new infrastructure initiatives and tending to the "brick and mortar" projects that would include private real estate deals and development, public facilities, and the rehabilitation of underused or blighted properties. To operate as a 501 (c) (3), it would have to work in concert with the TRA to accomplish those projects determined by the Partnership's agenda as in the best interest of the downtown's development.

In designing the DDC, the city should look to two development organizations already operating in Taunton: the Taunton Development Corporation (TDC) and the Neighborhood Corporation. Both of these agencies have experienced success within their respective missions. The TDC has successfully developed and expanded the industrial parks in the city, while the Neighborhood Corporation, formerly known as the Weir Corporation, has experienced success in completing complex development projects. The newly created Downtown Development Corporation's mission should be focused exclusively on the Downtown, allowing it to target resources in the most efficient way possible while avoiding potential conflicts of interest or lack of focus.

The Downtown Development Corporation will most likely derive its revenues from grants and loans, private contributions, earned income and fees, governmental support, and capital transferred to it by the TRA or other entities. Ultimately, it will need to secure a level of funding sufficient to implement policy initiatives while serving as

the development entity of the newly created Downtown Partnership. The Downtown Development Corporation should be viewed as a powerful tool for the Downtown Partnership.

The new Downtown Partnership can only be effective if its individual members are focused on implementing a common agenda. As the city assumes the role of interim leader by putting together this partnership and designing a new Downtown Development Corporation, it will also have to engage new individuals and business leaders with a willingness and a commitment to serve. The success of the Downtown Development Corporation is contingent on attracting a healthy mix of experienced and new individuals to ensure the right balance of innovation and practicality required for sound, sustainable success.

Downtown Taunton Business Association

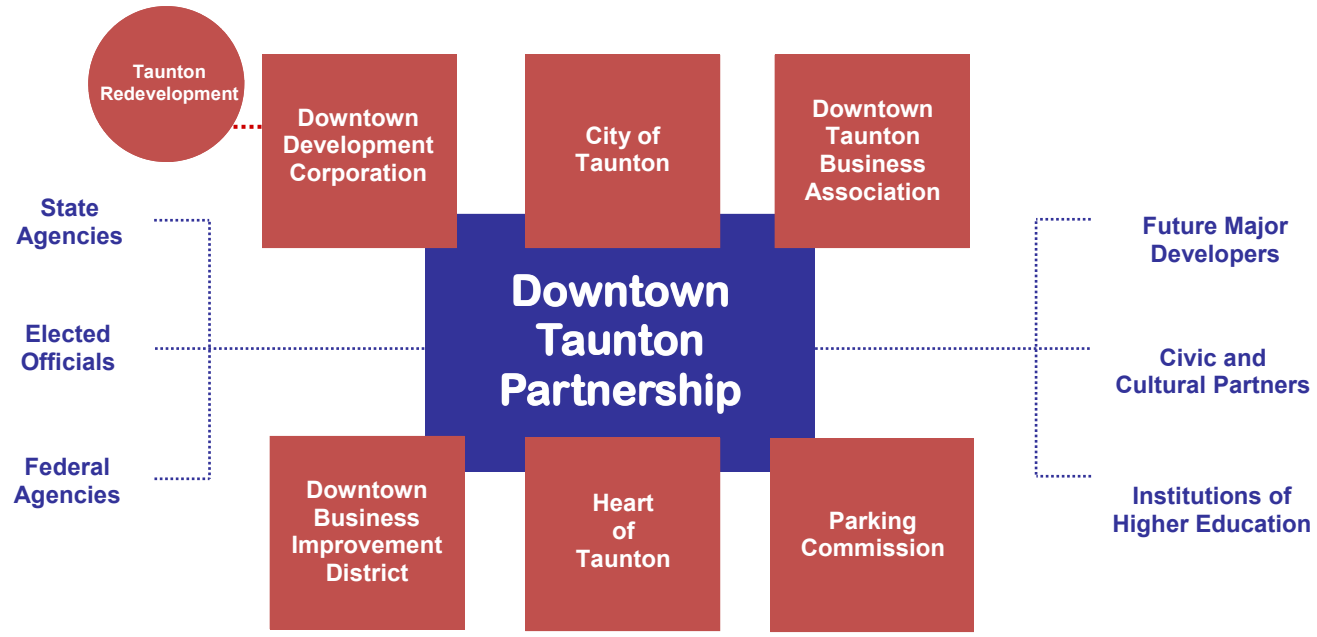
In addition to public sector resources, downtown redevelopment will require an interest from private sector leadership, which should be focused in the proposed Downtown Taunton Business Association. It is expected that the long-term leadership of the Downtown Partnership will emanate from this membership organization. This group is not intended to compete with other organizations, such as the Taunton Chamber of Commerce or the Heart of Taunton, but rather to serve as a conduit for directing the active involvement of those business owners and private sector leaders with roots and interests in the downtown. The Taunton Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of business owners and leaders throughout the Greater Taunton area, and thus cannot focus solely on downtown redevelopment. The Downtown Taunton Business Association would serve as the Downtown Partnership's active member association, a completely separate entity whose sole area of focus is Downtown Taunton.

The Heart of Taunton is not the ideal conduit for this function, given its need to concentrate on being the premier event-planning entity for the downtown. While there will certainly be some overlap in terms of support, the best way to maximize business participation in the downtown's future is through a completely new organization. The perception held by many that the Heart of Taunton serves primarily as an event-planning organization will make the transition to an advocacy role difficult.

The city should provide the impetus for the establishment of a Downtown Taunton Business Association, as well as seek potential sources of seed funding. Moreover, it should seek strong private sector leadership to aid in its creation. Ultimately, however, this new membership organization should be sustained by membership dues. Due to the number of ways downtown business owners will be asked to contribute, it may become necessary for other downtown entities to devise new and creative ways to sustain themselves. Hopefully, local business owners will receive benefits in the form of leadership, advocacy, direct member services, and other advantages similar to the kinds of things they might receive from a traditional chamber of commerce.

This Downtown Taunton Business Association will be a significant part of the downtown revitalization process, and can be expected to shoulder the primary responsibility for leading the new Downtown Partnership over the long-term. In addition to their advocacy for downtown concerns and its work to enhance the downtown's image and the services it would provide to members, the Downtown Taunton Business Association will provide the downtown with the kind of long-term leadership that has been lacking thus far, but that is necessary for the maintenance and preservation of a revitalization effort.

Proposed Downtown Taunton Partnership Organizational Structure



Final Remarks on Key Partner Entities

To ensure the private sector interest necessary for a successful downtown redevelopment effort, the existing organizational infrastructure cannot simply be reshaped. In order to attract a wide range of support, from both the public and private sectors, there must be a variety of ways in which individuals and groups can participate. Additionally, new pathways for that participation need to be created, particularly as a way to avoid the resurfacing of past conflicts and disagreements.

Additionally, there is a need for flexibility in the various funding mechanisms proposed for each of these organizations. There are many ways in which funds can be shared, agreements can be reached, and subcontracting can be carried out to allow for the maximization of funds and resources. For example, there is no reason why the BID cannot subsidize the membership organization or support events organized by the Heart of Taunton. Likewise, the city could determine that parking revenues should be used to support the Redevelopment Authority's efforts to capitalize on the new Downtown Development Corporation. There are many ways to arrange financing capable of sustaining the overall mission of the combined Partnership and city officials should, in establishing the Partnership, seek to establish a flexible mechanism capable of meeting a variety of possible changes in market conditions and revenue streams.

3 Potential Ancillary Partners

Public Higher Education Institutions. In seeking to expand the Partnership, consideration should be given to the possibility of one of the region's three major public higher education institutions locating a satellite campus in Downtown Taunton. Many urban downtowns have benefited from similar investments, including nearby New Bedford and Fall River. Such a project could have a considerable impact on Downtown Taunton. Even if there is not an actual campus located in the downtown, there are still many ways in which the region's public higher education institutions could be of assistance. Because of this, they should be offered membership in the Partnership.

The National Parks Service. Downtown Taunton has the potential to be named a National Historic Site. If this were to happen, it would have a substantial impact on downtown revitalization efforts, and the National Park Service would need to be included as a Participating Partner. In this way, the implications of this designation can be carefully planned for and integrated into an overall downtown development plan that could progress concurrently with National Park designation.

4 Supporting Partners

While this report has identified those partners that we believe should help drive the Downtown Agenda, much of what the new Downtown Partnership would seek to accomplish will not be achieved unless the process is an inclusive one that seeks out the best talent, expertise, and support available to it. The following represents a partial list of agencies and organizations that could be of assistance to the overall downtown revitalization effort and a pro-active effort should be made to enlist their help.

State Legislative Delegation. Taunton has a total of four delegates at the State House: Senator Marc R. Pacheco and Representatives James H. Fagan, Patricia A. Haddad, and Stephen R. Canessa. These four individuals have far-reaching connections, and will be instrumental in obtaining state support for downtown development initiatives. They also represent a valuable asset in terms of guiding and directing state projects in Taunton, including the current courthouse construction and expansions to Bristol Community College's presence in the city.

Congressional Delegation. Taunton is represented in the nation's capital by Senators John Kerry and Paul Kirk, as well as Congressman Barney Frank. These highly respected individuals will be instrumental in obtaining federal support for development initiatives, such as the proposal granting Downtown Taunton National Park status.

The Taunton Development Corporation. The Taunton Development Corporation possesses a wealth of experience in the area of urban redevelopment and has already experienced significant success with its efforts to promote and attract businesses to Taunton's two industrial parks.

The Taunton Industrial Development Commission. Led by the city's Office of Economic and Community Development, the Taunton Industrial Development Commission has the potential to be a valuable liaison at both the state and national levels. It is also able to play a key role in efforts to retain and expand local industry, secure funding and financing for local businesses, and market the city as a viable and attractive location for businesses.

The Taunton Area Chamber of Commerce. The members of the Taunton Area Chamber of Commerce provide businesses in the Taunton area with leadership, education, and information, and help to improve the overall quality of life in the community. Its members have a broad range of backgrounds and come from both the public and private sectors, and represent an invaluable treasure trove of experience and knowledge. The Chamber also provides local members with special marketing and advertising options, health insurance information, and a range of informative publications.

The Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District. The Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) employs a highly-skilled and well-educated professional staff of planners, demographers, and support staff. By providing transportation planning, geographic information systems support, comprehensive community planning, and economic development expertise, SRPEDD combines a number of

areas of expertise and is capable of providing comprehensive economic development and planning assistance.

SRPEDD's services have been engaged, at various times, to assist the City of Taunton with some of its needs, particularly in the areas of traffic control. The city, and those in decision-making capacities, needs to be willing to implement the changes recommended to them by this and other expert agencies if the city is to engender the conditions necessary to create a successful future for Downtown Taunton.

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. The mission of Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which involves strengthening cities, towns, and neighborhoods, is accomplished by providing professional assistance, leadership, and financial resources to promote affordable housing opportunities. DHCD is a valuable partner in attempts to develop housing in the downtown, and will also be able to provide support in ensuring the economic vitality of the downtown as a whole. In addition, DHCD can be a valuable asset to the city during the next eighteen months as it facilitates and designs its long term Downtown Partnership. The continued help of DHCD staff in advancing the cause of a BID for Downtown Taunton is also vital.

The Region's Public Higher Education Institutions. Aside from a significant physical presence by any of the region's public higher education institutions in the downtown, their inclusion as a participating partner in the Downtown Partnership offer the city and stakeholders a vital resource for programming or technical assistance that could advance the downtown vision.

At UMass-Dartmouth, The College for Visual and Performing Arts has worked with the cities of New Bedford and Brockton in helping to convert vacant downtown storefronts into artist workspaces that help to lessen the impact of those vacancies on the downtown's image while promoting a sense of vibrancy and activity so important to a condensed central business district. The newly created School of Education, Public Policy and Civic Engagement contains many elements that could provide support for a newly created Downtown Taunton Partnership, including the Urban Initiative, The Center for Policy Analysis, The Center for Marketing Studies and The Center for Civic Engagement. Assistance from these entities could include website management, marketing plans, analysis of specific questions relative to policy or economic development, as well as public participation and community building. For example, under the leadership of the Urban Initiative, the Charlton College of Business, in concert with graduate students from the Master of Public Policy program and the graphic design program, prepared a comprehensive action plan for the City of Fall River's Downtown area.

Bridgewater State College has its own Public Policy Division and an Office of Regional Outreach. Bristol Community College, in addition to already offering classes and programs in Taunton, which could be considered for re-location to the Downtown, is also very active on a variety of other fronts in various communities. This includes workforce development programs as well as professional seminars and events that have demonstrated their track record of community support.

The Southeastern Massachusetts Convention and Visitors Bureau. The Southeastern Massachusetts Convention and Visitors Bureau (SMCVB) serves Bristol County and Southeastern Massachusetts as a whole, and provides invaluable advertising, legislative advocacy, and technical assistance for the region's businesses and policymakers. Any efforts to attract new businesses and industries to the City of Taunton will be greatly enhanced by SMCVB's experience and expertise. The SMCVB should be approached to see what specific help they can provide in the marketing of Downtown Taunton, either on a regular basis or on as-needed basis.

The Old Colony Historical Society. The Old Colony Historical Society is a non-profit organization located on the outskirts of Downtown Taunton. It is dedicated to collecting, organizing, caring for, and interpreting the history of Taunton and the nearby region. Support and assistance from the Old Colony Historical Society will be invaluable should the initiative to grant Downtown Taunton National Park Status move forward, as it is excellently poised to demonstrate the historical significance of the area in local, regional, and state history. In addition, the Historical Society can play a key role in efforts to improve the downtown's image by highlighting the area's notable heritage and history.

The Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority. In addition to providing inexpensive and reliable public transportation to the Greater Attleboro-Taunton region, GATRA has several lines dedicated solely to Taunton's residents. GATRA will also play a very important role in connecting the city's residents with the new courthouse under construction in the downtown, and will provide an affordable way for Taunton residents to reach the shops, markets, and restaurants located throughout the downtown.

The SEED Corporation. The SEED Corporation has been helping small businesses throughout Southeastern Massachusetts for over twenty years, providing the information and assistance needed to grow, expand, and succeed in the modern marketplace. They also provide technical experience and assistance, and advocate for small businesses with local lending institutions to encourage and enable business growth and expansion. The SEED Corporation could explore the possibility of tailoring their programs, in some form, to providing assistance to businesses in Downtown Taunton consistent with supporting the overall Downtown Plan.

The Gateway Cities Coalition. A coalition of older cities has been formed in Massachusetts in an attempt to shape statewide policy on how these older, urban communities outside of Greater Boston can play a renewed role in the Commonwealth's economic vitality. Although the original group includes only eleven cities, as identified in a research report published by MassINC and the Brookings Institution, Taunton merits inclusion in an expanded group by way of a state designation referred to as Gateway Cities Plus, which recently helped the City of Taunton receive a $75,000 planning grant for downtown development projects. Taunton should continue to find ways to access the strength of this new coalition as it is not alone in terms of many of the issues it faces, including the challenges faced by its downtown.

The Massachusetts Court System. With the new courthouse currently under construction in Downtown Taunton as well as the

existing Superior Court, the state's Court System will serve as an important informational link to a significant number of individuals who visit the downtown to conduct business in the courthouses on a daily basis. As a partner, the Court System could help with the dissemination of parking information to jurors, witnesses, employees, and other visitors or allow informational brochures to be displayed and disseminated within the courthouses to guide visitors to venues they might be interested in such as dining or retail.

City Residents and Neighborhood Leaders. Residents and neighborhood leaders are absolutely necessary if efforts to revitalize Downtown Taunton are to be successful. Without their support and dedication, growth and expansion are next to impossible. Through the hard work and devotion of local residents, Downtown Taunton can be returned to its former glory and once again become the prosperous core of the great City of Taunton.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Recommedations & Conditions of Success

Downtown revitalization is a complex, multi-faceted process, and a difficult objective to achieve. In addition to the extraordinary demands such an effort places upon those who carry its mantle, the process of downtown revitalization requires a significant number of projects, initiatives, and cooperative efforts that must take place and be effectively sustained over the course of many years. Scholars of downtown revitalization argue, and the research team agrees, that the scope of such an effort should be viewed as encompassing a permanent and evolving mission. This essentially means that the work of downtown revitalization is never done and must continually adapt to meet changing economic conditions.

The complexity of downtown revitalization is also increased by the fact that no single factor causes a downtown to decline. Across the country, small-city downtowns that have experienced a gradual deterioration of their commercial and retail base have been victims of urban and suburban sprawl, facilitated by the rapid transportation improvements of the last 50 years and the construction of larger shopping developments on previously undeveloped peripheral properties or in surrounding suburban communities now linked by multi-lane highways. In addition, entrepreneurs and developers understand the often excessive and hidden costs associated with the redevelopment of existing properties. In some downtowns, including Downtown Taunton, many of the buildings currently standing were constructed over 70 years ago. As market forces have turned against downtowns, so too have many potential developers turned away from opportunities in downtowns in favor of more affordable and predictable developments on greenspace.

More importantly, however, has been the overall neglect on the part of communities where these downtowns are located. Their political and civic leadership, as well as business and property owners, have failed to make the physical, structural, and economic conditions of their downtown a universal priority. This aspect of a downtown's decline is often a difficult one to accept and can be a significant barrier to efforts on the part of those who wish to be champions for downtown revitalization. Furthermore, it is important to understand that the feasibility of launching a downtown revitalization effort and the level of its eventual success (or failure) are affected by both psychological factors just as much as economic ones.

Throughout this report, the research team has addressed each issue and area of concern individually and has documented its observations, findings, and recommendations for action, while also identifying potential partners and actors capable of carrying out those suggestions. A great deal of work needs to be accomplished. However, the research team understands that, in terms of organization and the perceptions and attitudes that currently exist, Downtown Taunton's stakeholders are not currently in a position to fully implement every course of action outlined throughout this report. As such, the research team determined that in offering its recommendations it would be of much greater value to the city and to downtown stakeholders to also focus on those fundamental preconditions that must be established in order for a downtown revitalization effort to move from talk to action.

On a final note, the research team also understands the national and global economic context within which it presents this report and its recommendations to the City of Taunton. History may well recognize the "recession" that has developed and intensified over the past year as second only to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Despite the financial difficulties of today, it is important to recognize that the economic restructuring that is taking place will eventually pass and conditions will improve. As such, there is no better time than now to begin laying the groundwork for a downtown revitalization effort. A significant number of tasks that require minimal or no funding, such as strategic planning and organizing stakeholder groups, can be completed now so as to put Downtown Taunton and its leaders in a position to implement many of the other recommendations detailed throughout this report.

Recommendations

Vacancies & Property Redevelopment

While there are many factors that make the work of filling vacant space a difficult task, the research team offers several basic and fundamental recommendations that can help the city in jump-starting the process. The city should use these recommendations to commence efforts to discuss and plan ways to overcome the challenges posed by excessive vacancies in the downtown while ensuring that accurate and timely information exists to support this work.

- *Update the City's Online GIS.* Despite the value of the city's Geographic Information System (GIS), the research team recommends that the city conduct a thorough review of information within this system as it found several inconsistencies between what the maps were indicating and what really existed on the ground. Providing accurate information within this online system is an important step to providing the public and potential investors and developers with opportunities to

understand the layout in Downtown Taunton, especially if they are interested in acquiring property or opening a business. As such, a policy that ensures consistent updates to this online tool should be developed and implemented.

- *Create a Working Vacancy Database and Mapping System.* The city needs to build a comprehensive vacant property information database, accessible to developers and business owners, that is easy to update as properties become vacant or are filled with tenants. Doing so will allow the city to become more strategic with regard to its decision-making and implementation of a vision and plan for downtown revitalization. The research team recommends that this database become an integrated and cross-agency tool that allows for more information than just basic property characteristics. The database should include information regarding city activities associated with each property including code enforcement citations, tax delinquency, water and sewer account status, and possible past eminent domain acquisition. The city would also be responsible for determining which of this information is public and what remains private. The implementation of such a system would require that essential departments become more computerized, and may require the city to pursue a private contract with software developers to create and implement the system across all departments. In addition, such a system should be tied to the city's GIS mapping system so that visual and geographic information can remain linked to other forms of data. The city must expend resources in not only funding but also personnel to ensure that this information database remains up-to-date and can easily be adapted to changing conditions on the ground.

- *Coordinate and Streamline Permitting Procedures.* Within the context of vacancies and property redevelopment, it is critical that the city begin to work to create a permitting process that is user-friendly and holds city departments accountable for working in the same direction with regard to permitting and development. Investors and entrepreneurs have little time to spend navigating a complicated and multi-layered permitting process that requires them to spend weeks traversing the city to meet with officials in different departments. In fact, the city's own Master Plan specifically recommends that the city consolidate its departments in as few locations as possible. As such, the city should focus specifically on those departments and entities that are part of the permitting process. If the city is serious about becoming an active partner in efforts to reduce vacancy rates in the downtown it must begin by simplifying its permitting process and eliminating the abundance of bureaucracy and confusing administrative apparatus that investors must deal with in order to receive decisions on their development proposals. Being business-friendly does not mean having to accept any and all projects proposed without practicing due diligence. Rather, it means fostering an environment that demonstrates to developers and those who might even be looking to expand their business within the city that their time will not be wasted and that decisions will be rendered fairly and expeditiously.

- *Develop and Implement a Market-Based Approach to Downtown Redevelopment.* Considering the unique conditions that exist in Downtown Taunton, the research team believes that the area requires a redevelopment plan that is market-specific and based upon the downtown's needs and potential. Doing so will allow the city and downtown stakeholders to become strategic in their undertaking of appropriate interventions to address and promote opportunities for vacant property redevelopment. Crafting this approach to redevelopment in the downtown will require that those involved in the process and eventual implementation include a number of individuals with professional experience and a thorough understanding of real estate markets, how they operate, and how Downtown Taunton's market could potentially grow. This is a key part of this recommendation. If the city and downtown stakeholders continue to rely upon information that is not guided by market principles, trends, and data, then it will continue to work in haphazard mode and allow development projects to come into the downtown regardless of whether they are economically sound for the entire area.

Physical & Aesthetic Environment

In referring to physical and aesthetic environment, the research team stresses the importance of a downtown environment that welcomes and attracts people and, in doing so, attracts the new investment needed to overcome the number one and number two challenges identified by survey respondents in Downtown Taunton: "attracting people in the evenings/weekends" and "attracting new development/ investment." The research team has divided its recommendations in achieving the goal of improving the physical and aesthetic environment of Downtown Taunton into four key tasks:

- *Create a Sense of Place.* Creating a sense of place is the art of creating a destination. To create a sense of place, Downtown Taunton's stakeholders must focus on the characteristics that make the downtown unique including its historical, economic, natural, or cultural advantages. In addition, stakeholders should concentrate on ensuring that the downtown become multifunctional, providing a wide variety of goods, services, and events that cannot be found in today's malls and mega-shopping outlets. Doing so will allow the downtown to attract a larger pool of prospective visitors.

- *Improve Downtown Taunton's Image.* How a downtown feels to visitors and shoppers is closely connected to

how it looks. While "image" has both physical and non-physical aspects to consider, the physical ones can be considerable, require a great deal of consensus and cooperation, and can sometimes be costly. With regards to infrastructure, Downtown Taunton contains areas that require a great deal of investment and attention. A comprehensive assessment of sidewalks throughout the Central Business District should be conducted to determine areas in need of repair or complete renovation. In particular, the city should consider improvements to those sidewalks that currently have brickwork along the center. While aesthetically pleasing, many of these areas are extremely uneven and are either higher or lower than the surrounding concrete. In addition, the city must improve access to and from many of downtown's sidewalks by constructing curb ramps that promote handicap accessibility and safety. With regard to streetscape enhancements, the downtown has a number of positive elements it can build upon including the existence trees along main streets and light pole banners installed by the Heart of Taunton. Additional recommendations include the installation of sidewalk benches and planters with flowers that can bring more color to the downtown. In addition, overgrowth of grass and weeds as well as trash and debris along sidewalks throughout the downtown must be consistently cleaned and removed.

- *Enhance the Pedestrian Experience.* Healthy downtowns encourage people to experience their services and amenities on foot and to linger long enough to purchase goods, dine, or otherwise contribute to the downtown's economy. Enhancing the pedestrian experience in Downtown Taunton will require stakeholders to tackle two important challenges (1) upgrading the visual and aesthetic environment, which can be achieved in large measure by accomplishing the goals of creating a sense of place and improving the downtown's image, and (2) improving pedestrian safety, which can be achieved by assessing the impact of current traffic conditions in Downtown Taunton on pedestrian activity. Some options for addressing problems related to traffic and pedestrian activity including placing additional traffic signals at particularly confusing and unsafe intersections that operate solely to ensure safe pedestrian crossings, additional signs warning motorists of pedestrian activity, the conversion of several crosswalks into speedtable-style crosswalks, blinking lights at each crosswalk not currently regulated by traffic signals, and the installation of a small elevated center median at the intersection of Broadway and Taunton Green. In addition to this, the city and downtown's stakeholders should consider the conversion of alleys that currently allow for vehicular traffic into pedestrian-only links between the parking lots and main streets. This suggestion could apply to both Leonard Court and Merchant's Lane as they provide pedestrians parking in the Allans Avenue lot behind City Hall access to Main Street. The community must be open to new ideas and proposals if the downtown is going to be an inviting place to people and not just cars. Organizing a task force of professionals, city officials, downtown merchants, and other stakeholders to specifically study the issue of downtown traffic and pedestrian issues and offer recommendations to the community may be of benefit as a way to find creative approaches to address and build consensus around these concerns.

- Highlight the Downtown's Heritage. Considering that a good number of historic buildings in Downtown Taunton avoided the ill-conceived, federally funded urban redevelopment projects of the 1960s and 1970s, tapping into the community's history and heritage can be a significant way to create a unique sense of place in the downtown. Shining the spotlight on the downtown's heritage as a part of the revitalization effort can be done in many ways, both large and small. The most widely recognized approach to preserving heritage in the downtown is through historic preservation of buildings and monuments.

Parking & Traffic

Information gathered through surveys and interviews revealed a strong perception that there are critical issues regarding parking in the downtown and that the quantity of parking spaces many not be the only issue for residents and stakeholders. The research team, however, was impressed with initial observations of the size and quantity of lots and parking facilities that surround the downtown's core, something many downtowns of similar size do not have. These conflicting perceptions led the research team to engage in field research to collect quantifiable data to allow for its own conclusions and recommendations to be developed. This included both an inventory of Downtown Taunton's current public on- and off-street parking resources, as well as a limited review of utilization of current parking spaces. The following is a list of several recommendations noted in the report, which the research believes the city and the downtown's stakeholders should work toward in the near future.

- It is vital that the city "change the politics of parking" by making the downtown neighborhood a stakeholder in its parking meters. This requires that some or all of the revenues generated from the meters and from fines be returned or earmarked for public improvements in the downtown. Additionally, this would require merchants and property owners to become organized in order to set spending priorities for meter revenues. Most downtowns that return meter revenues to the neighborhood have established "parking benefit districts" that delineate where those meter revenues are to be spent for amenities that can attract customers, visitors, and new development. The revenues collected from the downtown's meters should be allocated for more than just improvements to parking resources. An array of infrastructure improvements are needed throughout Downtown

Taunton that could be funded by meter revenues. Doing so would ensure that this money remains in the downtown, contributes to its economic development and maintenance, and would help garner support among local merchants and property owners for the use of meters.

- Inconsistent and rare enforcement of parking meters encourages abuse and actually places the burden of maintaining the downtown's parking resources on law-abiding citizens and taxpayers. As such, it is vital that the city pursue efforts to ensure that meter rates are consistently enforced so that this revenue can be used to make improvements in the downtown. To accomplish this goal, the city should work with the local police union to transfer authority for meter enforcement to the Parking Commission, which has the capacity to hire civilian meter monitors while freeing up police officers to handle law enforcement issues. In addition, increased demand for on-street parking following the opening of the new courthouse on Broadway will require the city to become more effective in enforcing compliance with meter rates and usage.

- To ease the impact of the new courthouse on downtown parking, the research team believes that part of the city's short-term solution must include a diffusion of the parking demand pressures away from the vicinity of the new courthouse and the two lots located nearby and toward the available space on the downtown's periphery. Doing so will also reduce traffic congestion in the downtown and around the Taunton Green. To make this work, the city should consider the establishment of incentives to encourage courthouse employees and jurors to park in peripheral lots, thereby affording more space in the nearby Court Street lot and Leonard Street Garage. Additionally, the city and the downtown stakeholders should consider the creation of a downtown shuttle loop that could, at least in the beginning, be devoted to court house employees, jurors, and visitors. Creating a shuttle loop would also allow the city to select a site further away from the downtown core where additional space exists to create parking for courthouse visitors, rather than having them drive into the downtown and hunt for parking. Such a system would require informative and clearly visible signage in and around the downtown instructing visitors to the court of their parking options. This may also require that the city reach out to the court offices issuing summons to jurors or witnesses in order to encourage them to provide brief parking information in their mailings. Funding for such a shuttle loop could be provided by a user fee collected as the individual enters the shuttle. In setting the fee rate, it is important to understand that what a driver would pay to park further away and utilize the shuttle must be considerably lower than what an individual would have to pay to park in a lot conveniently located near the courthouse or in the downtown.

- The city should undertake a series of infrastructure improvements to current surface lots in order to maximize unrealized space potential. Specifically, the city should consider a redesign of both the Allans Avenue surface lot behind City Hall and the Galligans Court surface lot off of Weir Street. The pavement in both lots is in serious disrepair, and the lack of clearly visible lines delineating parking spaces creates a confusing arrangement that obscures parking conditions for motorists and walking conditions for pedestrians. Aside from repaving and relining these lots, the city should also install sufficient lighting in these lots, as several interviewees indicated fears of suspicious activity taking place in these lots after dark. These fears, according to some, deter many female downtown employees from parking in these lots and discourage many more employees from parking there out of concern for the safety of their vehicles.

- The research team is aware that the Parking Commission is in the process of implementing recommendations from a Beta Group report citing repairs necessary to ensure the structural integrity of the Leonard Street garage. It encourages the Commission to continue this work expeditiously to ensure the garage's continued use for many more years. With concerns over the impending opening of the new courthouse, the Commission is also considering adding a third level to the parking garage and is in the process of having engineers assess the feasibility of such an upgrade. Clearly, if engineers deem the structure sound enough to support a third level and the funding exists to complete such a project, then the Commission would be wise to pursue this option since it would not require having to clear out another parcel of land in the downtown to pave an additional surface lot.

- The Parking Commission and the city could realize significant long-term savings by converting the Leonard Street Garage and Court Street surface lot to a computerized payment system, thereby negating the need for booth attendants at each location.

- The Parking Commission should consider a paid parking system for the Trescott Street surface lot. There are several concerns that nearby residents are using the lot to park throughout the day as it is currently free and lacks any sort of enforcement mechanism. The Commission could still allow residents to acquire residential parking permits that are valid from 6:00 p.m. through 8:00 a.m., which would require all residents to vacate the lot by 8:00 a.m. or be fined.

- The Parking Commission, the city, and downtown stakeholders should conduct a review of all signage, including parking signs, in and around the Central Business District. The downtown is in significant need of signs that catch the eye of motorists and inform drivers of what type of parking they are being directed

to. In the case of parking signs, the research team recommends that these signs be installed on both sides of the street (as is currently done with speed limit signs) rather than the current system of using double-sided signs on only one side of the street. Many of these signs are located on the opposite side of the street and could easily be overlooked by drivers.

- Due to a lack of enforcement of the free 15-minute parking spaces along Post Office Square, the city should convert these spaces to paid parking spaces by installing parking meters and also limiting drivers to the 20 minutes that one quarter can purchase in other parts of the downtown. The proximity of these spots to the Post Office warrants a system that promotes greater turnover and convenience for Post Office customers.

- Traffic in the downtown will have a serious impact on the city's ability to succeed at a downtown revitalization effort. While the movement of cars in and through a downtown is a sign of life, excessive amounts of traffic can often hinder the promotion of another important form of traffic in a downtown: pedestrian traffic. In addition, excessive traffic can foster a negative perception of the downtown among residents and outsiders alike, that the area is inconvenient, unsafe, or a nuisance. A serious, professionally managed, and multi-agency effort must be made to align the demands of traffic throughout the downtown area with the economic needs of the downtown's merchants, customers, and residents. As such, the city should establish a downtown traffic taskforce of approximately 12 to 15 members that includes representatives from SRPEDD, Mass Highway, the City Council, relevant city department heads, the Parking Commission, the Heart of Taunton, the Mayor's Office of Economic & Community Development, and local merchants to work over the course of approximately nine to twelve months on developing solutions to traffic concerns around the Taunton Green.

Arts & Entertainment

- Downtown Taunton currently lacks a large-scale venue for theater and the arts. The Taunton Arts Association (TAA), a well-known community organization that offers art classes, workshops, demonstrations, and art shows, is currently located on Williams Street, which is well beyond the boundaries of the Central Business District. In addition, theater groups that perform in Taunton typically hold performances at the Croteau Theater at Friedman Middle School or at the Taunton High School Auditorium, both of which are also outside of the downtown. While the Star Theater may have once served as the city's main venue for this type of entertainment, rebuilding a theater in the downtown – either from the remnants of the Star or in a different location – may require a great deal of time and funding. As such, the city should focus on its current strengths and bring those existing assets, like the TAA, into the downtown in a way that might extend the hours of operation for some establishments and spur additional activity.

- Within the downtown there are a few establishments, such as the BaHa Brothers Sandbar Grill and Steve's Backstage Pass, that are open late and feature live music entertainment for customers. While the existence of these types of establishments is a positive for the downtown, whether they act as catalysts for economic activity throughout the downtown is another question. To make these types of businesses and other establishments like them stimulate activity in other sectors of the downtown economy, stakeholders must work together to develop a coordinated marketing campaign for the downtown that publicizes events and services in a variety of venues. In addition to publicizing events and attractions, marketing efforts could also feature what the area's retail establishments have to offer, thereby encouraging them to stay open later to serve customers who may be dining in the downtown or attending an event in the evening. All of this takes a great deal of coordination among the downtown's business owners, stakeholders, and organizers and mirrors coordinated marketing efforts undertaken traditionally by regional malls or retail outlets.

Partnerships

The need for long-term leadership in Downtown Taunton is strongly tied to the research and analysis conducted around the topic of partnerships. Long-term leadership has the potential to include a wide variety of prospective actors and partners within the framework of a formalized and professional organizational structure. In this regard, Taunton has several advantages including the existence of several organizations and entities, such as the Heart of Taunton, the Parking Commission, and the Redevelopment Authority, as well as the potential for the creation of other important associations such as a Downtown Business Improvement District.

- The research team's assessment of the capacity and conditions that currently exist in Taunton and its independent evaluation of potential partnerships for the downtown's revitalization has led it to recommend an innovative and more sophisticated organizational structure known as the "Entrepreneurial Holding Company" model.

- The configuration and diverse nature of entities within the Entrepreneurial Holding Company allows each partner to specialize in particular aspects of the revitalization effort. This specialization is key to establishing greater focus among the various downtown partners and ensuring that skills and resources are targeted in meaningful ways.

- Specialization will require that organizations make the diversification of their leadership, personnel, staff, and executive boards an important part of role clarification so as to eliminate any potential conflicts of interest and safeguard against a weakening of focus. To do so, agencies and organizations must seek out new individuals to work together with those who have many years of experience to ensure greater participation from the community and create an environment that welcomes fresh perspectives and ideas while preventing the resurfacing of old disputes.

- In applying the Entrepreneurial Holding Company model to Taunton, the research team has identified six key partner entities that will serve as the foundation of a new Downtown Development Partnership. These entities include three that currently exist and three others that are either in the process of being established or whose establishment is strongly recommended. The entities that currently exist are the City of Taunton (specifically, the Mayor's Office and the Office of Economic and Community Development), the Taunton Parking Commission, and the Heart of Taunton. Those entities that are either in the planning phase or do not exist are a Downtown Business Improvement District, a Downtown Development Corporation (which will serve as an offshoot of the Taunton Redevelopment Authority), and a Downtown Business Association.

Conditions of Success

- The city's residents must come to the realization that the downtown is everyone's neighborhood and that a healthier downtown means a healthier Taunton.

- City leaders and downtown stakeholders must be open to change in order for redevelopment to take place.

- Taunton residents and stakeholders must recognize that downtown revitalization is a long-term project and that there is no silver bullet approach to redevelopment. Moreover, redevelopment is a never-ending process and no single project or program will solve all of the downtown's problems.

- Downtown stakeholders must dismiss the false perception that parking is the main problem in Downtown Taunton, and accept that having to pay for on-street parking is not the greatest barrier to redevelopment and investment. Rather, stakeholders need to understand and acknowledge the many complex factors contributing to the downtown's gradual decline.

- If Downtown Taunton is to undertake a revitalization effort, a short-term leader is needed to facilitate consensus-building among differing interests and encourage key stakeholders to work in partnership. This short-term leadership must be catalytic in nature and create a sense of urgency to inspire, encourage, and convince others to become active supporters and participants in the revitalization effort.

- Downtown stakeholders must foster the creation of a long-term downtown leadership structure that embodies a strong private-public partnership within the confines of a permanent, professional, and formal organizational structure capable of ensuring a continuous and long-lasting revitalization effort. A key part of Downtown Taunton's ability to overcome its challenges and leverage its assets will be creating opportunities to unite stakeholders and form partnerships to accomplish common goals. The long-term leadership will need to clearly define, document, and acknowledge the roles to be assumed by the various groups, partners, and individuals that make up this leadership structure.

- Downtown Taunton needs a comprehensive strategic plan, developed by a broad-based group of city residents and stakeholders, that will serve as a blueprint for program and project implementation in the short- and long-term and can safeguard against haphazard development. This strategic plan is a key part of consensus-building, stimulating action, and sustaining the revitalization effort. To be effective, the strategic plan must include a downtown vision and a downtown work plan that outlines short- and long-term objectives.

- Past disputes and disappointments have led to deep divides and frustration that prevent stakeholders from fully committing to cooperative efforts at revitalization. In order to organize the downtown's stakeholders, strong working relationships must be rebuilt upon mutual interests and a concern for the future of Downtown Taunton.

- Efforts must be made to diversify the leadership and composition of the organizations, boards, and commissions involved in the downtown. If Downtown Taunton is to be the site of a successful revitalization effort, city government and various stakeholder organizations must look beyond the usual suspects and attempt to build a coalition of old and new faces that can infuse the effort with enthusiasm and fresh ideas.

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Appendix A

Downtown Taunton
Mail Survey Instrument

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
THE URBAN INITIATIVE

285 Old Westport Road
North Dartmouth, MA 02747
Phone: 508-910-6407
Fax: 508-999-8374
www.umassd.edu/urbaninitiative

Dear Friend,

The Urban Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth was recently contracted by the City of Taunton's Office of Economic and Community Development to conduct a study of Taunton's downtown, which includes some data and inventory collection as well as an analysis of the challenges and opportunities that exist for the downtown's revitalization. As a part of this process, we hope that you might be able to participate by completing the following brief survey and returning it to us using the provided self-addressed stamped envelope. If you are able to do so, please complete the survey and return it to us by **Monday, March 30th, 2009**. Although we know that your time is valuable and limited, we hope that you are willing to contribute your thoughts and feelings about Downtown Taunton and assist us in this important project.

Thank you in advance for your time and willingness to participate.

The Urban Initiative

Although we ask you to provide the following information, please be assured that your responses will remain anonymous.

Name: _____

Organization/Business: _____

Title/Position: _____

Part 1:

1 = Not a problem in Downtown Taunton
2 = A minor problem in Downtown Taunton
3 = A moderate problem in Downtown Taunton
4 = A major problem in Downtown Taunton

Using the above rating scale, please rate each of the following problems/challenges as it relates to Downtown Taunton

Attracting new development/investment _____
Attracting people in the evenings/weekends _____
Competition from discount stores and/or malls _____
Crime/public safety _____
Image _____
Organization/management of downtown interests _____
Parking _____
Permitting process _____
Preservation of older/historic buildings _____
Shortage of suitable housing _____
Traffic circulation and flow/congestion _____
Unattractive building facades _____
Vacant/underutilized space _____

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If you gave a rating of 4 to any of the above problems, please use the space provided below to explain (feel free to use the back of this page if more space is needed):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

If there are any problems/challenges that you believe should be added to the list above please provide them below and assign a rating to each one:

_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____

Part 2:

1 = Not a priority
2 = A minor priority, to be considered in the long-run
3 = A moderate priority, to be considered in the next 2-3 years
4 = A major priority, to be considered immediately

Using the above rating scale, please rate the priority-level you attribute to each of the following problems/challenges as it relates to Downtown Taunton

Parking _____
Vacant/underutilized space _____
Organization/management of downtown interests _____
Attracting people in the evenings/weekends _____
Competition from discount stores and/or malls _____
Shortage of suitable housing _____
Image _____
Preservation of older buildings _____
Unattractive building facades _____
Crime/public safety _____
Traffic circulation and flow/congestion _____
Attracting new development/investment _____
Permitting process _____

If you provided additional problems/challenges in Part 1, please indicate them below and assign a priority level rating:

_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____

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Part 3:

Please check off the top five (5) assets/opportunities as it relates to Downtown Taunton

- o History/architecture
- o Layout and location
- o Daytime workforce
- o Retail/service mix
- o Government operations/service centers
- o Strong downtown association
- o Volume of automobile traffic
- o Availability of land/buildings
- o Parking
- o Parks/open spaces
- o Community spirit/commitment

If there are any assets/opportunities that you believe should be added to the list above please record them

_____

_____

_____

Part 4:

Please check off your level of support for the establishment of a Business Improvement District in Downtown Taunton:

A Business Improvement District is a downtown management strategy and financing tool that allows commercial districts to develop, fund, and administer programs and services targeted solely within the district. The establishment of a BID is predicated upon the participation of private sector businesses and property owners who agree to pay an addition assessment to their existing real estate property tax, which is exclusively dedicated to improvements within the district and for funding the additional services and programs that they have designed and the BID will implement to improve business within the district. The funds from a BID are used to supplement municipal services; not to replace existing services. (Definition from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development)

- o Very supportive
- o Somewhat supportive
- o Opposed
- o Strongly opposed
- o Undecided; but I know what a Business Improvement District is
- o Unsure; I don't know what a Business Improvement District is

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Please use the space below to explain your level of support/opposition to the proposed Business Improvement District:

_____

_____

_____

Part 5:

1 = Very active
2 = Moderately active
3 = Fairly active
4 = Not active

Using the above rating scale, please rate the level of involvement you believe the following organizations/agencies ***currently*** *play in the promotion/maintenance of downtown:*

Heart of Taunton _____
Taunton Redevelopment Authority _____
City of Taunton Parking Commission _____
Mayor's Office _____
City Council _____
Chamber of Commerce _____
Office of Economic & Community Development _____
Neighborhood Corporation (formerly WEIR Corporation) _____

If you wish, please use the space below to briefly explain your ratings

_____

_____

_____

Part 6:

1 = Leading role
2 = Very active role
3 = Supporting role
4 = As-needed role
5 = No role

Using the above rating scale, please rate the level of involvement you believe the following organizations/agencies ***should*** *play in a downtown revitalization effort (feel free to :*

Heart of Taunton _____
Taunton Redevelopment Authority _____
City of Taunton Parking Commission _____
Mayor's Office _____
City Council _____
Chamber of Commerce _____
Office of Economic & Community Development _____
Neighborhood Corporation (formerly WEIR Corporation) _____

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If you wish, please use the space below to briefly explain your rating

_____

_____

_____

If there are any other organizations/agencies not mentioned above that you believe should play a role in a downtown revitalization effort please list them below:

_____

_____

_____

Part 7:

Using the below scale, please check off the level of frequency with which you utilize the city's permitting process:

- O **1 =** Never
- O **2** = Rarely; 1 to 3 times
- O **3** = Often; 4 to 7 times
- O **4** = Very often; more than 7 times

Part 8:

Using the above scale, please rate the level of ease or difficulty relative to your experience(s) using the city's permitting process:

- O **1** = Very simple and convenient
- O **2** = Somewhat simple and convenient
- O **3** = Moderately difficult/complicated
- O **4** = Very difficult/complicated

If you wish, please use the space below to further explain your rating of the city's permitting process:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Part 9:

Using the below scale, please check off your attitudes/perceptions of parking in Downtown Taunton (check off all that apply):

- O Downtown Taunton has a sufficient quantity of parking spaces
- O Finding parking in the downtown is easy and convenient
- O Downtown may have sufficient parking now but will need more once the new courthouse opens
- O Better signage is needed to direct drivers to parking
- O Better enforcement of the meters is needed to promote turnover
- O Parking in the off-street lots located behind buildings is currently unsafe
- O Parking in the Leonard Street garage is unsafe
- O Finding parking in the downtown is very difficult and inconvenient
- O Downtown Taunton does not have enough parking

If you wish, please use the space below to further explain your attitudes/perceptions of parking in the downtown:

If you wish, please use the space below to provide any additional comments regarding your thoughts on the downtown:

Appendix B

Downtown Taunton Mail Survey Results

Part 1: Downtown Challenges

Participants were asked to use a scale to rank the severity of certain challenges that downtowns often face. The scale ranged from 1 to 4, with scores of 4 indicating a major problem and scores of 1 indicating no problem. Mean scores are below.

1.	Attracting people in the evenings/weekends	3.65
2.	Attracting new development/investment	3.63
3.	Vacant/underutilized space	3.56
4.	Image	3.19
5.	Competition from discount stores and/or malls	3.00
6.	Permitting Process	2.88
7.	Parking	2.81
8.	Unattractive building façades	2.78
9.	Traffic circulation and flow/congestion	2.75
10.	Organization/management of downtown interests	2.67
11.	Crime/public safety	2.63
12.	Preservation of older/historic buildings	2.55
13.	Shortage of suitable housing	2.45

Part 2: Perceived Priority Level of Each Downtown Challenge

Participants were asked to use a scale to indicate their perceived level of priority for each of the downtown challenges listed in Part 1. The scale ranged from 1 to 4, with scores of 4 indicating high priority and scores of 1 indicating no priority. Mean scores are below.

1.	Attracting new development/investment	3.71
2.	Vacant/underutilized space	3.59
3.	Image	3.38
4.	Traffic circulation and flow/congestion	3.09
5.	Parking	3.00
6.	Preservation of older buildings	3.00
7.	Attracting people in the evenings/weekends	2.97
8.	Organization/management of downtown interests	2.87
9.	Unattractive building façades	2.84
10.	Crime/public safety	2.72
11.	Permitting Process	2.71
12.	Competition from discount stores and/or malls	2.50
13.	Shortage of suitable housing	2.39

Part 3: Downtown Assets/Opportunities

Participants were asked to select 5 assets/opportunities from a list of 11 developed by the research team from initial interviews with downtown stakeholders. Frequency of selection by respondents is below.

		Frequency	Percentage
1.	History/architecture	26	81.3%
2.	Availability of land/buildings	17	53.1%
3.	Volume of automobile traffic	16	50.0%
4.	Layout and location	15	46.9%
5.	Strong downtown association	14	43.8%
6.	Daytime workforce	14	43.8%
7.	Community spirit/commitment	13	40.6%
8.	Government operations/service centers	9	28.1%
9.	Parking	6	18.8%
10.	Retail/service mix	6	18.8%
11.	Parks/open spaces	4	12.5%

Part 4: Level of Support for a Downtown Business Improvement District

Participants were asked to express their level of support for the establishment of a BID in the downtown central business district.

	Frequency	Percentage
Very supportive	16	(53.3%)
Somewhat supportive	6	(20.0%)
Opposed	1	(3.3%)
Strongly opposed	2	(6.7%)
Undecided; but I know what a BID is	4	(13.3%)
Unsure; I don't know what a BID is	1	(3.3%)
Total Respondents	30	(100.0%)

Part 5: Perceived Level of Current Involvement in the Downtown by Organizations or Agencies

Participants were asked to use a scale to express their perceived level of current involvement in the downtown of 8 community organizations as well as city agencies. The scale ranged from 1 to 4, with scores of 1 indicating high levels of involvement and scores of 4 indicating no level of involvement. Mean scores are below. Note that lower scores indicate higher levels of involvement.

1. Heart of Taunton	1.60
2. Mayor's Office	2.13
3. Economic & Community Development	2.46
4. Chamber of Commerce	2.53
5. Neighborhood Corporation	2.64
6. Taunton Redevelopment Authority	2.74
7. City Council	2.76
8. Parking Commission	2.92

Part 6: Perceived Level of Involvement by Organizations or Agencies in a Downtown Revival Effort

Participants were asked to use a scale to express the level of involvement they feel 8 community organizations and city agencies should play in a downtown revitalization effort. The scale ranged from 1 to 5, with scores of 1 indicating high levels of involvement and scores of 5 indicating no involvement. Mean scores are below. Note that lower scores indicate higher levels of involvement.

1. Heart of Taunton	1.40
2. Mayor's Office	1.57
3. Economic & Community Development	1.73
4. City Council	1.90
5. Taunton Redevelopment Authority	2.17
6. Parking Commission	2.20
7. Neighborhood Corporation	2.45
8. Chamber of Commerce	2.60

Part 7: Level of Frequency Utilizing Permitting Process

Participants were asked to indicate their level of frequency using the City's Permitting Process. Options ranged from "never" to "very often (more than 7 times)."

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	7	21.2%
Rarely; 1 to 3 times	17	51.5%
Often; 4 to 7 times	1	3.0%
Very often; more than 7 times	2	6.1%
Missing/Don't Know	6	18.2%
Total	33	100.0%

Part 8: Level of Ease/Difficulty Using Permitting Process

Participants were asked to use a scale to indicate their perceived level of ease or difficulty relative to the City's Permitting Process. Options ranged from "very simple and convenient" to "extremely difficult/complicated."

	Frequency	Percentage
Very simple and convenient	2	6.1%
Somewhat simple and convenient	7	21.2%
Moderately difficult/complicated	8	24.2%
Extremely difficult/complicated	1	3.0%
Missing/Don't Know	15	45.5%
Total	33	100.0%

Part 9: Perceptions/Attitudes Towards Parking in the Downtown

Participants were given a list of 9 statements relative to parking in the downtown and were asked to select all that applied to them. Frequency of selection for each is below.

	Frequency	Percentage
1. Better signage is needed to direct drivers to parking	21	65.6%
2. Downtown may have sufficient parking now but will need more once the new courthouse opens	18	56.3%
3. Downtown Taunton does not have enough parking	16	50.0%
4. Finding parking in the downtown is very difficult and inconvenient	14	43.8%
5. Parking in the Leonard Street Garage is unsafe	12	37.5%
6. Better enforcement of the meters is needed to promote turnover	10	31.3%
7. Taunton has a sufficient quantity of parking spaces	9	25.0%
8. Parking in the off-street lots located behind buildings is currently unsafe	6	19.4%
9. Finding parking in the downtown is easy and convenient	5	15.6%

Appendix C

Downtown Taunton Property Database

Multiple Level Vacancy	Street-Level Vacancy
Upper-Level Vacancy	Vacant Lot

Parcel ID	Number	Street Name	Total Value	Out of Town Owner	Commercial Concern	Lot Size (Acres)	# of Buildings	Building Sq.Ft.	Year Built	# of Stories
66-41	1	Broadway	$ 263,300	N	Y	0.06	1	2,025	1900	1
66-40	5	Broadway	$ 2,338,200	N	Y	0.38	1	36,510	1860	3
66-23	18	Broadway	$ 750,700	Y	Y	0.2	1	12,918	1900	2
66-30	25	Broadway	$ 852,700	N	Y	0.07	1	8,436	1960	3
66-22	28	Broadway	$ 261,400	Y	Y	0.06	1	3,754	1900	2
66-26	35	Broadway	$ 1,499,900	N	Y	0.81	1	10,041	1920	2
66-20	40	Broadway	$ 349,500	N	N	0.79	1	N/A	N/A	
55-197	45	Broadway	$ 2,347,900	N	N	0.67	1	9,066	1800	1
55-196	49	Broadway	$ 417,200	N	Y	0.27	1	3,312	1900	2
55-195	51	Broadway	$ 244,300	Y	Y	0.27	1	888	1941	1
55-194	59	Broadway	$ 865,400	Y	Y	0.98	2	2,112	1960	1
55-192	65	Broadway	$ 387,100	N	Y	0.12	1	4,820	1900	3
55-186	67	Broadway	$ 241,500	N	Y	0.06	1	2,620	1900	2
55-227	71	Broadway	$ 478,100	N	N	0.19	1	9,360	1900	2
55-226	77	Broadway	$ 437,100	N	N	0.1	1	4,626	1900	3
55-225	79	Broadway	$ 557,600	N	N	0.11	1	8,196	1900	3
55-224	83.5	Broadway	$ 269,300	N	Y	0.12	1	3,075	1900	2
55-223	89	Broadway	$ 273,900	N	Y	0.07	1	3,547	1900	3
55-222	91	Broadway	$ 329,300	N	Y	0.07	1	4,118	1900	3
66-36		Broadway	$ 110,700	N	N	0.13	1	N/A	N/A	
66-37		Broadway	$ 10,100	N	N	0.08	1	N/A	N/A	
66-38		Broadway Arcade	$ 103,100	N	N	0.09	1	N/A	N/A	
66-99	7	Cedar Street	$ 19,600	N	N	0.12	1	N/A	N/A	
66-98	9	Cedar Street	$ 479,100	N	N	0.13	1	5,040	1900	3
66-97	13	Cedar Street	$ 368,700	N	N	0.13	1	3,676	1900	2.5
66-96	15	Cedar Street	$ 389,000	N	N	0.14	1	3,934	1900	2
66-87	20	Cedar Street	$ 432,000	N	N	0.13	1	4,326	1900	2
66-88	22	Cedar Street	$ 382,800	N	N	0.15	1	5,402	1900	3
66-93	23	Cedar Street	$ 359,700	Y	Y	0.37	1	3,584	1850	2
66-89	24	Cedar Street	$ 431,900	N	N	0.13	1	3,761	1900	2
66-90	26	Cedar Street	$ 308,900	N	N	0.13	1	3,506	1900	2
66-92	27	Cedar Street	$ 402,100	Y	N	0.23	1	4,540	1900	2
66-91	28	Cedar Street	$ 285,600	N	N	0.12	1	3,171	1877	2
66-94		Cedar Street	$ 21,000	N	N	0.14	1	N/A	N/A	
66-95		Cedar Street	$ 31,000	N	N	0.19	1	N/A	N/A	
66-138		Church Green	$ 63,600	N	N	0.39	1	N/A	N/A	
66-137	1	Church Green	$ 365,600	N	Y	0.07	1	4,571	1900	2
66-145	14	Church Green	$ 1,815,900	N	Y	1.86	1	12,078	1900	2
66-596	8	Cohannet Court	$ 241,300	N	Y	0.16	1	4,280	1900	1
66-591	2	Cohannet Street	$ 231,000	N	Y	0.04	1	4,578	1900	3
66-626	5	Cohannet Street	$ 1,169,700	Y	Y	0.47	1	19,335	1979	2
66-599	12	Cohannet Street	$ 235,300	N	Y	0.11	1	2,888	1900	1
66-597	34	Cohannet Street	$ 6,400	N	Y	0.1	0	N/A	N/A	0
66-598	34	Cohannet Street	$ 282,100	N	Y	0.07	1	5,911	1900	1
66-629	4	Court Street	$ 1,473,000	N	Y	0.25	1	20,549	1900	2
66-25	9, 11, 15	Court Street	$ 6,581,900	N	N	1.88	1	63,760	1800	3
66-630	10	Court Street	$ 360,600	Y	Y	0.05	1	3,576	1900	2
66-632	12	Court Street	$ 545,100	N	Y	0.58	1	4,407	1913	1
66-15	19	Court Street	$ 556,200	Y	Y	0.2	1	7,845	1900	2
66-16	21	Court Street	$ 394,800	N	Y	0.28	1	10,702	1900	1
66-633	26	Court Street	$ 160,800	N	N	0.67	1	N/A	N/A	
66-6	31	Court Street	$ 2,025,600	N	N	0.47	1	33,275	1950	1

Multiple Level Vacancy	Street-Level Vacancy
Upper-Level Vacancy	Vacant Lot

Parcel ID	Number	Street Name	Total Value	Out of Town Owner	Commercial Concern	Lot Size (Acres)	# of Buildings	Building Sq.Ft.	Year Built	# of Stories
66-635	34	Court Street	$ 126,900	N	N	0.37	1	N/A	N/A	
66-636	38	Court Street	$ 14,600	N	N	0.16	1	N/A	N/A	
66-637	42	Court Street	$ 130,300	N	N	0.27	1	N/A	N/A	
65-130	51	Court Street	$ 410,700	Y	Y	0.38	1	3,700	1986	1
65-134	54	Court Street	$ 483,300	N	Y	0.47	1	6,000	1900	1
65-133	60R	Court Street	$ 391,200	N	Y	0.52	1	4,749	1920	2
65-135		Court Street	$ 24,800	N	N	0.34	1	N/A	N/A	
65-136		Court Street	$ 29,000	N	N	0.8	1	N/A	N/A	
66-634		Court Street	$ 9,700	N	N	0.06	1	N/A	N/A	
66-639		Court Street	$ 1,100	N	N	0.11	1	N/A	N/A	
66-8		Court Street	$ 44,100	N	N	0.34	1	N/A	N/A	
55-187	3	Dean Avenue	$ 182,900	N	N	0.05	1	1,340	1900	1.5
55-188	5	Dean Avenue	$ 285,900	N	N	0.11	1	2,333	1890	2.5
55-228	6	Dean Avenue	$ 294,100	N	N	0.12	1	2,542	1920	3
55-189	7	Dean Avenue	$ 250,800	N	N	0.11	1	2,160	1880	2
55-229	8	Dean Avenue	$ 255,100	N	N	0.21	1	1,972	1920	2
55-190	9	Dean Avenue	$ 268,300	N	N	0.13	1	2,368	1920	2.5
55-230	10	Dean Avenue	$ 235,700	N	N	0.07	1	1,672	1900	2
55-231	12	Dean Avenue	$ 272,300	N	N	0.07	1	2,295	1900	2
55-232	14	Dean Avenue	$ 269,000	N	N	0.09	1	2,517	1900	3
66-72	5	Fruit Street	$ 294,600	N	N	0.06	1	2,978	1875	2.5
66-75	9	Fruit Street	$ 309,700	N	N	0.09	1	3,110	1890	2
66-112	21	Fruit Street	$ 324,800	N	N	0.15	1	3,419	1900	2
66-144	29	Fruit Street	$ 202,300	N	N	0.16	1	1,288	1900	2
66-569		Galligans Court	$ 8,900	N	N	0.07	1	N/A	N/A	
66-570		Galligans Court	$ 8,500	N	N	0.05	1	N/A	N/A	
66-571		Galligans Court	$ 102,900	N	N	0.15	1	N/A	N/A	
66-574		Galligans Court	$ 9,100	N	N	0.08	1	N/A	N/A	
66-575		Galligans Court	$ 94,700	N	N	0.1	1	N/A	N/A	
66-552	140	High Street	$ 360,000	N	Y	1	1	4,836	1900	2
66-551	146	High Street	$ 437,100	N	Y	0.95	1	5,010	1900	2
66-534	152	High Street	$ 251,400	N	N	0.15	1	2,080	1800	1.5
66-532	154	High Street	$ 318,200	N	N	0.17	1	2,804	1900	2.5
66-645	160	High Street	$ 256,400	N	N	0.09	1	3,434	1850	2.5
66-646	162	High Street	$ 248,900	N	N	0.08	1	2,239	1900	2
66-647		High Street	$ 56,200	Y	N	0.12	1	N/A	N/A	
66-547	5	Hill Street	$ 900,500	N	Y	0.92	1	19,320	1989	2
66-548	7	Hill Street	$ 269,700	N	N	0.13	1	1,725	1910	1.5
66-537	8	Hill Street	$ 191,400	N	N	0.07	1	1,089	1920	1.5
66-536	10	Hill Street	$ 312,900	Y	N	0.08	1	2,934	1900	3
66-535	12	Hill Street	$ 269,700	N	N	0.1	1	3,090	1910	2
66-577		Howard Street	$ 97,900	N	N	0.88	1	N/A	N/A	
66-578		Howard Street	$ 9,100	N	N	0.08	1	N/A	N/A	
66-579		Howard Street	$ 8,400	N	N	0.04	1	N/A	N/A	
66-12	20	Kings Court	$ 274,600	N	Y	0.12	1	2,734	1900	1
66-10		Kings Court	$ 9,900	N	N	0.07	1	N/A	N/A	
66-11		Kings Court	$ 110,700	N	N	0.13	1	N/A	N/A	
66-47	1	Knotty Walk	$ 282,400	N	Y	0.04	1	2,604	1960	2
66-390	27	Leonard Court	$ 227,000	N	N	0.06	1	2,220	1900	2
66-389	29	Leonard Court	$ 250,600	N	N	0.06	1	2,321	1900	2
66-391	30	Leonard Court	$ 342,100	Y	N	0.11	1	2,679	1850	2
66-388		Leonard Court	$ 141,200	N	N	0.57	1	N/A	N/A	

Multiple Level Vacancy	Street-Level Vacancy
Upper-Level Vacancy	Vacant Lot

Parcel ID	Number	Street Name	Total Value	Out of Town Owner	Commercial Concern	Lot Size (Acres)	# of Buildings	Building Sq.Ft.	Year Built	# of Stories
66-32		Leonard Street	$ 53,500	N	N	0.11	1	N/A	N/A	
66-33		Leonard Street	$ 9,700	N	N	0.06	1	N/A	N/A	
66-34		Leonard Street	$ 844,600	N	N	0.28	1	85,500	1985	2
66-35		Leonard Street	$ 1,276,700	N	N	0.48	1	13,080	1869	2
66-31		Leonard Street	$ 290,300	N	Y	0.06	1	2,508	1900	1
66-361	1	Main Street	$ 265,200	N	Y	0.09	1	10,042	1900	3
66-56	6	Main Street	$ 606,100	N	Y	0.31	1	10,976	1900	2
66-358	15	Main Street	$ 784,900	N	Y	0.32	1	29,347	1900	3
66-57	16	Main Street	$ 216,300	Y	Y	0.11	1	1,080	1900	1
66-58	20	Main Street	$ 232,300	Y	Y	0.12	1	1,184	1900	1
66-59	24	Main Street	$ 285,100	Y	Y	0.17	1	5,088	1900	2
66-363	25	Main Street	$ 473,600	N	Y	0.25	1	11,867	1900	3
66-364	27	Main Street	$ 305,100	Y	Y	0.14	1	3,520	1900	3
66-60	30	Main Street	$ 196,900	N	Y	0.06	1	7,350	1900	3
66-61	32	Main Street	$ 51,400	Y	Y	0.07	1	N/A	N/A	0
66-365	35	Main Street	$ 354,800	N	Y	0.1	1	6,619	1900	3
66-366	37	Main Street	$ 516,500	N	Y	0.11	1	12,531	1900	3
66-83	40	Main Street	$ 329,500	N	Y	0.08	1	3,404	1900	1
66-84	42	Main Street	$ 304,600	Y	Y	0.16	1	6,456	1900	1
66-367	45	Main Street	$ 378,300	Y	Y	0.2	1	6,424	1900	3
66-368	49	Main Street	$ 288,000	N	Y	0.19	1	4,735	1930	1
66-85	54	Main Street	$ 462,700	Y	Y	0.42	1	8,701	1900	1
66-369	59	Main Street	$ 248,400	Y	Y	0.05	1	4,070	1900	3
66-370	63	Main Street	$ 625,000	N	Y	0.08	1	8,836	1950	3
66-86	64	Main Street	$ 309,000	N	Y	0.1	1	5,632	1900	2
66-371	65	Main Street	$ 173,800	N	Y	0.07	1	1,746	1900	1
66-101	66	Main Street	$ 845,700	N	Y	0.22	1	19,782	1900	3
66-372	67	Main Street	$ 137,900	N	Y	0.04	1	1,188	1900	1
66-373	69	Main Street	$ 351,700	N	Y	0.09	1	6,741	1900	1
66-100	70	Main Street	$ 1,288,400	N	N	0.17	1	15,528	1900	3
66-374	73	Main Street	$ 215,900	N	Y	0.08	1	1,346	1900	1
66-375	75	Main Street	$ 244,400	N	Y	0.07	1	1,700	1900	1
66-376	77	Main Street	$ 358,400	N	Y	0.23	1	4,320	1954	1
66-103	80	Main Street	$ 691,200	N	Y	0.15	1	12,764	1850	3
66-377	85	Main Street	$ 711,100	N	Y	0.35	1	18,471	1900	3
66-378	107	Main Street	$ 442,800	N	Y	0.24	1	27,392	1900	4
66-55		Main Street	$ 284,800	N	Y	0.04	1	3,944	1900	2
66-379	85	Main Street (Rear)	$ 187,500	N	Y	0.6	1	2,780	1900	2
66-380		Main Street (Rear)	$ 1,900	N	N	0.02	1	N/A	N/A	
66-102		Main Street Park	$ 1,700	N	N	0.17	1	N/A	N/A	
66-563		Mechanics Court	$ 125,200	N	N	0.51	1	N/A	N/A	
66-567		Mechanics Court	$ 82,400	Y	Y	0.03	1	1,247	1900	2
66-568	15	Mechanics Lane	$ 192,500	N	Y	0.26	1	6,433	1900	1
66-382		Merchants Lane	$ 5,100	N	N	0.05	1	N/A	N/A	
66-385		Merchants Lane	$ 53,600	N	N	0.18	1	N/A	N/A	
66-387	14	Merchants Lane	$ 475,900	N	N	0.19	1	6,436	1930	1
66-383		Merchants Lane	$ 101,400	N	Y	0.05	1	3,240	1900	2
66-18	12	Pleasant Street	$ 2,670,500	N	N	0.82	1	11,328	1904	2
66-650		Pleasant Street	$ 136,400	Y	N	1.03	1	N/A	N/A	
66-627		Post Office Square	$ 161,100	N	N	0.32	1	N/A	N/A	
55-198	14	Presbrey Avenue	$ 188,300	N	N	0.08	1	1,159	1940	1.5
55-199	16	Presbrey Avenue	$ 189,000	N	N	0.09	1	1,276	1863	1.5

Multiple Level Vacancy	Street-Level Vacancy
Upper-Level Vacancy	Vacant Lot

Parcel ID	Number	Street Name	Total Value	Out of Town Owner	Commercial Concern	Lot Size (Acres)	# of Buildings	Building Sq.Ft.	Year Built	# of Stories
55-200	20	Presbrey Avenue	$ 265,800	N	N	0.11	1	2,436	1920	2
55-191	24	Presbrey Avenue	$ 220,800	N	N	0.06	1	1,142	1900	1.5
55-220	9	Randall Street	$ 235,400	N	N	0.13	1	1,884	1900	2
55-219	13	Randall Street	$ 216,400	N	N	0.21	1	1,328	1900	1
55-218	15	Randall Street	$ 170,000	N	N	0.23	1	320	1930	1
55-221		Randall Street	$ 5,200	Y	N	0.09	1	N/A	N/A	
66-54	3	School Street	$ 220,400	N	Y	0.04	1	2,592	1900	2
66-64	15	School Street	$ 396,800	N	Y	0.1	1	5,255	1940	2
66-65	19	School Street	$ 307,400	N	Y	0.2	1	3,796	1940	1
66-66	31	School Street	$ 5,201,200	Y	N	0.85	1	68,320	1980	4
66-74	35	School Street	$ 240,100	N	N	0.13	1	3,196	1900	3
66-73	45	School Street	$ 778,000	N	N	0.32	1	9,408	1875	2
66-39		School Street	$ 835,200	N	N	0.21	1	43,224	1990	2
66-344	4	Spring Lane	$ 466,700	Y	N	1	1	29,464	1900	1
66-338		Spring Lane	$ 8,800	Y	N	0.21	1	N/A	N/A	
66-648	6	Spring Street	$ 251,700	N	N	0.14	1	1,521	1850	1.5
66-649	8	Spring Street	$ 353,000	N	N	0.16	1	3,100	1820	2
66-331	10	Spring Street	$ 353,400	N	N	0.58	1	2,984	1806	2
66-332	12	Spring Street	$ 348,200	N	N	0.26	1	3,381	1820	2
66-337	16	Spring Street	$ 303,900	N	N	0.11	1	2,436	1920	2
66-341	18	Spring Street	$ 280,200	N	N	0.12	1	2,520	1920	2
66-393		Spring Street	$ 295,500	N	N	2.42	1	N/A	N/A	
66-392	15	Summer Street	$ 1,688,600	N	N	0.6	1	22,167	1880	2
66-394	23	Summer Street	$ 1,284,200	N	N	0.6	1	19,056	1958	1
66-395	33	Summer Street	$ 88,000	N	N	0.88	1	N/A	N/A	
66-48	1	Taunton Green	$ 817,600	N	Y	0.21	1	13,548	1900	2
66-53	4	Taunton Green	$ 197,800	N	Y	0.04	1	1,792	1900	3
66-51	7	Taunton Green	$ 226,600	N	Y	0.05	1	2,480	1900	2
66-52	9	Taunton Green	$ 415,100	N	Y	0.05	1	5,560	1900	3
66-46	12	Taunton Green	$ 1,717,000	Y	Y	0.77	1	28,232	1900	2
66-45	19	Taunton Green	$ 175,900	N	Y	0.03	1	1,275	1900	1
66-44	20	Taunton Green	$ 164,700	N	Y	0.03	1	1,275	1900	1
66-43	21	Taunton Green	$ 159,700	N	Y	0.03	1	1,125	1900	1
66-42	22	Taunton Green	$ 165,600	N	Y	0.03	1	1,200	1900	1
66-24	30	Taunton Green	$ 788,700	N	Y	0.33	2	7,600	1972	1
66-587	41	Taunton Green	$ 544,100	N	Y	0.15	1	12,191	1900	2
66-586	43	Taunton Green	$ 538,400	N	Y	0.15	1	11,216	1900	3
66-585	44	Taunton Green	$ 231,300	N	Y	0.06	1	6,908	1900	3
66-584	47	Taunton Green	$ 242,600	Y	Y	0.04	1	5,339	1860	3.5
66-583	49	Taunton Green	$ 586,200	Y	Y	0.1	1	11,207	1900	3
66-582	56	Taunton Green	$ 177,400	Y	Y	0.16	1	N/A	N/A	0
66-82	3	Trescott Street	$ 260,500	Y	Y	0.15	1	2,250	1900	1
66-62	8	Trescott Street	$ 265,700	Y	Y	0.14	1	11,514	1900	2
66-80	17	Trescott Street	$ 336,100	N	N	0.11	1	3,730	1900	2.5
66-63	18	Trescott Street	$ 289,100	N	Y	0.11	1	4,812	1900	2
66-79	19	Trescott Street	$ 296,600	N	N	0.12	1	3,583	1900	2
66-78	23	Trescott Street	$ 240,200	N	Y	0.14	1	2,800	1960	1
66-77	25	Trescott Street	$ 326,200	N	N	0.09	1	3,667	1890	2.5
66-76	27	Trescott Street	$ 313,300	N	N	0.09	1	3,248	1890	2
66-67	30	Trescott Street	$ 354,000	N	N	0.18	1	3,255	1900	2

Multiple Level Vacancy	Street-Level Vacancy
Upper-Level Vacancy	Vacant Lot

Parcel ID	Number	Street Name	Total Value	Out of Town Owner	Commercial Concern	Lot Size (Acres)	# of Buildings	Building Sq.Ft.	Year Built	# of Stories
66-68	34	Trescott Street	$ 265,800	N	N	0.18	2	2,485	1875	2
66-69	38	Trescott Street	$ 224,900	N	N	0.18	1	2,606	1875	2
66-70	42	Trescott Street	$ 307,400	N	N	0.08	1	3,201	1875	2
66-71	44	Trescott Street	$ 317,900	Y	N	0.08	1	3,564	1875	3
66-81		Trescott Street	$ 354,800	N	N	0.83	1	N/A	N/A	
66-136	5	Union Street	$ 218,200	Y	N	0.07	1	1,428	1900	1.5
66-135	9	Union Street	$ 331,700	Y	N	0.05	1	2,723	1900	2.5
66-134	11	Union Street	$ 357,000	Y	N	0.08	1	3,444	1900	3
66-133	15	Union Street	$ 371,700	Y	N	0.13	1	3,338	1900	2
66-104	16	Union Street	$ 417,200	N	N	0.21	1	3,980	1900	2
66-132	17	Union Street	$ 269,000	N	N	0.12	1	2,160	1900	2
66-105	18	Union Street	$ 221,400	Y	N	0.09	1	1,888	1810	2
66-131	19	Union Street	$ 256,500	N	N	0.05	1	2,246	1875	2
66-106	20	Union Street	$ 177,100	Y	N	0.09	1	1,173	1800	1
66-130	21	Union Street	$ 250,100	N	N	0.09	1	2,614	1900	2
66-107	22	Union Street	$ 192,200	Y	N	0.11	1	1,080	1800	1
66-129	23	Union Street	$ 268,000	N	N	0.11	1	2,311	1875	1.5
66-108	24	Union Street	$ 306,700	Y	N	0.11	1	3,128	1890	2
66-128	25	Union Street	$ 239,300	N	N	0.14	1	2,364	1900	2
66-127	27	Union Street	$ 194,100	N	N	0.09	1	1,418	1875	1
66-110	28	Union Street	$ 299,800	N	N	0.09	1	3,308	1880	2.5
66-111	32	Union Street	$ 331,400	N	N	0.2	1	4,462	1900	2
66-109		Union Street	$ 10,500	N	N	0.1	1	N/A	N/A	
65-129	47	Washington Street	$ 464,100	Y	Y	0.22	1	N/A	N/A	
65-128	53	Washington Street	$ 245,900	N	N	0.11	1	3,335	1900	2
66-1	55	Washington Street	$ 209,300	Y	N	0.1	1	2,538	1910	2
66-2	59	Washington Street	$ 348,700	N	N	0.29	1	3,192	1910	2
66-3	63	Washington Street	$ 367,200	N	N	0.33	1	3,498	1910	2
66-4	53R	Washington Street	$ 244,700	N	N	0.14	1	3,495	1900	2
66-360	6	Weir Street	$ 445,100	Y	N	0.06	1	7,452	1900	3
66-581	11	Weir Street	$ 111,300	Y	Y	0.02	1	2,304	1945	4
66-580	21	Weir Street	$ 192,300	N	Y	0.05	1	2,646	1945	2
66-357	24	Weir Street	$ 326,600	Y	N	0.11	1	5,609	1900	2
66-573	29	Weir Street	$ 551,400	N	Y	0.23	1	3,966	1950	1
66-356	32	Weir Street	$ 242,500	N	Y	0.11	1	3,713	1900	2
66-355	36	Weir Street	$ 219,200	N	Y	0.08	1	1,782	1900	1
66-572	37	Weir Street	$ 273,900	N	Y	0.08	1	5,732	1950	3
66-354	40	Weir Street	$ 611,600	N	N	0.08	1	11,832	1950	3
66-353	44	Weir Street	$ 270,300	N	Y	0.13	1	3,232	1900	2
66-352	48	Weir Street	$ 260,100	N	Y	0.07	1	3,820	1900	2
66-566	49	Weir Street	$ 231,900	Y	N	0.07	1	7,368	1900	3
66-349	62	Weir Street	$ 420,900	Y	Y	0.21	1	7,990	1900	3
66-386	64	Weir Street	$ 784,000	N	Y	0.92	2	2,400	1900	1
66-348	70	Weir Street	$ 63,900	Y	Y	0.12	0	N/A	N/A	0
66-347	74	Weir Street	$ 543,600	Y	Y	0.32	1	10,136	1900	1
66-538	75	Weir Street	$ 235,000	Y	Y	0.18	1	1,620	1900	1
66-346	76	Weir Street	$ 409,700	N	Y	0.2	1	6,621	1900	1
66-345	82	Weir Street	$ 504,700	N	Y	0.35	1	15,237	1900	2
66-539	85	Weir Street	$ 216,400	N	Y	0.07	1	3,459	1900	3
66-541	91	Weir Street	$ 246,200	N	N	0.02	1	2,864	1890	2
66-334	92	Weir Street	$ 454,700	N	Y	0.42	1	9,576	1960	1
66-333	94	Weir Street	$ 312,900	N	Y	0.2	1	4,736	1900	3

Multiple Level Vacancy	Street-Level Vacancy
Upper-Level Vacancy	Vacant Lot

Parcel ID	Number	Street Name	Total Value	Out of Town Owner	Commercial Concern	Lot Size (Acres)	# of Buildings	Building Sq.Ft.	Year Built	# of Stories
66-542	99	Weir Street	$ 344,900	Y	N	0.09	1	2,553	1900	2
66-543	103	Weir Street	$ 251,400	Y	N	0.04	1	2,224	1920	2
66-330	106	Weir Street	$ 310,100	Y	Y	0.22	1	2,690	1950	1
66-544	109	Weir Street	$ 230,900	N	Y	0.07	1	3,418	1900	2
66-531	113	Weir Street	$ 352,400	Y	N	0.25	1	3,571	1850	2
66-329	114	Weir Street	$ 450,700	N	N	0.29	1	5,730	1900	3
66-339		Weir Street	$ 14,000	N	N	0.14	1	N/A	N/A	
66-351		Weir Street	$ 5,400	N	N	0.09	1	N/A	N/A	
66-359		Weir Street	$ 1,700	N	N	0.06	1	N/A	N/A	0
66-545		Weir Street	$ 6,100	N	N	0.21	1	N/A	N/A	
66-565		Weir Street		N	N		0			
66-339		Weir Street	$ 14,000	N	Y	0.14	0	N/A	N/A	
66-540		Weir Street	$ 4,800	N	Y	0.06	1	N/A	N/A	
66-588	4	Winthrop Street	$ 339,800	N	Y	0.06	1	3,790	1960	2
66-589	8	Winthrop Street	$ 193,000	N	Y	0.04	1	2,033	1900	2
66-592	9	Winthrop Street	$ 196,900	Y	Y	0.06	2	2,794	1900	1
66-590	12	Winthrop Street	$ 218,600	N	Y	0.05	1	4,672	1900	2
66-593	15	Winthrop Street	$ 356,300	N	Y	0.09	1	5,414	1900	2.5
66-560	24	Winthrop Street	$ 163,700	N	Y	0.23	1	N/A	N/A	
66-595	31	Winthrop Street	$ 411,900	Y	Y	0.23	1	2,476	1950	1
66-559	36	Winthrop Street	$ 53,800	N	N	0.11	1	N/A	N/A	
66-561		Winthrop Street		N	N		0			

The level of vacancy for each property in this Appendix and in other sections of this report reflect data collection completed in August of 2009. Therefore, vacancy conditions for individual properties may change once the final report has been submitted.

DRAFT

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

THE URBAN INITIATIVE

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