

DOWNTOWN DARIEN



An Action Plan for the Revitalization of Downtown Darien

Connecticut Main Street Center
Resource Team
May 22 – 25, 2006

Charting Your Course to a Vibrant Downtown



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PURPOSE

The Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC), as one of its ongoing support services to Darien Revitalization, Inc. (DRI), sponsored a Resource Team for Downtown Darien in May 2006. The purpose of the Resource Team Visit was to:

- **Allow the community to hear outside perspectives on local issues**
- **Make recommendations for DRI based on the opportunities that exist and the community's capacity to respond**
- **Help develop strategies to improve Downtown Darien and DRI**

An effective and efficient organization, with a well thought out plan of work, will move a commercial district closer to the vision defined by the residents and stakeholders.

Skilled professionals with experience working in complex commercial environments staffed the Connecticut Main Street Resource Team (see team profiles in appendix). The Resource Team toured the district, met with stakeholders and interested parties, and interviewed individuals from local businesses, institutions, government and DRI.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The team's visit, May 22-25, 2006, was coordinated by the staff and volunteers of Darien Revitalization Inc. and the Town of Darien. Special thanks are due to Debra Parnon, Tom Geary and Evonne Klein.

NEXT STEPS

The Resource Team recommends the following steps be taken by Darien Revitalization Inc.:

1. Create an ad hoc committee that includes the executive director, committee chairs and board leadership to review this report and begin to prioritize the recommendations and start incorporating them into the DRI work plan. This committee is encouraged to meet with CMSC staff to discuss any questions as well as resources available to support the implementation of these recommendations.
2. Dedicate a significant portion of a board meeting to the review and discussion of this report. Each board member should be given a copy of the full report which the board should formally adopt as a guiding tool for future planning.
3. Offer all the people who participated in the Resource Team Visit (see List of Participants) the opportunity to review this report.
4. The ad hoc committee can also develop a strategy to share this report with potential partners, municipal representatives and the media.
5. Insure that appropriate DRI staff, volunteers, and partners attend any upcoming CMSC workshops.

DARIEN REVITALIZATION INC. MISSION, VISION AND GOALS

MISSION STATEMENT

“Darien Revitalization, Inc., a volunteer-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was established to guide the revitalization of Downtown Darien by use of the Main Street four-point management approach. Its mission is to maintain and enhance the unique charm, character and historic significance of Downtown Darien while ensuring a variety of retail, dining and housing choices, as well as social and cultural activities, for residents and visitors of all ages.”

VISION STATEMENT

“Downtown Darien is an inviting, vibrant commercial and residential center where people of all ages live, work, shop and play. Conveniently accessible by rail, bus, car, bike and foot, Downtown Darien retains its historic New England charm and beauty. Our unique mix of upscale retailers, restaurants and housing, and our social and cultural events offer resident and visitors a variety of enticing experiences day and night.”

GOALS

1. To foster and build an environment that is attractive and pedestrian-friendly.
2. To help existing businesses better serve their current customers and identify opportunities to expand, as well as to identify an appropriate mix of new and compatible uses.
3. To promote Downtown Darien as a place to live, work, shop, dine and gather.
4. To brand Darien Revitalization Inc. (Darien Downtown Partnership) as the organizational resource for all issues related to downtown.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Total Participants: 68

Darien Revitalization Inc.

Debra Parnon, Executive Director

Tom Geary, President, Board of Directors

Jeff Williams, Vice President, Board of Directors; Co-Chair Economic Restructuring Committee

George McKnight, Secretary, Board of Directors; Promotions Committee

David Kenny, Treasurer, Board of Directors

Cyndy Ashburne, Board of Directors; Promotions Committee

Louise Berry, Board of Directors

Dan Dolcetti, Board of Directors

R. David Genovese, Board of Directors; Co-Chair, Economic Restructuring Committee

Wilder Gleason, Board of Directors

Judy Groppa, Board of Directors, Design Committee

Debi Hibben, Board of Directors, Promotions Committee

Alex Lopatynsky, Board of Directors, Chair, Design

Carol Wilder-Tamme, Board of Directors; Co-Chair, Promotions

Karen Brewer, Design Committee

Robert Cardello, Design Committee

Marian Castell, Design Committee

Bill Bogardus, Economic Restructuring Committee

Brian Lange, Economic Restructuring Committee

Blair Martin, Economic Restructuring Committee

Town Staff & Elected Officials

Evonne Klein, First Selectwoman

Bob Harrel, Former First Selectman

Linda Santarella, Board of Selectmen

Jeremy Ginsberg, Director of Planning & Zoning

Peter Hovell, Chairman, Board of Finance

Joseph Spain, Planning & Zoning Commission

Ursula Foreman, Planning & Zoning Commission

Callie Sullivan, Representative Town Meeting

Bob Buch, Fire Marshal

Gary Pavia, Police Dept.

Duane Lovello, Chief of Police

Bob Steeger, Director of Dept. of Public Works

Jo Tatum, Housing Authority

Lori Romick, Health Dept.

Regional Organizations and Utilities

John Atkin, RPA

Marge Kelly, CL&P

Sue Prosi, SWRPA

Civic Organizations

Jennifer Cippoletti, Rotary Club
Peter Deutsch, Lions Club
Don Fittal, Superintendent, Darien Public Schools
Mary Forman Flynn, Director of Darien Community Association
Bill Harrington, Senior Men's Association, Promotions Committee
Nancy Hrusa, Kiwanis Club
Frank Kemp, Darien Arts Center
Mille Miceli, Kiwanis Club
Susan Nix, Realtor
Jonathan Olmsted, Beautification Commission
Kae Shields, Darien Arts Center

Merchants

Shirley Baker, Koenig Art Emporium
Geri Corrigan, Red Door Spa
Nancy Fernandez, Birdies in the Nest
Lisa McKernon, Rye (NY) Merchants Association
Nick Troilo, Nicholas Roberts Fine Wines

Property Owners

Dwight Collins
Frank Elmasry
Penny Glassmeyer
Jerry Nielsen

Commercial Realtors and Bankers

John Candarone, First County Bank
Jodie Dostal, Cushman & Wakefield
Deborah Hadden, Wachovia Bank
Rabhat Jaelhav, First County Bank
George Walker, Albert B. Ashforth, Inc.

Community Representatives

Pam Dysenchuk
Christine Kellog
Monica McNally
Nina Miller
Kitty Wynne
David Young

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This action plan focuses on how to achieve long-term viability for Downtown Darien, reinforce downtown as the center of social and cultural life, and create a visually and physically compelling environment that will capture the significant demand that exists in Darien and the region.

Downtown Darien is ripe with opportunity. Darien is an affluent community that can and will support downtown - if downtown offers the goods, services and experiences that residents demand. A large family segment of the Town's population would like to *Shop Downtown Darien First*, but many of their needs are not currently being met in downtown.

Connecticut mirrors a national trend of growing segments of the population that desire a range of housing choices and housing costs. Many of these people are choosing downtown, including young professionals, childless couples, empty-nesters, elderly individuals and even families (when the school system is strong). However, Darien has been losing its young adult population (19-29 year-olds) at the greatest rate due to the high cost of housing. Retirees wanting to downsize are leaving because of a lack of options available in town.

Downtown Darien is in a trade area where there is very strong potential demand for downtown residents and shoppers. The transportation linkages to major employment centers alone make Darien's location enviable. The demand for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is growing throughout the country, especially in locations where fixed-rail service already exists. TOD creates a mix of residential and commercial uses within a quarter-mile of transit stops. These developments are of high quality and can provide sustainable economic development within the context of existing infrastructure. While many in Darien look at the Metro-North station as a liability that bisects downtown, it is really an asset that few towns in Connecticut have to capitalize on.

SUMMARY

In the next one to three years, Darien Revitalization Inc. (DRI) is advised to focus on the following goals in order to meet the challenges and opportunities that currently exist:

1. To foster and build an environment that is attractive and pedestrian-friendly
 - a. short term: connections to Tilley Pond Park, eliminate or decrease regulatory barriers (less stringent parking regulations, allow parking garages with ground floor retail, allow three-story buildings, reclassify banks as service/commercial use in the retail core), establish a public art program, and a signage & wayfinding program
 - b. long term (Master Plan): eliminate gaps in pedestrian environment, reduce traffic congestion (providing secondary routes for local traffic, restore the street grid system in downtown, consolidate driveways and curb cuts, implement traffic calming measures, construct safer crosswalks), parking management program in place for all of downtown

2. To help existing businesses better serve their current customers and identify opportunities to expand, as well as to identify an appropriate mix of new and compatible uses
 - a. short term: relationship building with business and property owners, identification and surveying of key target markets for downtown
 - b. long term: conduct market niche study, develop a business attraction program, create an economic tool bag (i.e. streamlined permitting process, incentives, development and design guidelines, historic tax credits, zoning regulations, code enforcement)
3. To promote Downtown Darien as a place to live, work, shop, dine and gather
 - a. short term: brand development and marketing, merchant cross-promotion program
 - b. long term: management of annual event calendar tied to targeted niches, comprehensive marketing program
4. To brand DRI as the organizational resource for all issues related to downtown revitalization.
 - a. short term: public-private partnership development and capacity building, advocacy role in downtown issues, ongoing communications, develop and implement workplans (*see proposed workplan summary in appendix*)
 - b. long term: DRI has strong ongoing public and private partnerships, comprehensive revitalization program has become institutionalized, program becomes more staff-driven, sustainable resources for downtown revitalization in place, active participation in statewide network advocating for strong downtown policies

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is organized by chapters dedicated to **Design** - restoring the physical value of downtown, **Economic Restructuring** – restoring the economic value of downtown, **Promotion** – restoring the social value of downtown, and **Organization** – restoring the civic value of downtown. Each chapter contains observations and recommendations for both long and short term activities that can lead the community and DRI to the shared goal of a healthy and vibrant downtown.

Within the Design chapter, there is a section on developing a Downtown Master Plan. Darien Revitalization, Inc. (DRI) is charged with engaging the community and facilitating the vision for downtown. This vision can have conceptual components, but it must also explicitly declare the community's intent for what downtown will become.

The vision will help guide the development of the master plan. A downtown master plan is a document that describes, in words and with visual tools, the goals and objectives for land use and infill strategy. The master plan will guide big picture directions for downtown's long-term sustainability. Once adopted, the master plan will serve to guide revisions to the town's zoning and land use regulations to help attract, support and facilitate appropriate future development.

Downtown Darien is poised for great things. It is time to accept the need for both a compelling long-term vision and the realization that downtown revitalization happens incrementally, over time. It takes strong leadership from both the private and public sectors and an open partnership. It takes every possible tool in the revitalization toolkit and the elimination of every

barrier that inhibits the right things from getting done. Most of all, it takes people working with one another every day towards a shared vision. In the end, it is up to Darien. You have what it takes and it's yours to win or lose.

DESIGN

ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Darien's downtown area is organized along the regional thoroughfare of the Boston Post Road (US Route 1). It has well-defined geographic limits as it is bordered on the west by Leroy Avenue, Tilley Pond Park, and residential districts; on the south by Interstate 95; on the north by Sedgewick Avenue which also has residential uses on its east side; and on the east by the Goodwives Shopping Center (strip mall), Old King's Highway South and commercially zoned land beyond that is principally comprised of corporate offices. One of its most prominent



Historic mixed-use buildings in the "Model Block" on Boston Post Road

landmarks is the Metro North rail line that diagonally bisects the Central Business District (CBD).

Nearly all of what is informally known as Downtown Darien is zoned CBD; for that reason, the terms downtown and CBD are used interchangeably in this report. As the town's primary business area, the CBD zoning district is intended to be the focal point for retail and business office activities. Principal permitted uses in the CBD include commercial sales, business and professional offices (provided such uses are located on upper

floors), public uses, transit stations, and dwelling units located on upper floors. Other uses allowed by Special Permit include restaurants, and the sale of prepared food (such as candy or ice cream).¹ There are several historic buildings dating to the 19th century within the limits of downtown including the Calvary Baptist Church, the Austen Block and Original Town Hall on the Boston Post Road and an interesting, eclectic blend of buildings with distinctive architecture, including many smaller, wood frame buildings that were originally constructed as homes and later converted to retail or commercial offices.

Many buildings within the CBD, however, are one-story, flat-roofed 1960's era storefronts that are set far back from the street. These building types lack architectural character and therefore do not present a strong base that reinforces the street-wall. They are often associated with suburban strip malls. On the opposite end of the

spectrum are several large, single use buildings within the CBD that also create visual impacts, but for different reasons. These three or four story, commercial office buildings were probably constructed in the 1970's or 80's and are representative of a building type often found in



This attractive restaurant and shady, well-appointed sidewalk on the Boston Post Road provide a nice respite from the less compact and more sprawling development that is common along the highway.

*Note: All photographs in this section of the report are by David Sousa of Clough, Harbour & Associates LLP, unless otherwise noted.

¹Planning and Zoning Commission, Town of Darien, Connecticut. Adopted May, 25, 1999; Last revised effective March 12, 2006. *Town of Darien Zoning Regulations*. Page VI-13.

suburban office parks. They not only lack retail uses on their ground levels, but also are of a scale that dwarf their neighbors and overpower their surroundings. Their looming, nondescript facades lack architectural articulation, are not based on human proportions, and consequently visually detract from downtown.



One-story retail store on Boston Post Road



Modern office building on Corbin Drive

Whether small, boxy retail shells or large, boxy office buildings, these relatively recent intrusions into downtown represent architecture that does not complement the pedestrian scale or character of the district, fail to contribute to a cohesive, understandable townscape, and detract from Darien's historic, New England charm. Fortunately, these building types are non-conforming to current zoning and would no longer be permitted.

DESIGN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Darien Revitalization Inc.'s (DRI) mission for downtown is to "maintain and enhance the unique charm, character, and historic significance of Downtown Darien, while ensuring a variety of retail, dining and housing, as well as social and cultural activities for residents and visitors of all ages." To help the DRI and the town attain this goal, the Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC) Resource Team assessed existing conditions and identified ways that Darien can achieve long-term viability for downtown, reinforce downtown as the center of social and cultural life, and create a visually distinctive, unique area, within the context and vernacular of Darien's small town, New England character.

OVERVIEW OF SPECIAL CHALLENGES TO REVITALIZATION

During the numerous focus group meetings where the CMSC Resource Team met with small groups of Darien residents, town leaders, business leaders, and stakeholders, common threads emerged relative to specific challenges that Darien faces in its desire to revitalize downtown. They include:

- There is no unified vision among residents, which causes mixed expectations among residents as to what Downtown Darien will become.
- The current development review process is lengthy; the arbitrary or inconsistent application of land use regulations creates unpredictability and may be scaring away potential developers and investors.
- There is a lack of housing choice in town.
- Traffic congestion is a major concern and traffic delays impact the lives of residents on nearly a daily basis. Traffic congestion was cited as the principal reason why residents prefer to shop in other districts, other towns, or on the internet.
- Absent a clear vision and comprehensive plan, market forces appear to have established a trend of development patterns that is not necessarily in the best interests of the community.

It should be noted that business leaders and town officials have not been “asleep at the switch” relative to revitalization of downtown. Darien downtown has enjoyed many notable projects of late including the renovation of the Darien Playhouse as a movie theatre and retail stores, and construction of two new mixed-use buildings known as the Grove Street Plaza that includes restaurants, a store and several upper story apartments. More



Renovated Darien Playhouse

plans for new construction on the Boston Post Road in the vicinity of Day Street are currently proposed by local developers. While reinvestment in Downtown Darien in the form of renovated buildings and attractive infill development has been occurring over the past several years, there is much opportunity to improve downtown’s viability using Smart Growth strategies.

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING USES AND THE “WALKABILITY” OF DOWNTOWN

A review of the CMSC “Analysis Map” (refer to Appendix) reveals that development of Downtown Darien is not compact since there are many gaps between buildings and many sections of downtown that are comprised of surface parking lots. In addition, the percentage of downtown that is principally comprised of buildings that have retail on at least the ground floor is fairly limited in extent. These “walkability gaps” have fractured downtown into two or three



Uninterrupted storefronts in attractive, pedestrian-scale buildings close to the sidewalk help create more “walkable” downtowns.

separate or non-contiguous retail districts. This fracturing severely limits the ability of retailers to attract pedestrians and shoppers between these sub-districts.

Residents of Darien recognize the importance of a “walkable” downtown since one of the town’s “Traffic and Transportation Policies” in the recently adopted *2006 Plan of Conservation and Development* states “Create a pedestrian-friendly downtown where people park once and walk, instead of driving from one store to another.”²

For the purpose of this discussion and analysis of downtown, “walkability” is defined as attractive streets and sidewalks that not only promote pedestrianism by virtue of physically accommodating pedestrians with wide and well-maintained sidewalks and safe and accessible crosswalks, but also by enticing people to walk, and leading them impulsively from one block to the next. They are enticed to shop, stroll and wander because the buildings, street trees, and other amenities along their route offer beauty, provide comfort, and create enclosure. The

² Planning and Zoning Commission, Town of Darien, Connecticut. March 2006 (Final Draft). *2006 Town Plan of Conservation and Development*. Page 4-3.

sidewalks are alive with people, colorful flowers, streaming banners, artistic signs, impromptu art exhibits, alluring shop windows, sidewalk cafes, pedestrian-level lighting, and architectural detail. All of this richness combines to create urban environments that attract people and make them want to linger and enjoy their surroundings while they conduct everyday business, window-shop, or simply enjoy walking in a nice environment for health and recreation.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION

- The most common topic of consternation and concern among residents interviewed by the CMSC Resource Team was traffic congestion. As stated earlier, traffic delays impact the lives of residents on nearly a daily basis and downtown gridlock occurs whenever I-95 becomes clogged, which is quite frequently. Anecdotal information suggests that retail sales are declining in recent years due to traffic congestion and delay. Some residents stated that the Boston Post Road is a dangerous street to walk along due to traffic speeds and errant vehicles. Also the Post Road is not a very nice place to walk along during congested periods due to vehicle emissions and annoyed and inattentive drivers. This concern is echoed in the Town's recently adopted Plan of Conservation and Development which states *"...traffic and transportation is the number one concern as identified in the League of Women Voters roundtable sessions held in late 2003 and early 2004 as part of the development of this Town Plan."*³

The heavy traffic on Darien's streets does not mean that the Boston Post Road and other arteries have to sacrifice the qualities that bring people to it. Intolerable conditions such as traffic noise, collisions, poor walking environments, and loss of business, have happened in part due to: 1) an emphasis on mobility over accessibility, which can result in higher speeds than are appropriate to downtown; 2) a departure from traditional street design principles such as wide sidewalks and placing buildings at the back of the sidewalk; 3) a lack of application of "traffic calming" techniques that slow traffic on major streets; and, 4) lack of alternative routes for local or regional traffic. Suggested strategies to improve traffic flow while promoting pedestrianism in the CBD include the following:

- **Provide Secondary Routes for Local and Through Traffic.** The Boston Post Road is overburdened and is being forced to do too much. Aside from I-95 and the Merritt Parkway, it is the only marked northeast-southwest through route in the region. The town, in close coordination with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, needs to develop alternate routes that can be used for through or local traffic. One alternative route could be as identified in a 15+ year-old traffic report or feasibility study. As mentioned by several residents, the study recommended extension of the Old King's Highway South northeasterly from Tokeneke Road, under the Metro North tracks via a new underpass, and connecting to Mechanics Street. Due to vertical clearance limitations, this underpass would reportedly be available only to passenger vehicles; nonetheless, this option and other creative solutions could provide considerable relief to traffic congestion in the CBD by distributing traffic on more streets and save the Post Road from having to carry the full load.
- **Construct a Modern Roundabout.** Roundabouts are gaining favor as a viable alternative to the traditional signalized traffic intersection. They improve both safety and efficiency for pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles. Unlike older traffic circles or rotaries, modern roundabouts require entering vehicles to yield the right-of-way to

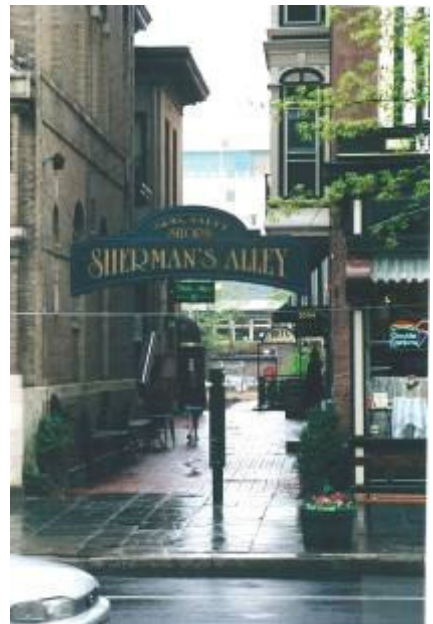
³ Ibid. Page 4-1.

vehicles already in the circle and therefore discourage higher speeds. The incidence of vehicle-pedestrian accidents is also less in roundabouts than in signalized intersections.⁴ Lastly, roundabouts also serve as attractive and landscaped gateways or distinctive entry points into a town center. A modern roundabout as a traffic improvement for the south side of downtown at Leroy and the Boston Post Road would greatly improve traffic flow at one of the main gateways into downtown.



Modern Roundabout

- **Connect Streets.** CBD blocks are too long and there are few interconnected streets. New streets could be laid out as an interconnected network to maintain continuity of the town's circulation system. To provide optimum circulation, access, and crossing opportunities, an ideal downtown block length is between 200 and 400 feet.⁵ Communities with incomplete street grids or longer blocks can provide more street and pedestrian connections by improving undeveloped rights-of-way, improving alleys, and redeveloping larger blocks with new streets, walkways, or alleyway connections. The town of Darien should work to reinstate a downtown grid of streets to improve pedestrianism and facilitate traffic flow. New streets would also meet the needs of bicyclists, and shoppers, and provide more convenient on-street parking.
- **Consolidate Driveways/Curb-cuts.** Many uncontrolled driveways on a busy street increase vehicle conflicts, hinder traffic flow, and interrupt the sidewalk. They also decrease opportunities for pedestrians to cross the street because gaps in traffic are filled by motorists entering the road from driveways. Also, pedestrians seeking refuge in a center turn lane are unprotected. Finally, excessively wide driveways allow faster turns and result in more exposure to pedestrians. Restricting driveways can be one of the most important access management tools for pedestrian and bicycle safety, and for general street function.⁶



⁴ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. June 2000. *Roundabouts: An Informational Guide*.

⁵ Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program. November 1999. *Main Street...when a highway runs through it: A Handbook for Oregon Communities*.

⁶ Ibid.

- **Implement Traffic Calming Measures.** Motorists typically drive at a speed they perceive as safe. This is partially related to the road design, especially available or perceived lane width, curves in the road, corner radii, and stopping sight distance. The configuration of curb edges at intersections is important. Tighter radii will slow turning vehicles. Large radii should be avoided on downtown streets because they encourage faster turning speeds. On-street parking and short blocks also help hold down speed by creating “friction.”

- **Construct Safer Crosswalks, Curb Extensions or Bulb-outs.** Curb extensions (also called bulb-outs, neck-downs, flares, or chokers) shorten pedestrian crossing distances, improve their visibility to motorists, and widen the sidewalk right where space is most needed for ramps, signal poles, street furniture, and a waiting area. The town should consider installing bulb-outs at crosswalks at all intersections in downtown where on-street parking is allowed as well as textured surface materials, and other traffic calming strategies to improve the safety of crossings. Construction of curb extensions on the Boston Post Road will require special



Example of Curb Extension or Bulb-out

approval by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) as that agency owns and maintain the road as US Route 1. CTDOT is becoming more receptive to traffic calming measures and roadway enhancements within village and downtown districts by virtue of its adherence to the principles of Context Sensitive Solutions as promulgated by the Federal Highway Administration (refer to website <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/> for more information on CSS principles, techniques and case studies).

REGULATORY BARRIERS

Regulatory constraints often work against good design, raise roadblocks against innovation, or, ironically, prevent projects that are otherwise consistent with the traditional character of the community. Zoning, subdivision, and building codes can inadvertently discourage redevelopment or infill.

The following is a discussion of land-use permit related regulatory barriers or constraints within the CBD that was observed by the CMSC Resource Team, learned through discussion with residents and business people, or gleaned through a casual review of zoning regulations; it should not be considered all-inclusive. The barriers are in four areas of the town’s zoning regulations: 1) excessive parking requirements; 2) prohibition against the construction of parking garages; 3) building height limits of two stories; and, 4) classification of banks as a retail use.

Regulatory Barrier #1 - Parking. The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC), as the town's principal agency that regulates and approves site plans and large-scale construction projects, has shown considerable awareness of downtown's design deficiencies and sensitivity to many of the principles that

provide for compact development and walkable districts. For example, the PZC now requires buildings constructed in the CBD to provide retail uses on ground floors and encourages appropriately-scaled Main Street architecture where buildings are situated on the street-line (adjacent to the sidewalks). The PZC also insists that developers and other applicants construct



Large area of municipal and private parking south of Boston Post Road near Center Street

landscaping, new sidewalks built to Model Block standards, as well as dedicate portions of their land for pedestrian plazas or pocket-parks.⁷ To its credit, the PZC is also very progressive in its unwritten policies that encourage developers, where feasible, to utilize shared parking among its neighboring property owners in order to maximize parking efficiency, minimize or consolidate curb-cuts, and effect safer, coordinated traffic flow through rear parking lots. The PZC regulations also encourage applicants whose properties are adjacent to existing rear municipal parking lots to expand the municipal parking and dedicate those areas of their properties to the town. Over time, this has resulted in a significant supply of fairly well-situated, free municipal parking.

The availability of parking is a key issue for most downtown and main street business owners. Since land downtown is often in short supply, and large surface parking areas are generally not conducive to a pedestrian environment, large parking lots are discouraged in downtown districts. Surface parking lots often cover more ground than the buildings they are intended to serve, particularly in suburban centers and commercial corridors. On average, 54% of the land area of commercial development is paved and used for parking.⁸

On-street parking and public parking lots may be vital resources, but often there is a perception that these facilities are at or near capacity even when they are not. Communities often have to balance the need for parking and the inclination of businesses to provide parking to meet peak hour demand during the busiest shopping periods with the desire to have a compact, pedestrian-friendly, and aesthetically pleasing downtown or Main Street.

While the Darien PZC is very progressive in its policies and practices regarding Main Street and downtown architecture, site planning, landscaping and the encouragement of shared parking, its

⁷ Planning and Zoning Commission, Town of Darien, Connecticut. March 2006 (Final Draft). *2006 Town Plan of Conservation and Development*. Page A9-6.

⁸ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Development, Community, and Environment Division. January 2006. *Parking Spaces/Community Places: Finding Balance through Smart Growth Solutions*. Page 7.

requirements for the construction of parking for commercial developments is quite regressive. Specifically, the PZC parking requirements established in Section 900 of the town Zoning Regulations⁹ require a minimum of 10 off-street parking spaces for every 1,000 square feet of retail, service or personal service business. Similarly, Darien's Zoning Regulations require 20 parking spaces for each 1,000 square feet of restaurant use. These requirements are quite excessive and out of synch with current practices and generic parking requirements. Due to these PZC policies or regulations, lack of parking is not an issue or limiting factor in Darien, at least for downtown uses. CMSC conducted an approximate tally of parking spaces within the CBD by analyzing 2004 aerial photographs and determined that the CBD has the following inventory of parking:

	Total No. of Spaces	Retail Customers &/or Offices	Dedicated to Commuters	Available after 5 PM for Downtown Uses
Public Parking Lots	1156	333	823	313
Private or Shared Lots	1522	1214	308	87
On-Street Parking	175	175	0	0
Total	2853	1722	1131	400

To compare the current inventory of parking in Darien to projected needs based on current regulations the Resource Team conducted a cursory estimate of building space within the CBD. The team approximated the total square footage of building floor areas (from town geographic information database based on Town Assessor records) and correlated the amount of available parking to the square footage of space served by the parking and determined that, in aggregate, there are approximately 5.8 parking spaces for each 1,000 square feet of retail, office, and service space in the CBD, as summarized in the following table:

Total "Footprint" of All Buildings in CBD (sq. ft.)	310,000	sq. ft.
Total Approximate Floor Area (sq. ft.)	490,000	sq. ft.
Total No. of Spaces in CBD (excluding commuter)	2,853	
No. Spaces per 1,000 gross (sq. ft.) in CBD	5.8	
Total No. of Spaces (including some commuter*)	3,253	
No. Spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. (including some commuter)	6.6	
*Conservative estimate of dedicated commuter spaces within the CBD that are available to shoppers/diners after 5 P.M.		

⁹ Planning and Zoning Commission, Town of Darien, Connecticut. Adopted May, 25, 1999; Last revised effective March 12, 2006. *Town of Darien Zoning Regulations*. Page IX-2.

This ratio not only exceeds the generic, single-use parking requirements of most localities¹⁰ but also greatly exceeds the actual parking demand experienced in mixed-use, compact districts, as the following discussion will illustrate. The number of available parking spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. of gross building floor area increases to approximately 6.6 after 5 P.M. based on a conservative estimate of the number of commuter parking spaces that are vacated by the commuters and made available to the public for use by shoppers or restaurant patrons. Commuter parking available after 7 P.M. and on weekends would be higher yet.

There is a growing body of evidence that indicates that parking demand in mixed-use, high-density districts is significantly less than similarly sized developments in single-use, low-density districts. This decreased demand is due to a number of qualities unique to mixed-use districts including: the availability of alternative transportation choices (walking, biking, transit, etc.); complementary, cross-utilization of parking by surrounding land uses (e.g. an office building parking lot will be empty when the restaurant next door is packed after 5 P.M., so requiring both to provide for 100 percent of their parking needs is wasteful); the availability of off-site parking within ¼ mile walking distance (i.e. municipal parking lots or garages)¹¹ and, the convenience of on-street parking.¹²

Researchers are finding that parking regulations should be adjusted to factor efficiencies gained by using mixed-use and compact development planning principles. A recent study by the University of Connecticut specifically evaluated parking supply and demand in several New England mixed-use districts, and compared that demand to parking requirements mandated by local jurisdictions. This study discovered that, on average, the amount of parking mandated by municipal regulation was about two and one-half times peak use.¹³ The study concluded that peak demand in compact, mixed-use districts averaged only 2.0 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area. Applying these findings to Downtown Darien suggests that the town's current regulations require five times more parking than necessary to meet expected parking demand. The town should conduct a more detailed inventory of parking downtown, and commission a parking demand study to determine parking availability at various periods throughout the day. The objective of the study would be to provide tangible data on parking supply and demand specific to downtown that will allow the town PZC to reduce parking requirements to more rational levels.

Regulatory Barrier #2 - Parking Garage Prohibition. Section 907 of the town's Zoning Regulations prohibits parking structures anywhere in town.¹⁴ A key strategy to provide parking in high-density core areas, from an urban design and functional standpoint, is in underground or multistory parking garages. Parking structures allow increased density of downtown which will improve walkability. The town should revise this regulation to allow parking structures in the CBD. Current technologies and design innovations have led to custom garages composed of

¹⁰ Bergman, David, ed. 1991. *Off-street Parking Requirements*, American Planning Association PAS Report No. 432.

¹¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Development, Community, and Environment Division. January 2006. *Parking Spaces/Community Places: Finding Balance through Smart Growth Solutions*.

¹² Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program. C. 2001. *Commercial and Mixed-use Development: Code Handbook*.

¹³ Marshall, Wesley E. and Garrick, PhD, Norman W. November 2005. *Parking at Mixed-Use Centers in Small Cities*. University of Connecticut, Connecticut Transportation Institute, Civil and Environmental Engineering.

¹⁴ Planning and Zoning Commission, Town of Darien, Connecticut. Adopted May, 25, 1999; Last revised effective March 12, 2006. *Town of Darien Zoning Regulations*. Page IX-6.

materials and architecture that blend in with surrounding buildings, or are enveloped by retail and housing.



Examples of contextual, architecturally pleasing parking garages: Harvard Square (above, photo by Peter Vanderwalker) and Audubon Court, New Haven (right)



Regulatory Barrier #3 – Building Heights Limited to Two Stories. The maximum height allowed for buildings within the CBD is 2 stories and 28 feet, except that the PZC may permit the height to be increased to not more than three stories and 35 feet provided that certain conditions are met by the applicant.¹⁵ These conditions include that the applicant must develop and maintain an area of open space on the lot to be used as a public plaza; further, a 2.5 to 1 ratio of gross floor area of the building for each square foot of open space developed shall be utilized to determine maximum permitted building on the lot.



Three-story buildings better enclose the street and are of appropriate scale in the context of downtown Darien.

Presumably, the intent of this requirement is to provide more pedestrian amenities and therefore has merit; however, the practical application of this provision creates the unintended consequence of making three story buildings in the CBD impractical or uneconomical to develop. That is because the amount of open space required to be set aside by the applicant is excessive. The 2.5:1 ratio of building floor area to open space or plaza for a 10,000 square foot, three story building (3,333 s.f. per floor) equates to a 4,000 sq. ft. plaza. In other words, the size of the plaza would be 20% larger than the floor plate or “footprint” of the building.

¹⁵ Ibid. Page VI-15.

A three story building of 35 feet in height would not be outside the range of the architecturally-pleasing ratio of 2:1 that many architects and planners consider ideal for pedestrian-oriented urban streetscapes given that street right-of-ways within the CBD are over 65 feet in width (refer to Appendix - “Design and Architectural Guidelines”). Therefore, the zoning code should be revised to encourage three story buildings, especially if the third story is continued on a different plane from the bottom two (e.g. was stepped-back as in a penthouse design or a third floor that was integrated into the roof using appropriately-scaled dormers). The requirement for open space or plazas should allow a “fee-in-lieu” of open space, whereby an applicant could elect to pay a fee to the town in lieu of providing the open space. The town could then use the funds accumulated to purchase and develop a larger, contiguous, centrally located plaza, square or green that would be much more meaningful (in terms of size, location, quality, function and potential to become an icon for the community) than numerous small plazas. This strategy would also encourage a more continuous “street wall” and therefore serve to make the CBD more “walkable”.

Regulatory Barrier #4 – Proliferation of Banks in the CBD. Darien zoning regulations acknowledge that some land uses are incompatible in the CBD and recognize that mixed use



Bank buildings do not enhance the shopping experience.

development in the CBD best supports the functions of downtown daily life: employment, recreation, retail, and civic and educational institutions. Such mixes foster vibrant, interesting communities. Areas which include office, retail, and housing uses within the same neighborhood – or even within the same building create synergy. As stated

earlier in this report, the PZC now requires buildings constructed in the CBD to provide retail uses on ground floors; however, one significant flaw in the regulation is the failure to define retail to exclude banks. The reason why the PZC should better control or even prohibit banks within the CBD is that empirical data indicate banks are not a principal destination for shoppers and diners. They lack store fronts and display windows and therefore do not contribute to a lively street and vibrant retail environment. Banks function more as professional service centers or offices and should be reclassified as such in the zoning regulations.

SPECIFIC DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION ITEMS

The following design recommendations or action items are general in nature by virtue of the relatively limited duration and scope of the CMSC Resource Team visit. They are intended to expand residents' expectations of what downtown could be and stimulate discussion on a collective vision for downtown. It identifies strategies and solutions that have been used in communities similar to Darien to create more compact, walkable, and economically viable downtowns. This narrative should be used in companion with the Sketch Plan provided in the Appendix: *“Recommended Improvements/ Possible Infill Development for Downtown Darien”*. This plan (henceforth referred to as the CMSC Sketch Plan) was prepared and presented during the CMSC's 5/22 – 5/25/06 Resource Team visit to Darien. It is highly conceptual in nature and is not intended as a master plan for downtown; rather it was developed to graphically depict the

CMSC Resource Team's recommendations, and to suggest possible areas for infill development.

As a further caveat, the development possibilities shown on this Sketch Plan are not intended for strict interpretation or application on any specific site; rather, it is provided to help residents and businesses understand and visualize the tremendous potential that increased densities and a more holistic view of street networks can provide including: create critical mass, enhance and expand the district, and improve traffic flow.

Key components of the CMSC Resource Team Sketch Plan are:

- Downtown Infill Development: As discussed in prior sections, numerous infill opportunities exist in Downtown Darien that could result in the construction of new mixed-use buildings, along with additional green space. Creative conversion of surface parking lots into townhouses, fine restaurants, and high-end retail is possible. Recent infill construction techniques can beautifully blend into the architectural character of the district. Rethinking the value of all surface parking lots on a site-by-site approach can result in valuable new sites for construction.

The intensity or density of development depicted on the Sketch Plan would be consistent with the density of development that exists in the 'Model Block' on the Boston Post Road. This attractive and compact retail area 'scored' very high on our "walkability" analysis due to its many qualities, including: a) the buildings form a consistent street-wall at the back of the sidewalk; b) some buildings are two and three stories; c) most buildings are historical or have a traditional design that reinforces Darien's small-town, New England character; d) parking is limited and discretely located behind the buildings; and, e) uses on the ground floor are mostly retail or restaurant. These attributes make this block very desirable both for merchants and shoppers. This potential infill development is shown as red-shaded buildings on the CMSC Sketch Plan.

- The introduction of a Modern Traffic Roundabout at the intersection of the Boston Post Road and Leroy Avenue could serve as a gateway to downtown and achieve multiple traffic mitigation and safety objectives. (see "Traffic Congestion" on page 14).
- Connected Streets: Also as discussed in "Traffic Congestion" an interconnected network or grid of streets is important element of a town's traffic circulation system. A well-planned grid of street, alleys and short city blocks also enhance pedestrianism and provide more opportunities for infill development. The CMSC Sketch Plan shows several possibilities for extending street or creating new streets in the CBD to achieve these benefits. They are identified by the pink coloring.
- A By-Pass Route Under Metro North Railroad as recommended years ago by extending Old King's Highway South northeasterly from Tokeneke Road, under the Metro North tracks via a new underpass, and connecting to Mechanics Street could provide considerable relief to traffic congestion in the CBD (see "Traffic Congestion" on page 14).

Many communities are reluctant to embrace higher density development because it is equated with lower quality and images of overcrowding. In fact, well-designed, clustered developments

are attractive and often include residential units that are priced at market rate.¹⁶ In order to ensure good quality developments that contribute to the pedestrian environment, Darien needs to establish Design and Architectural Standards (see “Architecture” in next section) and aggressively review site plans and development proposals, since higher urban densities require higher standards of architectural design and more user-friendly public spaces.

If Darien residents determine that this compact development/transit-friendly approach shown in the CMSC Sketch Plan has merit, then detailed planning and feasibility studies should be commissioned to refine the plan into a “blueprint” or Master Plan for downtown and to determine what changes to the town’s land use regulations would be necessary to permit the density of development. The implementation of the plan could either be done by current property owners, or, if multiple properties are involved, the town could acquire (through friendly acquisition from willing sellers) and assemble the properties itself (possibly through a non-profit development corporation) and competitively select and designate a master developer to design, finance and construct the development. In either case, affected property owners and businesses should be “at the table” during every stage to obtain their “buy-in” and to ensure that tenants would be transitioned to new and improved locations. (See “Implementation Steps” on page 27 for more discussion on the development of a Master Plan.)

CMSC does not expect that the level of development shown on the Sketch Plan could occur within a foreseeable period of time. Rather, experience in other towns indicates that change will be incremental and phased over a long period of time. Development would gain impetus as earlier phases enjoy economic success and residents and businesses realize the less tangible benefits that can be gained, such as renewed community pride, a better quality of life for residents, and a more desirable community - physically, socially, and environmentally. While much further discussion and study will be required, it is hoped that this report and Sketch Plan can contribute to these worthwhile goals.

ACTION ITEMS

A. Diversify Uses and Increase Density of Buildings

Encourage more retail density. An integral feature of downtowns is the street-wall, or the consistent, unbroken corridor of building facades that runs the length of a downtown street. Downtown Darien’s street has many major gaps as illustrated in Appendix - “CMSC Analysis Map”. There are many areas where sites of former buildings on the Boston Post Road have been filled-in with parking lots. The town should encourage proposals that replace gaps in the street wall through infill development.

Promote Transit-Oriented Development with a mixture of



The main street in Camden, Maine is a good example of a consistent, unbroken street-wall.

¹⁶ Regional Plan Association. August 1997. *Building Transit-Friendly Communities: A Design and Development Strategy for the Tri-State Metropolitan Region*.

residential units (condos, apartments, townhouses, etc.) within the CBD, and above shops. The Center for Transit-Oriented Development is an excellent resource for information. Their website is www.reconnectingamerica.org/html/TOD/index.htm

Restrict Banks in the CBD. Revise zoning regulations to restrict banks within the CBD. In the meantime, consider a moratorium on banks in the CBD as discussed in the Economic Restructuring section of this report.

Attract Institutions to Downtown. Civic, cultural, and institutional uses (e.g. civic buildings, schools, courthouses, community churches, colleges, museums, hospitals) generate civic activity and promote intergenerational interaction. These activities are positive and complimentary of downtown retail activities not only because they bring people into downtown but also because they contribute to pedestrian and street activity during the evening and weekend off-peak hours. The town should work to encourage new institutions to locate on prominent sites in downtown, preferably at sites that terminate major streets.

Make Compact Development Happen. Encourage infill development not only on the Post Road but within underutilized rear lots to expand the limits of downtown, enhance walkability and create critical mass. Regarding the former Howard Johnson's site that is just west of downtown, expand the downtown district to include this gateway site. Insure that whatever development occurs on this site provides a strong pedestrian connection to the rest of downtown.

B. Architecture

Create and Adopt Design and Architectural Guidelines. Darien's Planning and Zoning Commission or Architectural Review Board should develop a set of design principles and architectural guidelines in order to assess and review projects with fairness and consistency. Residents and developers whose projects are subject to review would be afforded a measure of predictability in the knowledge that the judgment of the Board will be based on their project's conformance with the principles and guidelines.¹⁷ Refer to Appendix: "Design and Architectural Guidelines" for more discussion on this topic.

Ensure Buildings Enclose the Street. Require new construction to be a minimum of two stories (three stories better) and brought to the edge of the sidewalk.

C. Streets and Sidewalks

Close one or more exists on Interstate 95. Consider closing exits adjacent to downtown that make it easy for cars to exit the interstate to



A building on a visible corner in downtown should have a prominent architectural feature or strong entrance that is oriented to the corner. This example is from Wellesley, MA.

¹⁷ City of Middletown Department of Planning, Conservation, and Development. July, 2002. *Middletown Design: A Framework for Development, Design Guidelines for the Middletown Design Review and Preservation Board.*

avoid traffic jams which only clogs the Boston Post Road. Such an action cannot be taken without ample public discussion and the full involvement of CONNDOT.

Construct a Modern Roundabout. Consider a roundabout as a traffic and gateway improvement for the south side of downtown.

Connect Streets. CBD blocks are too long and there are few interconnected streets. Work to reinstate a downtown grid of streets to improve pedestrianism and facilitate traffic flow.

Consolidate Driveways/Curb-cuts. Restrict driveways in the CBD for pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Implement Traffic Calming Measures such as tighter radii at intersection to slow turning vehicles. On-street parking and short blocks also help hold down speed by creating “friction.”

Construct Safer Crosswalks, Curb Extensions or Bulb-outs.

Consider “**Undergrounding**” overhead utilities.

Construct Appealing Sidewalks. Encourage wider sidewalks with new construction. Expand the model sidewalk program to include all areas of downtown.



Business signs downtown should be colorful, unique and visible yet should not be large or obtrusive or have glaring lighting. This example is from a street in Camden, Maine.

Provide More Public Seating. Provide alcoves and pocket parks with benches to encourage people on the street; make downtown more attractive to strolling, shopping.

Coordinate Signage. Signs not only serve an important function of showing direction, but also can inform and interpret. A coordinated, simple and visually unified system of directional signage to orient visitors to public parking, transit stations, parks and other points of interest should be established.

Construct Gateways. The entry points or gateways to Downtown Darien should be marked with attractive signage, landscaping and a vertical element(s) that can be uniquely associated with Darien.

D. Parking and Transit

Design and Manage Parking Areas. Darien’s parking challenges include the allocation of parking resources to account for the fluctuating needs of the downtown area and rail commuters. Some parking could be counted as commuter parking during the week when there is higher demand for parking for station users. Those same spots could be counted



This monument and park serve as a gateway welcoming visitors to Brattleboro Vermont’s downtown district.

as commercial parking during evenings and weekends when visitors to the commercial district increase. Another issue brought up during the Resource Team visit was that there was not sufficient long term parking for downtown workers. Darien needs to find a process and organization mechanism to manage existing parking resources more intelligently.

Revise Downtown Parking Regulations. The parking requirements of the town's zoning regulations should be revised to minimize unnecessary surface parking. The town should consider waiving minimum off-street parking standards in the CBD altogether. Many cities (including nearby New Canaan) waive parking standards for downtown development in recognition of the availability of on-street parking, municipal parking and alternative modes of travel.

Use Parking Districts. Local ordinances can authorize payment of in-lieu fees to help support downtown parking programs and construction of new public parking facilities.

Encourage Structured Parking. Darien should consider revising its zoning regulations to allow custom garages with materials and architecture that blend in with surrounding buildings, or garages that are enveloped by retail and housing.



Darien Commuter Train Station

Screen Surface Parking Lots. Downtown parking lots should be more discretely located (or reduced in size) and partially screened from view. Parking should be accommodated behind buildings, rather than in front of buildings, to maintain a pedestrian-oriented streetscape. Parking lots are a negative visual element of town centers because they are utilitarian and open to view. Often they do not receive the same level of design attention as other types of land uses. Landscaping, trees, attractive fences and low walls can mitigate the negative visual effects of parking lots and make a significant difference in the overall visual qualities of downtown.

On-Street Parking. The town should investigate increasing the availability of on-street parking within the CBD.

Bicycles and Pedestrians. Provide safe bike trails, signed routes and bike racks to connect outlying neighborhoods with the downtown...provide alternate mode of travel to commuter transit system.

Public Transit. Provide well-appointed bus or transit stops with shelters and good signage.

E. Green Infrastructure, Special Identity and Connections.

Plant Street Trees. Trees contribute significantly to the visual qualities of streets. Studies have also shown them to have a positive effect on retail sales. Trees also make measurable contributions to improving environmental conditions and pedestrian comfort by providing shade and wind protection, and reducing ambient temperatures. The existing mature trees in Darien's CBD are a terrific asset. The town should provide more street trees to ensure continuity of the

tree canopy, particularly to be in place and compensate for tree loss in the event of a hurricane or widespread disease that could decimate older trees.

Create a Symbolic Center. Downtown Darien lacks meaningful public plazas, parks and other outdoor green space. Creating public spaces provides venues for civic gatherings and ceremonies, outdoor markets or festivals, where people can informally socialize, or use for quiet enjoyment. With growth and new development, Darien should provide new public spaces, such as a town green or central plaza to support the social and cultural fabric of the community and to provide a symbolic center and new identity.

Install Outdoor Art. Install permanent and temporary art or sculpture displays and murals.

Improve Connections to Peripheral Residential Neighborhoods. Provide better and more sidewalks between neighborhoods and downtown.

Improve Tilley Pond Park. This park located at the periphery of downtown should be improved to better serve as a venue for activity that will draw people downtown. Make the park more visible through signs and banners.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Darien must provide a clear regulatory and procedural path that is supportive of infill development in order for downtown revitalization to succeed. The following key steps can help Darien implement a successful infill strategy.

Prepare a Downtown Master Plan

The Downtown Master Plan should establish goals and objectives for the infill strategy and identify desired characteristics of and locations for infill. Although no one can predict the future, the goal in creating a Master Plan is to suggest the general, “big-picture” directions that will provide for downtown’s long-term sustainability, rather than offer “quick-fix” or short-term solutions. Growth policies can accommodate and encourage infill within designated zones or on a site-by-site basis, similar to the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. For example, the Downtown Master Plan would provide a general strategy on building use and should be formally adopted by the PZC and residents (preferably by formal amendment of the town’s *Plan of Conservation and Development*). Once a Downtown Master Plan is adopted, it can serve to guide revisions to the town’s land use regulations to reduce parking requirements, allow greater densities and taller buildings, for example. Consistency with the Downtown Master Plan will reduce potential conflicts later in the development process.

Creating and implementing a long-term vision for a downtown is difficult and requires the on-going commitment from the local government, the business and civic leadership, and the community as a whole. There are several suggested steps to develop a Downtown Master Plan, including:

- Establish a Downtown Master Plan Committee consisting of neighborhood residents, business operators, property owners and other stakeholders.
- Conduct a series of public workshops where all are invited to participate. The workshops will allow the community to understand all issues, address concerns and provide focus on (and find solutions to) specific issues.

- Identify neighborhood opportunities and constraints and residents' desires along with associated goals and objectives. All participants should be urged to be visionary and look beyond "what is" using the Sketch Plans of this report to imagine what could be.
- Consider an appropriate mix of land uses, economic development opportunities, natural resource protection, traffic improvements, utility upgrades, public open space, streetscape standards and other uses valued by the community that would enhance the development, minimize development impacts and help the development fit in with the neighborhood or greater community.
- Make specific zoning recommendations including suggestions for building massing, architectural design, parking reduction, setbacks or buffers, pedestrian circulation, trails, traffic calming, etc.
- Prepare an action plan.

Revise Zoning Regulations. Zoning regulations should support infill and include a clear articulation of intent that reinforces the provisions in the Master Plan. There are many zoning options available, including changing an existing zone, or creating a new zone, or a floating zone.

Regulatory Consistency and Streamlining. Interagency reviews should be coordinated to ensure efficiency and consistency. Reviewers of development proposals should possess a comfortable degree of certainty regarding the latitude they can apply to the project. By making the approval process easier, more efficient, and more clearly defined, developers and new businesses will be less hesitant to invest in Darien.

Public Participation. Because infill takes place in established communities, input from area residents, property owners, tenants, and business people should be sought, preferably during the infill planning process, and before specific projects are proposed. Residents have a long-standing stake in the community, and often feel a sense of propriety over a passed-over parcel of land, however small, as a public recreation or green space under their stewardship.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

The economic restructuring component for downtown revitalization, stated quite simply, ensures that downtown is a good place to invest. If downtown loses its ability to attract investment the area will become stagnant at best, obsolete and blighted at worst. Investments in housing, retail, office or business expansion take someone to champion the cause, supply the data the investor needs, and guide the process; this is the job of the Economic Restructuring (ER) committee. Attracting investment does not necessarily mean any investment, but rather attracting and steering the right investment to the right location in order to benefit the entire downtown.

The ER committee not only helps recruit, retain and expand opportunities for investment in downtown, but the committee also helps ensure that the rhythm of the business, people and living environments all work together. The ER committee has a big job to do and will rely on active participants willing to work behind the scenes to make big things happen.

OBSERVATIONS

All of the consultants participating on this Resource Team had the opportunity to talk with and interview many individuals and groups from the community. Ample time was provided for each consultant to explore, both guided and unguided, the downtown. Downtown must serve many needs, but the relationship that the businesses have with each other and the *place*, is the difference between a marginal downtown and a great downtown that attracts people. While focusing on the economics of the district, it is impossible to ignore some of the aspects that may normally fall into the arenas of Design or Promotion, which is reflected in the observations below.

- Residents and professionals living and working in Darien simply do not shop downtown as a first stop for shopping. Downtown is often seen as a disjointed place with too many banks occupying prime retail locations. Most of those interviewed stated that there is not enough shopping, quality retail shopping or shopping for all ages. Things for kids to do, more restaurants, less banks, and better pedestrian environments were all dominant topics that residents wanted to talk about. Most people don't want Darien to become a tourist destination but they do want to be able to shop in Darien first. A full 20% of Darien's population is under 9 years old making the need for children's, pre-teen and teen shopping and entertainment imperative¹⁸. Women continue to buy 85% of all retail goods and services; it would be wise for the ER committee to listen to the women shoppers of Darien¹⁹.
- Several people indicated that they fear Darien will not be a place where their children will be able to afford housing. Affordable workforce housing was often a topic of conversation. There is some data to back up these beliefs; the greatest loss in Darien's population since 1980 has occurred in the 19-29 age group²⁰. Furthermore, young retirees (55-64) seem to be leaving Darien as well, perhaps in search of more affordable or smaller housing, or because low maintenance, transit-oriented housing does not exist in Darien²¹. Most interviewed stated that downtown could be a location for workforce and senior housing, currently missing in Darien. Condominium and upper story housing can be attractive for

¹⁸ U.S. Census

¹⁹ National Retail Association

²⁰ U.S. Census

²¹ U. S. Census

young families, teachers, retirees and most civil service type workers. Downtown Darien is especially well poised for transit-oriented housing, because of the location to train and bus services. More and more communities are turning to downtown for housing needs, baby boomers are *selling down*, and for the first time in America, condominium sales exceeded home sales in 2005²².

- Perhaps the most alarming observation relates to parking. A significant majority of the people the Resource Team met with believes the parking regulation (10 spaces per 1000 square feet of selling space) is absurd, archaic and almost certainly used on a questionably subjective basis. Many people said too many projects received *waivers* from the parking requirement because their business were deemed *appropriate* in what appears to be an arbitrary process. Commercial realtors and developers said businesses just avoid Darien because of the excessive parking requirement.

It is clear that there is a need for Darien's leaders to communicate with other successful downtowns and learn how to encourage good business development, be responsive to the needs of the community and do it by using methods that have proven to be successful.

RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Downtown Darien is ripe with opportunity. Darien is an affluent community that can and will support the downtown if downtown offers the goods and services the residents demand.

Quality retailers are attracted to areas where the retail core is protected, predictable, shop-able (no gaps) and walkable. Downtown does not need to be chain vs. independent but rather an environment where all businesses work together and feed off of one another. Newrules.org is a website full of court tested ordinances, most of which aim to eliminate the taking over of downtown by chains. To even know what ordinances will be needed there must be a downtown plan in place that guides the downtown development now, and in the future. The economic restructuring committee will continue to promote the downtown as a good place to invest and in doing so should consider some of the following ideas.



Maintain the Data

- **Create and maintain a database of economic indicators for downtown.** The information in the database should include information about the buildings, employees, businesses, customers and relevant market data. It will be very valuable, for a restaurant owner for example, to have information about the number of employees working downtown, or a potential investor to have a complete list of all downtown buildings for sale.

²² National Home Builders Association

- **Compile a list of gaps in supply.** The ER committee should complete a consumer survey to reconfirm demand of the local community. This can be done in conjunction with a college or high school supplying the labor and even doing the analysis of the survey. The University of Wisconsin has done a tremendous job of compiling information, survey examples, and complete instructions for gathering, storing and using data that will benefit your district economically. You can access survey and retention data at www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/dma/2.html
- This survey will be one step in preparing for the niche market study to be conducted in the coming year. As a designated Connecticut Main Street program Darien Revitalization, Inc. (DRI) will receive a niche market study as a major second year activity. Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC) will work with Debbie Parnon and the ER committee to compile the relevant information that needs to be in place prior to the start of the study. The more information that can be supplied by the ER committee the better the end product will be.

Build Business Relationships

It is important for every Main Street program to have a good relationship with business and property owners. The ER committee can do a lot to help maintain a constant line of communication with both business and property owners. Here are some suggestions for building these networks:

- **Business After Hours.** The ER committee can host monthly business meetings with downtown business and property owners. This should be a time to network and perhaps provide additional business training.
- **Newsletter Articles.** The ER committee should provide a range of topical articles for the newsletter that merchants could use to improve their businesses. Articles on such issues as merchandising, customer service and inventory control can all be obtained from various sources. A quick search on Google of “business improvement articles” will result in hundreds of copyright-released articles suitable for print.
- **Business Development Assistance.** The Connecticut Main Street Center has on staff a business development specialist that can be utilized by DRI. The ER committee should plan to use the CMSC business specialist both for group presentations and individual consultations. With the impending construction that is on the horizon for Downtown Darien, businesses will need guidance, inspiration and ideas on surviving construction. Other seminar topics could include:
 - Succession planning
 - Image development
 - Consumer trends
 - Inventory management
 - Business expansion
- **New business celebrations.** When a new business locates downtown, the ER committee should celebrate with the business. Introductions of new business owners at selectmen meetings, ribbon cuttings and articles in the newspapers can help the business and DRI.

Business Recruitment. It will be important for the ER committee to begin some form of business recruitment. Because recruitment can be costly, a passive or soft recruitment program

is recommended at this time. Think of it as business attraction and soft recruitment. Downtown Darien can show up on the radar screen (so to speak) and site selectors may visit downtown, but will your downtown be ready in other ways? Make sure you are attractive for business by paying attention to such issues as the ease of doing and starting a business, the way the area looks, and how the area is managed.

A soft recruitment program might include articles in area magazines about downtown. Perhaps a recruitment team may be assembled to visit targeted businesses that may be seeking another location.

Begin a soft recruitment program:

- **Articles.** Submit articles to local and regional papers that promote the fact that Darien has an active downtown revitalization program. Make sure that as new businesses move into the downtown press releases announce their opening, locally and regionally. Articles can also be developed and published that promote business development; an example would be an article on how local business can apply for SBA lending.
- **What is available?** It is important for the ER committee to know what is available for rent or sale. Publish this information on your website, in newsletters, and in presentations to groups.
- **Personal visits to targeted businesses.** Perhaps the most successful way downtowns are snagging new businesses is with a personal visit. The ER committee will develop a list of the types of desired businesses for downtown, then identify some of the businesses in the region that fit these profiles and visit them. Independent businesses respond well to visits from community members inviting them to open in their community.
- **Promote Darien as “open for business.”** Make sure all of your communications relay the fact that you are a community that is aggressively looking for the right businesses and you are open for them. Promote new zoning changes, a can-do attitude, and the fact that Darien has an organization dedicated to the management of downtown.
- **Know who (nationally) is looking in your area and what they are looking for;** you just might have what they are looking for. Most of the good businesses that Darien would like to recruit can be contacted through one of two organizations; the ER committee should contact both of these.
 - **Lease Trac** - Located in Augusta Georgia, maintains contact information for businesses looking for new locations
 - **ICSC** - International Council of Shopping Center Executives. Downtown is one big shopping and living center. This organization has members looking for downtown locations.
 - **Commercial realtor and site selector breakfasts.** Host breakfasts for commercial realtors and site selectors. Keeping them informed about the progress of downtown helps them help downtown.

Housing

Because there is such a keen interest in housing that is affordable for a large part of the working population of Darien, the ER committee should be involved in promoting housing downtown. Some of the issues that the ER committee can address are:

- Support and advocate transit-oriented and affordable workforce housing in the downtown area.
- An absorption study would identify the number of units that can be absorbed in the community over a certain period of time.
- Reuse of upper stories for housing may require new revisions in ordinances that can be championed by the ER committee.
- The ER committee can work with the development community and the municipality to establish guidelines for housing as a part of commercial developments.

Support a Comprehensive Master Plan for Downtown

A downtown master plan is a document that describes, in words and with visual tools, an overall development concept which includes both present and future property uses as well as future land development plans. The ultimate goal in creating a master plan is to suggest the “big picture” directions that will provide for downtown’s long-term sustainability, rather than offer “quick-fix” or short-term solutions. Please refer to the Design section of this report for more on a master plan.

- Prior to the completion of the master plan there are some elements that can and should be supported/developed by the ER committee including:
 - Parking. A recommendation for code revisions is also stated in the Design section of this report and should be supported with vigor by the ER committee.
 - Banks are a service commercial use and should not continue to be allowed in key retail locations. Until such an ordinance is in place, there should be a moratorium on any new banks locating in the downtown core. The Resource Team learned that Rye, New York placed a moratorium on banks; perhaps a visit to Rye might help in instituting a moratorium for Downtown Darien. See the Design section of this report for more information on this.
 - Establish a Café ordinance that allows and encourages outdoor dining.
 - News rack consolidation ordinance (clean up the mess). This ordinance is currently being considered and presumably will be implemented at some point. This is a relatively easy task for most cities to accomplish. The process of reviewing and updating the proposed ordinance appears to be taking way too much time and needs to be carefully reviewed and streamlined. A cumbersome process for implementing change will only make future needed changes difficult to impossible to implement. The ER committee must support the Design committee’s work on this issue.

Downtown Darien is poised for great things. The ER committee has already recognized the wonderful location that Darien enjoys. The transportation linkages to employment centers alone make Darien’s location enviable. Darien’s trade area is also a great asset in that the spendable income from the region is one of the highest in Connecticut. Consumers have money to spend in Darien; retailers love this combination, consumers and money. Traffic to some is a liability, but to the community that is trying to build a retail base, it is a blessing. Traffic can be managed and should be seen as an opportunity that just needs to be shaped. In the end it is up to Darien. Darien has more assets than most communities its size. DRI has committed people and thus far has demonstrated they can get the money to run the organization. You have what it takes and it is yours to win or to lose.

PROMOTION

The goal of Main Street Promotion is to bring more people downtown to shop, dine, relax, and be entertained—and ultimately to work, live, and invest. This is accomplished through two key strategies:

1. **Marketing the unique assets** of the downtown district, in order to get people to come; and
2. **Creating a compelling experience** for people once they come downtown (or for those who are already there, as is the case for downtown residents and employees).

Downtown Darien has the potential to succeed with both of these strategies, ultimately changing the way people feel about the downtown and significantly increasing the number of people who choose to come there. To accomplish this, however, it is important to think strategically about an effective promotional plan for the downtown and what it takes to make these strategies work.

The Main Street Approach™ to downtown Promotion works in three primary areas, which are inter-related:

- **Special events.** A wide variety of events give people reasons to come downtown. Events are particularly important when the retail mix is not yet compelling enough to be a draw on its own. Downtowns need both daytime and evening vitality, and special events help provide this.
- **Image development.** Over the past two or three decades, the image of many downtowns has deteriorated, due to a number of different factors. The unkempt appearance of the buildings and street and the declining business mix have created an undesirable image. As a result, many people have negative impressions of the downtown area, which—whether real or perceived—need to be addressed through positive image campaigns and activities.
- **Retail activities.** Because of the dramatic changes in retail that have resulted in tremendous competition for downtown retail businesses, many of which are locally owned, retail promotion needs to be strategic and well coordinated.

The following observations and recommendations present specific ideas for improving each of these three areas, as well as suggestions for helping the promotion committee perform more effectively.

OBSERVATIONS

Assets

The Main Street Approach™ to promotion begins with **recognizing and building on the community's unique assets**. Downtown Darien has multiple assets that can be used to build a compelling environment. These include:

- Excellent retail anchors
- The community WANTS to come downtown for events
- Demographic support for children and family programming
- Comprehensive event calendar with two new events planned by DRI
- An infrastructure in excellent shape with plenty of parking spaces
- Tilley Pond Park – an urban oasis just steps from downtown
- A committed Town government
- A movie theater downtown – Darien Playhouse
- Many cultural organizations and amenities

- Downtown composed of “one of a kind” local businesses that can’t be found anywhere else

Challenges

While Darien must capitalize on these assets, the community must also recognize and address the challenges it faces. These include:

- A bifurcated physical environment created by the railroad. The underpass is a barrier to pedestrians
- Traffic issues on the Boston Post Road
- Proliferation of downtown financial institutions
- Few merchants advertise individually
- Lack of a unified community vision for downtown
- No measurable objectives for downtown events
- Logo development process has been painfully slow and has become the excuse for not completing even the most basic communications projects

RECOMMENDATIONS

Targeted Strategies

Identify the markets that are much more likely to come downtown, and begin with targeted promotional efforts to attract these markets. These “likely suspects” include:

Local Residents: It is much more convenient for local residents to shop in Darien than elsewhere. They *want* to shop in Darien. Make it easy for them by letting them know the products and services you offer. A direct mail program targeting a certain demographic (i.e. females between the ages of 25-40 with household incomes exceeding \$100,000) is probably the most effective. Contact your local or regional newspaper to see if they can provide such a service, or you may have to find a private company to purchase a list.

Downtown Employees: Offer specials or added value for people who work downtown. For example, many downtown Boulder restaurants offer 10% off lunch to downtown employees. It’s not a huge incentive, but it helps and builds goodwill. Other perks like advance notice of sales or special events is also a motivator.

Commuters: Although a difficult group to reach, they are a built in market since they are already coming downtown. Create a vibrant “after work” environment in the summer evenings – perhaps in Tilley Pond Park – that will encourage them to take a break between the train commute and the car commute.

Families: Parents are always looking for safe, fun activities for their children. They are also looking for activities that they and their children can enjoy together. By hosting these events in



Downtown Darien, you create a sense of downtown as a community park, a center, a place to build family memories. While there is already a Halloween trick-or-treat in place, this concept could be expanded to include treats for the parents too. There could be coupons for a percent off on a later visit or an invitation to a Holiday open house. For summer, Downtown Darien could sponsor a children's concert series. Children love to sing along, so this could be as simple as having someone play a guitar with familiar songs. Colorful, simple things like balloons always engage children. They are fascinated by "Balloon People" who can twist balloons into fun shapes and hats. Appropriate street entertainers such as jugglers or costumed characters also create fun memories (and photo opportunities!) for families.

Brand Development

The Main Street program focuses on downtown as the real and symbolic center of the community. The name Darien Revitalization, Inc doesn't really reflect that focus. Seriously consider changing your organizational name to **Darien Downtown Partnership**. Downtown is the focus and "Partnership" implies the working together that is necessary for the program to be successful. Since we also recommend that you embark on the brand development process outlined below, now is the time to consider that name change.

Brand Development Process

Step One: Develop the brand team. This should be a small group of downtown leaders and consumers who have the capability to be both **strategic** and **objective**. This should be a broad group representing the various target markets. Look for a mix of people who are relatively new to downtown as well as some "old timers". The main requirement is that they can be objective, strategic, flexible and able to see the big picture beyond their particular business or role they play in Downtown Darien. At least one of the participants should have some marketing experience. Also, since they will have to "sell" this to a larger constituency, the group should be well-respected and have credibility in the community. Constituencies that might be represented are: municipal officials, Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureau, downtown business, consumers, local residents, regional residents, businesses from other retail centers in Darien.

Step Two: Assess the current situation. Downtown Darien has already conducted a SWOT analysis. Do some very basic consumer **research** and determine customer **perceptions** of downtown. Remember – Downtown Darien is not what you think it is – it is what your customers think it is.

Step Three: Develop the brand promise. What will shoppers and other users **experience** in Darien? Why would customers choose Downtown Darien over another shopping district? What **advantages** do you have? Be honest – this is not about what you want to be – it is about who you are and what you are **not**. A brand promise is not a slogan. It is customer confidence that the experience in Downtown Darien will meet expectations.

Step Four: Create the brand communications plan. This is the step in the process where you develop your **logo**, **graphics** and **messaging**. Notice it is not the first step. Many communities try to do this first. It is exciting and visual and gives volunteers something tangible to work toward. But graphic communications are most successful if a community has thoughtfully worked through steps one-three. Graphics should be simple and consistent. It is important that they are just as identifiable and striking in black and white as they are in color. Messaging can be a slogan, or catchphrase, but it is really about building consensus on what you want to communicate.

Step Five: Build and sustain the brand. Do not give up. This is the marathon portion of the brand building process. Establish some **goals** and **measurements** and do not expect to succeed overnight. Be realistic in your expectations. Progress can be measured by online surveys or intercept surveys. These do not have to be scientific or expensive – they just need to provide information.

The rules of branding are:

- Be who you are
- Be bold vs. being shy
- Be consistent
 - Look
 - Messaging
 - Timeless

Please see “The Branding of Downtown Boulder” by Jeff Cohn and Jane Jenkins, reprinted from Main Street News, November 2001, in the appendix.

Communications

- Expand public relations program to include regional publicity. Take advantage of event listings in publications. Brainstorm story ideas and prepare press releases in advance. Keep in touch with the media on a consistent basis – not just when you want coverage for “news” or events. Develop story ideas around business personalities or architectural history. Media coverage is one of the most credible sources of information.
- Enter the electronic world. Downtown Darien needs a website. As many other communication strategy recommendations will be based on this, DRI should make this one if its first priorities. In website development – less is more. Keep it simple and easy to navigate.
- Develop an e-mail distribution list. Use your website and direct mail campaigns to collect customer contact information. Offer a giveaway, such as \$250 in Downtown Darien gift certificates. The contact information you gain will be worth the cost of the prize give-away.
- Publish an electronic downtown newsletter and send it to your e-mail contact list. News items should be short and easy to read. Offer information about store specials or promotions. Make sure it is the type of e-mail that recipients will look forward to and will open. One store in Boulder offers a 30% discount on a specific line of products if you bring in the latest e-newsletter.
- Be positive and develop BUZZ about Downtown Darien. Word of mouth is the most powerful form of advertising and communications. If everyone is talking about Downtown



Darien in a positive way – then customers will not care if there is traffic. They will get there because everyone says “You just have to experience Downtown Darien.”

Special Events (Refer to Appendix: Event Matrices)

- Evaluate your existing event calendar by purpose. This is as simple as identifying what are you doing and why are you doing it. This action item is essential before downtown does any more event planning. Clear, measurable goals and who your target audience(s) will be need to be established for every event.
- Know your market for downtown events. What demographic are you trying to reach? An event designed to draw commuters may be very different from an event designed to attract families.
- Provide programming for children and families. Your demographics support it and mothers at home with children are always looking for activities. They may not shop with the kids, but they will come back if you create a memorable experience for them.
- DRI, other stakeholders and/or the municipality need to invest in outdoor entertainment infrastructure including a stage, lights and sound system. Offer to provide this infrastructure support to cultural groups who want to perform downtown.
- Program events at Tilley Pond Park. This under-utilized resource can serve as a stage for the downtown. You can develop commuter “after the train” events there as well as offer family entertainment. The Darien Arts Center would be a willing partner in such an endeavor.
- Evaluate your results. The critical component in event evaluation is determining an objective for each event and whether the event met that objective. Was the event designed to generate sales? Build traffic? Create awareness for Downtown Darien? Provide family entertainment? Raise money? From the very beginning, know why you are producing an event and what you expect to accomplish. No later than a week after the event is over, convene the organizing group in a celebratory atmosphere. You did it! Over champagne or other refreshments, discuss whether the event achieved the desired objectives. There is a special event evaluation form in the appendix to help guide further discussion. Take good notes, tuck them away until you have had a chance to recover and review as part of planning for future events.

Please see Event Matrices and Event Evaluation Form in the appendix.

Retail Activities

Retail sales are the lifeblood of any shopping district and as such a significant amount of time and energy must be devoted to making those cash registers ring. Retail activity is what brings consumers – local and visiting - to the point-of-purchase. Healthy retail sales also:

- Create more jobs in the community (both full and part time)
- Put more money in the pockets of local citizens and likewise, more money circulating in the community
- Allow for a healthier rent structure which, in turn, will allow for substantial improvements and better maintenance
- Increase community pride

Retail sales can be promoted in a variety of ways, both by individual merchants and collectively as a group. The important thing to remember is to keep it up. Retail promotions must be ongoing to be effective. Follow one successful promotion with another and keep the business/business district in the shopping public's eye.

Retail promotions can take on a variety of forms, but they should all be aimed at the goal of making those cash registers ring. Some promotions - like sidewalk sales - will produce instant sales. Other promotions - such as a fashion show and luncheon - may not produce sales on the day of the event but will present the merchandise to the shopper who may return a few days later to make a purchase.

While special events are designed to build traffic downtown, retail events should be designed to stimulate sales. Individual businesses may want to schedule their own retail events with some limited marketing support (newsletter, website announcements) from DRI. Planning a district retail event is a challenge because every business handles sales and discounts differently, but here are a few ideas:

- Half-Day, Half Price sale (or other timed events like “Early Bird” or “Happy Hour”.)
- Draw a percent off coupon from a fishbowl – or break a balloon with a coupon inside.
- Invitation only (Preferred customer) sale.
- A celebrity visit, author book signing, or designer attended trunk show. People are much more likely to buy the product when they have met the creative force behind the product.
- Gift with purchase or value added. In downtown Boulder, merchants occasionally offer an extra \$5 gift certificate with every \$50.00 order. This is really a 10% discount, but somehow \$55 for a \$50 value sounds better than \$45 for a \$50 value. You have not undervalued your product.

Encourage businesses to develop cross-promotional opportunities. Cooperation is the key. There are many natural ways to cross promote product, but most retailers are reluctant to let product out of their store. One of the most effective ways to cross promote is in window displays. Complementary retailers can get together and promote each other’s product. A clothing store can use shoes from another business to complete an outfit. A floral shop can use vases from the gift store. Other ideas:

- The movie theater can offer snacks from local retailers.
- Several businesses sponsor a “Girls Night Out” with products and services (lingerie, massage, bath products) from all the participating businesses. Same event with different products could be used for a “Guys Night Out.”
- Restaurants can carry wines from the local wine shop.
- Have a fishbowl in the local banks with weekly drawings. Winners get a gift certificate to a downtown business. This is a good way to involve the many banks in downtown.

Promotion Committee

The Promotion Committee needs to expand to include diversity of experience or expertise.

- The DRI Promotion Committee needs:
 - Leadership
 - More volunteers – new blood
 - Partners
 - Strategic thinkers vs. workers – the committee needs both
 - Kid’s programming
- Evaluate event calendar. Set an objective for every event or promotion.
- Recruit more volunteers. Special events require many “man” hours.

Here are some ideas for recruiting volunteers. Since the excellent school system is a major attraction for Darien, PTAs or other school volunteer groups probably have many volunteers that might be looking for a change, or may have some time for additional work. If the meeting times would work, teachers - particularly elementary level – are real experts at promotion and activity. They also see things from a consumer point of view. There may be many educated professional

women in Darien that are focused on raising families right now, and they might be interested in using some of their professional skills on a very part-time basis. The Junior League (or its equivalent), also is a fertile ground for recruiting volunteers. Downtown Darien should also look at volunteers from the Darien Arts Center. They seemed really interested in downtown as a venue for their events and might be interested in participating on a committee.

Build your merchants' network. Have fun together! Schedule monthly or quarterly gatherings that are centered on food and beverage. Early morning can work, or utilize the more popular "Happy Hour". Host these events in different businesses, and if funding is a problem, pass the hat for donations. Have a loose agenda to announce upcoming events and recognize volunteers. Collect merchandise or gift certificates from downtown businesses and draw for door prizes. The objective is to talk informally, share ideas and build relationships.

This is more difficult than it sounds as businesses usually do not focus beyond the boundaries of their own store fronts, but the rewards of a group of business people connecting and having fun are endless!

Make Parking an Asset

In every downtown, parking is a "problem". The problem is different everywhere – but there is always one common denominator - poor public relations. A customer complains about downtown parking (lack of space, cost, distance etc.) and instead of offering a positive alternative, downtown merchants reinforce the customer complaint. The negative comments feed and grow and pretty soon there is a perception that you don't want to go downtown because there is no place to park. Don't forget parking as part of your marketing plan. (In Boulder its called "*Parketing!*") It's an uphill battle, but every other downtown effort will be negated if people perceive there is no where to park downtown.

Samples of parking promotions are in the appendix.

CONCLUSION

The Eight Principles that are the basic values underlying the Main Street Approach are appropriate for all areas of downtown revitalization, but particularly for Main Street promotion. Review each principle in the light of what it means for promotional projects and activities.

1. **Comprehensive.** The promotion committee work plan needs to include all three key areas of Main Street promotion—retail, special events, and image development.
2. **Incremental.** The committee should begin with small, simple promotion projects and build on success, adding new events and activities each year.
3. **Partnerships.** Working with other groups and organizations—and encouraging them to sponsor downtown activities—is the best way to gain community-wide buy-in.
4. **Self-help.** Successful promotions depend on the work of a broad base of committed volunteers.
5. **Unique assets.** The best promotions are unique to the community and build on the community's distinct heritage and assets.
6. **Change.** The old ways of promoting downtown don't work very well any more. Creative, fun activities will breathe new life into downtown events.
7. **Quality.** All downtown promotions should be of highest quality in order to dispel negative perceptions about the downtown.
8. **Implementation.** There is no substitute for "just doing it!"

Above all, have fun promoting your downtown! This is a creative, exciting area of work that can add life, vitality, and social value to Downtown Darien.

ORGANIZATION

To be effective, downtown revitalization cannot be a haphazard undertaking or a set of disparate projects. It requires collaboration, focus and continuity. *Organization is about bringing these qualities to a community's downtown revitalization efforts by integrating diverse interests in the community and focusing them on a shared, long-term agenda for restoring downtown's physical beauty and economic viability.*

Organization, one point of the Main Street Four Point Approach™, is about *marshaling the human and financial resources to implement a comprehensive downtown revitalization process.* Therefore, the organizational component is the work of both the Organization Committee and the Board of Directors of Darien Revitalization Inc. (DRI). Indeed the credibility of the organization, and therefore revitalization efforts as a whole, relies on the Main Street organization's effectiveness in outreach to the community and setting the standard for *transparency, governance, and accountability.*

The basic responsibilities of DRI's Board of Directors fall under the following categories:

- **Stewardship**
 - Developing, supporting and promoting DRI's mission and vision
 - Developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the annual work plan and budget
 - Selecting and supporting the Chief Executive and reviewing his/her performance
 - Assessing its own performance and developing a recruitment plan for future board members (Governance)
 - Managing financial resource effectively (Fiduciary Management)
- **Fund Development**
 - Ensuring there are adequate and diverse resources to support the work plan (Fundraising)
- **Advocacy**
 - Engaging partners, stakeholders and the community at large in the revitalization process
 - Embracing the responsibility to develop and express opinions on issues related to downtown
 - Enhancing the organization's public image

The Organization (also known as Outreach) Committee *works to educate and engage the public* and complements the Board of Director's, and other committees', work by developing resources and tools in:

- **Outreach / Partnership Development**
 - Engaging active partners and developing an increasingly engaged volunteer base (NOTE: all committees are responsible for this outreach)
- **Advocacy / Education**
 - Educating the community on the Main Street Four Point Approach™ and the need for a comprehensive management program for revitalizing Downtown Darien
- **Public Relations & Communication**
 - Furthering DRI's mission, vision and plan of work

OBSERVATIONS

Assets

Darien Revitalization Inc. (DRI) applied for, and the downtown was designated, a Connecticut Main Street Community in spring 2005. Since that time, DRI's has established its **Mission** to *"maintain and enhance the unique charm, character, and historic significance of Downtown Darien, while ensuring a variety of retail, dining and housing, as well as social and cultural activities for residents and visitors of all ages."* DRI has been proactive in their outreach to the community, engaging residents in dialogue about the future of their downtown. Led by their **Vision** (see Mission, Vision and Goals) of the future of Downtown Darien the organization has found itself in the middle of policy discussions on downtown development projects. The organization has hired an executive director, attended training in downtown revitalization through the Connecticut Main Street Center and the National Main Street Center, and has worked with partnering organizations and through its committee structure to implement some projects.

The Town's elected officials and staff are enthusiastic partners of DRI. Indeed, the efforts to secure designation as a Connecticut Main Street Community were led by Darien First Selectwoman Evonne Klein. The Town financially supports the DRI, which is needed to show the Town's commitment to revitalizing the downtown while it helps to leverage private support. The DRI is eager to establish itself as a representative of the community's desire to have a vibrant, healthy downtown. It is now

that community momentum and interest must be maintained if the program is to reach a significant level of growth and be recognized as an important development entity for the community. The organization itself needs to be strong enough to support the needed accomplishments in design, promotion, and economic development that have been outlined in this report.



Challenges

As with any young organization, there are a number of organizational challenges which were observed by the Resource Team:

- Board and Committee members have expressed the need for clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities
 - The board is in the habit of commenting on day-to-day activities, rather than setting the strategic direction for the organization
 - The committees do not fully understand their roles and need strategic direction from the board in order to effectively identify projects, timelines and budgets
- Because there is no comprehensive plan or operating budget, DRI is functioning on a project-by-project basis.
- The organization needs and wants a larger, more active, and engaged volunteer and partner base.

- Both the organization and the community at-large have expressed a desire for better public relations / communications to partners, the media, and the community as well as internal communications systems.

All of these issues are inter-related: In other words, improvement in one area (e.g., a comprehensive plan for downtown) will probably lead to more enthusiastic volunteer support. More training through Connecticut Main Street Center, as well as other nonprofit professional development opportunities, will develop effective leadership that approaches issues strategically. This cause-and-effect relationship is true, basically, of all the functions in the Organization program area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The DRI Board of Directors

Governance. It is the job of the board of directors to (1) set overall strategy and policy objectives, (2) review and approve the ways the staff and committees plan to achieve those aims, and (3) monitor whether the organization is making sufficient progress toward its goals. *The Board Governance Committee incorporates routines, structures and procedures that establish a focus on the board's responsibility of policy and strategy rather than managing the program.*

The Board Governance Committee concerns itself with:

- Board roles and responsibilities
- Board composition
- Board knowledge
- Board effectiveness
- Board leadership and succession planning

A Board Governance Committee job description is included in the appendix.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a Governance Committee (consider inviting one or two individuals from outside the current DRI Board who have expertise in governance and leadership development). The Governance Committee will lead the board through a process of self-assessment, identification, recruitment, and training of new directors to ensure that DRI has a board that matches the needs of the downtown and represents the community.
2. Contact the Pro Bono Partnership for community nonprofit workshops in governance and the roles and responsibilities of nonprofit boards. The entire board and the executive director should attend such workshops.
3. Develop a Leadership Succession Plan that includes identification of Vice Presidents of Governance and Fund Development.

Strategic Planning. In early 2006 the DRI Board and Committees participated in a strategic planning process, facilitated by Connecticut Main Street Center. The board drafted programmatic goals which, when final, will provide the committees with the strategic direction they need to develop their annual plan of work.

A clear and written work plan must be developed annually, which will serve numerous purposes:

- It will be the road map that will tell the community how you will achieve your vision

- It will be the best tool for seeking financial support, allowing investors to see how their support will be utilized and what the benefits will be
- It will help you recruit partners and volunteers who will carry out key activities
- It will keep you focused – acting as a filter to ensure proposed projects and/or grants are appropriate and relevant to your goals, and, ultimately, your vision.

Recommendations:

1. Led by the executive director, the board must complete its planning process by finalizing and approving its organizational goals.
2. Each committee then identifies and prioritizes projects that meet those goals and develops a workplan with project managers, partners, timeline, and budget information.
3. The board reviews / approves the proposed workplan and budget.
4. Committees are then empowered to implement their projects. Each committee chair should provide a monthly written update to the board on the status of projects. The Executive Director monitors projects on a daily basis.

Financial Management. Every work plan needs to be synchronized with the budget. *The Board of Directors is responsible for the development of a financial plan that will determine where the resources will come from and who is responsible for obtaining these resources.*

- Give each committee a budget line-item that supports its workplan and, at the same time, can be reasonably raised. While it is the board's job to ensure that DRI is adequately funded, each committee should discuss the possibility of income opportunities related to its projects.
- As the new workplan is fine-tuned, the budget also needs to be re-visited and then a financial plan put in place to raise the funds necessary to support this budget.
- The Board must also ensure that there is a sound financial control and reporting system in place. The board should review monthly reports that compare actual results to budget.

Recommendations:

1. The board must pay immediate attention to creating and implementing a fund development plan and campaign. An excellent resource is your local community foundation. Other local Main Street organizations have received technical assistance grants and consultants for such planning.
2. Developed by the executive director and board leadership, the board must review and approve an annual operating budget.
3. A nonprofit executive is responsible for (among other things) management of budgeting, accounting, and record keeping. It is imperative that the DRI executive director be fully engaged in the financial management of the organization.
4. The Executive Committee should incorporate into their monthly agendas the review of income and expense statements against budget and report back to the full board.

Public Policy Development. *The board has an obligation to educate itself on all issues related to downtown and be prepared to take public positions on those issues.* As ambassadors for downtown, DRI Board members should be present at public hearings and commission meetings and should continue to engage the community in conversation about the future of downtown.

Recommendations:

1. Appoint appropriate spokespersons for the organization who will address the media and the public. The Executive Director and Board President are standard appointees.

2. The executive director and board leadership should continue to meet regularly with Town staff and elected officials to communicate the activities of DRI and engage them in conversation about issues related to downtown. Report back to the board on results of those meetings.

Personnel. At the time that Darien was selected as a Connecticut Main Street Community, it was planned that the organization would complement the Executive Director's skills with an additional staff person. It is clear that DRI needs a dedicated professional in promotions and communications. This specialist would greatly enhance the visibility of the organization by developing an organizational database of funders, partners, media, etc. developing a website, a newsletter, DRI presentations, coordination of media coverage, and coordinating promotional activities.

Recommendations:

1. The board must develop and approve an operating budget for 2006-2007, which includes salary and benefit line items for Executive Director and additional staff. Factor in cost of living and salary increases as well as office space and equipment costs.
2. The Executive Director is then empowered to conduct a search and hiring process for a promotions and communications specialist.

The Organization (or Outreach) Committee

Outreach / Partnership Development

- Develop / maintain the organizational database – a simple Excel spreadsheet format can be easily manipulated to sort by donors, volunteers, media, etc. This is necessary for your marketing and communications activities. **(immediate and ongoing)**
- Compile DRI program information (mission, vision, strategic goals, committee job descriptions and work plan summary) into a Volunteer Orientation Kit. This will assist both DRI and potential partners and volunteers in easily placing people and organizations in the right roles. *NOTE: New London Main Street has an award-winning model for this program.* **(next 3-6 months)**
- Inventory the talent in your community; all organizations and entities that are users of downtown. Include all contact information and the mission and/or stated focus of each. With their approved workplans in hand, all committees can then reach out to potential partners to engage them in upcoming projects. **(next 3-6 months)**
- Work with the Board of Directors to develop the DRI's major funders as *programmatic partners* as well – engaging them in the work plan throughout the year. Do the banks, etc. and their employees seem to lend themselves naturally to a given project or are they already doing an event or project that could be located in the downtown or enhanced by DRI? **(ongoing)**
- The Committee should oversee a membership campaign that can help leverage smaller donations and recruit volunteers. At the same time, a membership campaign helps educate the community as to why they should feel that downtown belongs to them! Any membership campaign exists as part of an overall fund development plan and should be coordinated with the Board of Directors. *Friends of Main Street (Winsted) has a successful membership campaign that you might want to emulate.* **(next 6-9 months)**
- Invite municipal staff department heads to meet with committees in order to educate DRI as to their scope of work. This should happen prior to or as DRI committees are developing their work plans, so as to take full advantage of the natural programmatic partnerships that exist in Town Hall. This serves as an opportunity to open lines of communication as well as

to involve Town staff in proactively coming up with solutions to improve the quality of life downtown. **(within 3 months)**

- Involve young people! Main Street programs across the country have come up with creative ways of engaging youth in the revitalization of downtown. Check to see if public and private schools have community service requirements for students. Explore The Depot, Scouting organizations, youth groups at churches, etc. for youth volunteers. Some Main Street programs involve high school students on the board or committees. For ideas, post a request for examples on the National Main Street ListServe, which connects you with 1,600 Main Street communities throughout the country. **(ongoing)**

Advocacy / Education

- Publish a print and an online newsletter. Each committee can be responsible for submissions of updates that report their activities. Reprints of articles related to the four points of Main Street are good. Feature occasional articles written by partnering organizations. **(within 3 months)**
- DRI Executive Director, Debbie Parnon, should request time on Board of Selectmen agendas to briefly update the council on DRI activities. As often as possible, Debbie should bring along a downtown merchant or other partner in order to introduce new faces to the council. **(immediate and on-going)**
- Consider holding “Community Conversation” evenings, which can be presented in conjunction with a sponsoring partner, to illuminate important downtown issues and provide a focus for community debate and discussion. *Rose City Renaissance (Norwich) has developed such events and they should be contacted for information.* **(within 3 months and ongoing)**

Public Relations & Communication

- The Board should identify appropriate spokespersons for the organization (usually the Executive Director and Board President). **(immediate and on-going)**
- The Promotions Committee will be focusing on brand development including changing the organization’s name to reflect the fact that it is a downtown partnership. Be in close contact with them in order to understand the brand development concept for downtown and the organization. **(immediate and on-going)**
- Develop or update DRI’s “Dog & Pony” PowerPoint presentation. Plan to roll-out this 20-30 minute presentation, containing plenty of photos, to all of the organizations listed on your inventory. **(3-6 months)**
- Develop a program brochure that highlights DRI’s mission and plan of work. This brochure will function as a “leave behind” on calls to potential partners and funders. **(3-6months)**
- Develop a sharp public relations package, which includes media kits, press releases, and your program brochure. Perhaps local newspapers will be willing to feature a regular newspaper column written by DRI. **(within 3 months)**
- Develop an attractive and easy-to-manuever DRI website. There might just be some website designer already in your downtown! CMSC can also guide you toward a designer. The organization and promotions committees can work together to enhance this website in order to promote Downtown Darien as well as the DRI. **(3-9 months)**
- Plan a fun Annual Meeting, celebrating DRI’s first year and publicly recognizing and thanking funders, partners and volunteers. Plan on also producing an Annual Report each year. **(annually)**

CONCLUSION

Darien Revitalization Inc. must lead by example by being a solution-oriented program.

The job of the Main Street organization is not just to identify the commercial district's problems, but also to develop and implement solutions. This distinction carries with it the obligation to be pro-active rather than re-active; optimistic rather than pessimistic; results-driven rather than captives of process. *As a solution oriented program DRI must develop a strategic work-plan that outlines a list of key projects and then set about the business of systematically completing each one.*

APPENDIX A: PROPOSED DRI WORKPLAN SUMMARY

2006-2007 Workplan Summary

Proposed August 2006

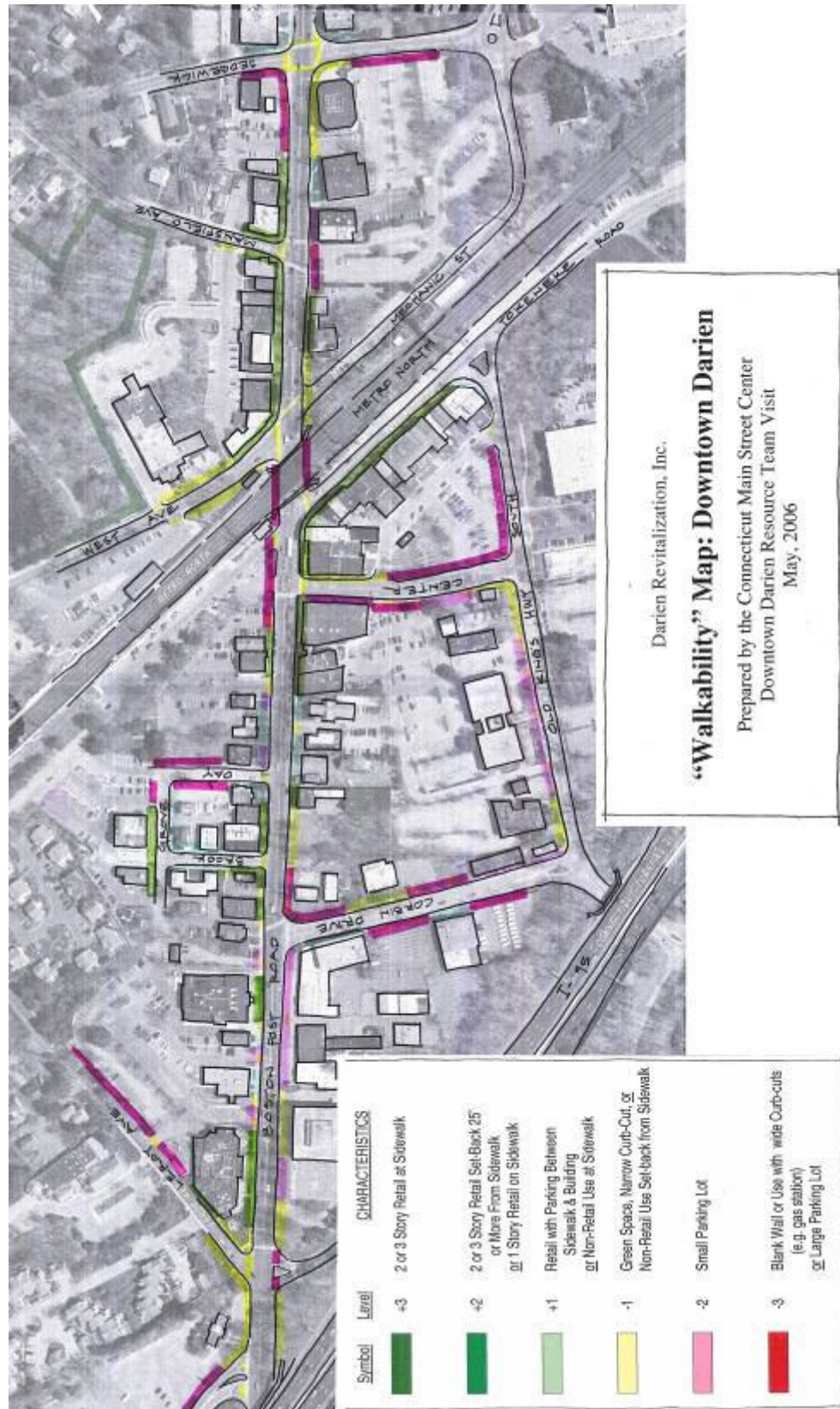
Darien Revitalization Inc. works to maintain and enhance the unique charm, character and historic significance of downtown Darien while ensuring a variety of retail, dining and housing choices as well as social and cultural activities for residents and visitors of all ages, day and night.

Strategic Goals:	Organization / Board	Design	Economic Restructuring	Promotion
To foster and build an environment that is attractive and pedestrian-friendly.	1. Develop a newsletter featuring articles on design best practices	1. Improve wayfinding and signage (Post Rd., Municipal Parking Gateway & Directional, Parking Lots) 2. Appealing Sidewalks (expand model sidewalk program, encourage wider sidewalks with new construction) 3. Implement traffic calming strategies to improve safety of crossings 4. Streetscape program (model sidewalk street furniture & trees)	1. Support changes in zoning: ordinances for parking, ground floor retail-restaurant-entertainment, outdoor dining, news rack consolidation, and reclassification of banks as service/commercial.	1. Program commuter "after the train" and family events at Tilley Pond Park. 2. Incorporate "parking" (market parking) into promotion of events and activities.
To brand Darien Revitalization Inc. as the organizational resource for all issues related to downtown revitalization.	1. Complete annual action and financial plans 2. Establish governance committee 3. Develop & maintain database of donors, volunteers, media, etc. 4. Communicate the appropriate information regarding upcoming RR trestle and CL&P cable projects. 5. Develop a Volunteer Recruitment, Orientation, and Training Program. 6. Executive Director to provide regular updates to Board of Selectmen. 7. Hold annual meeting	1. Conduct CMSC Design Audit 2. Darien Revitalization Inc. banners for empty storefronts 3. Develop design and signage guidelines 4. Develop parking management plan	1. Develop & maintain a database of economic indicators for downtown 2. Compile a list of gaps in the supply 3. Create semi-annual State of Downtown Business report	1. Inventory and evaluate existing downtown events 2. Change name of organization and proceed with brand communications plan for the organization (logo, graphics, messaging) 3. Establish a Downtown Darien website
To help existing businesses better serve their current customers and identify opportunities to expand, as well as to identify an appropriate mix of new and compatible uses.	1. Newsletter articles on small business best practices and trends		1. Prepare for and complete niche market study with CMSC 2. Build relationships with downtown businesses 3. Business Development Assistance from CT Main Street Center 4. Develop a soft recruitment program 5. Hold Commercial Realtor and Site Selector Breakfast	1. Plan appropriate retail events, based on data collection (below) 2. Encourage businesses to develop cross-promotional opportunities.
To promote downtown Darien as a place to live, work, shop, dine, and gather.	1. Establish a Speakers Bureau and an excellent visual presentation	1. Develop permanent and temporary art or sculpture displays & murals 2. Improve connections to Tilley Pond Park (signage, banners, etc.)	1. Support and advocate for transit-oriented and workforce housing in downtown (reuse of upper stories and housing as part of major projects) 2. New Business Celebrations	1. Assess current perceptions of and target market for downtown (surveys, focus groups) 2. Develop the brand and communications plan for downtown (logo, graphics, messaging) 3. Develop calendar of downtown events

APPENDIX B: CMSC ANALYSIS MAP

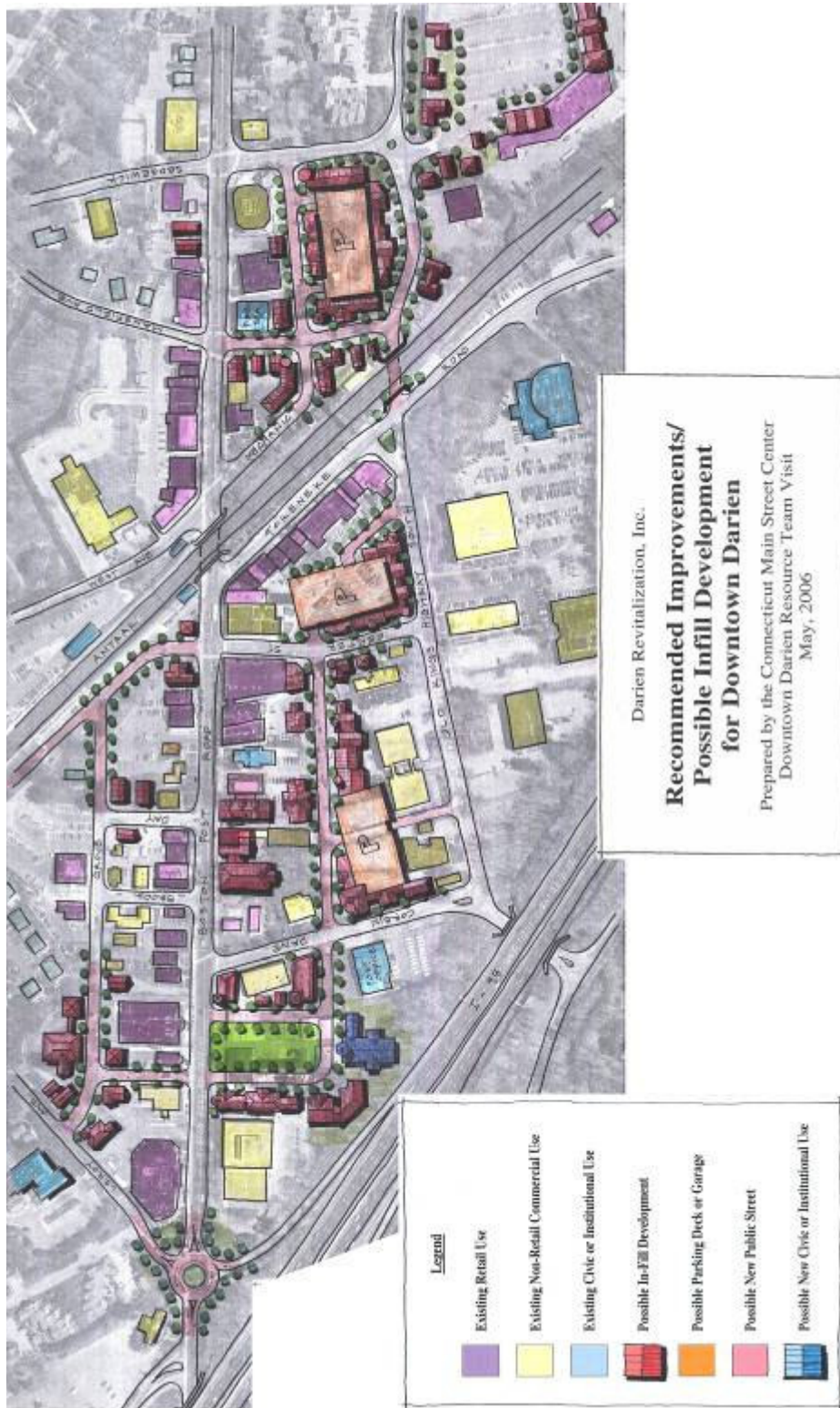


APPENDIX C: WALKABILITY ANALYSIS



APPENDIX D: CMSC SKETCH PLAN

RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS/POSSIBLE INFILL DEVELOPMENT FOR DOWNTOWN DARIEN



APPENDIX E: DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURAL GUIDELINES

Design and architectural guidelines regulate the building materials, configurations, and details that impact downtown's quality and character. Detailed landscape and building design guidelines can be used during site plan review to increase the quality of design and provide needed consistency in the scale and character of new buildings and landscaping.

The design and architectural guidelines would encourage architecture that reflects Darien's local and historical vernacular. The PZC should seek input from the community in the development of the guiding values of the community and features that the residents seek to protect. The design and architectural guidelines should be comprehensive but should not specify any specific architectural style or be overly restrictive. If they are too specific, design of the downtown will look contrived or artificial. If the guidelines are too restrictive, then architectural creativity will be stifled and development may be discouraged because of unjustified increases in building costs or processing time of permits.

Design and architectural guidelines can be an essential strategy in improving the visual qualities and long-term economic viability of Downtown Darien. Design and architectural guidelines for downtown should include illustrations to make these guidelines more easily understood by developers, review boards, and the public and should address, at a minimum, the following important elements of design of the public realm¹:

Articulated Architecture: Building facades should be designed to a human-scale, for aesthetic appeal, pedestrian comfort, and compatibility with the design character of the district or neighborhood. The PZC should continue to ensure that buildings are designed to give texture (preferably brick or stone), visible entries, and depth and human scale to the façade (especially the ground level).

Building Height: Buildings frame the street and provide a sense of intimacy through partial enclosure. Vertical surfaces such as building fronts and trees that enclose to the street also encourage drivers to slow down.² Architects and planners refer to the height-to-width ratio of the street. The width is measured horizontally between opposing building fronts, and the height is measured from the sidewalk to the building eaves. Architects and planners generally hold that the ideal height of buildings to recreate the pleasing proportions of a New England village or pedestrian-oriented urban streetscape is within the range of a ratio of 1:2 and 1:3.³ That is, for every one foot of building height, there should be two to three feet of overall street width.

Building Character: Use architectural features wherever possible to tie commercial buildings into a cohesive district. When possible relate entries, window lines and sign bands to adjacent buildings. Use materials that complement the area's character in terms of color, scale, and texture. Carefully consider roof forms. Use patterns that provide scale and interest and relate to existing patterns in the neighborhood.

¹ Adapted from the City and County of Denver *Streetscape Design Manual*, 1993.

² Vermont Forum on Sprawl. March 2001. *Growing Smarter: Best Site Planning for Residential, Commercial & Industrial Development*.

³ Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program. November 1999. *Main Street...when a highway runs through it: A Handbook for Oregon Communities*.

Continuity, Interest, and Comfort: Develop the ground level of buildings to provide visual interest to pedestrians. Outdoor dining areas, retail display windows or activities that are visible from the street accomplish this. Create lively and interesting facades for the enjoyment of pedestrians.

Sympathetic Infill: A proposal for a new building in the CBD should be responsive to its size, scale, and style in relationship to adjacent buildings. The placement, size and orientation of doors, windows, and fenestration in general, are other important considerations. In addition, the impact of a building's proposed façade on the existing patterns of pedestrian activity should be carefully considered.

Corner Buildings: Ensure that buildings proposed for prominent corners (and at terminal views) are designed with distinctive vertical elements (turrets, towers, etc.), welcoming entries, and hidden parking.

Sidewalk Cafés: Encourage sidewalk cafés with outdoor seating, low walls or fences, and some overhead protection (e.g. awnings, umbrellas) throughout downtown.

Business Signs: Signs are important to the success of most businesses. They identify the business to the driver and pedestrian and, if well designed, can harmonize with the street and enhance the image of the district. Colors, materials, sizes, shapes, and lighting of signs should be compatible with the architecture of the building, the business it identifies, and the character of the surrounding area.

APPENDIX F: THE BRANDING OF DOWNTOWN BOULDER

By Jeff Cohn and Jane Jenkins

Reprint from Main Street News, November 2001

Image development campaigns have long been used by Main Street district leaders struggling to improve the public perception of downtown. But the task of creating a compelling image for your main streets is a continuing priority, for even the most successful of revitalization programs. The popular buzzword “branding” is now being applied to whole commercial districts, not just the familiar “products” that are sold over the counter. In this article, we will explore how an established, successful downtown program in Boulder, Colorado, has, in the face of new retail competition, begun to reshape the public’s image of the downtown through the process of “branding.” -Doug Loescher, National Main Street Center

What Is a Brand?

What is a brand? It is the relationship between a customer and a product. The brand is the sum total of what the customer thinks and feels and how he or she interacts with the brand. It is incumbent upon the marketer to try to influence this behavior. Brands held in high esteem by the customer get used more frequently and therefore capture a greater share of the customer’s spending.

Using a classic retail example, if we say “Nordstrom” to a typical upscale female consumer, her opinion of the Nordstrom brand will immediately come to mind. She will no doubt mention the store’s strong commitment to customer service, depth of merchandise, sense of style, and comfortable shopping atmosphere. She most certainly will not use classifications such as dirty, unfriendly, low-end, etc. The customer’s image of the store is the result of Nordstrom’s branding excellence. And Nordstrom is famous for understanding that the brand is created at every customer interaction, from advertising to full shelves (inventory) to educated and friendly sales professionals on the floor. The company manages its brand by managing every experience the customer may have with the company.

At this point, we must emphasize that a logo, or tagline, is not a brand. The brand is the relationship customers express when they see that logo or tagline. In the Main Street context, consider the branding of a famous American city such as San Francisco. When we mention that town, what comes to mind? From our perspective, we’re likely to think about hills, cable cars, great restaurants, maybe the Gold Rush era, or perhaps the new urban developments in the Yerba Buena area. That’s the San Francisco brand, helped along by a few Rice a Roni commercials along the way! And if that makes you want to take a quick trip to the Golden Gate City, then they’ve done a great job of creating that brand image in your mind.

Try this exercise with your town. When you say the name of the community, what images come to mind? Are they positive or negative? What are people missing in the context of your brand? This can be a very enlightening process.

Defining Downtown Boulder

Downtown Boulder is a 40-square-block area of Boulder, Colorado. Nestled against the beautiful Flatiron Mountains, Boulder is a component of the Denver metropolitan area; it is located 30 miles from Denver but has its own political, social, and economic systems. Many

Boulderites never leave town if they can help it and prefer to use Boulder-based businesses whenever possible.

The City of Boulder formed a business improvement district (BID) in 2000. The hub of the district is the Pearl Street Mall, which was closed to vehicular traffic in 1977. (There is, however, vehicular access to Pearl Street on the horizontal streets running perpendicular to the mall.)

Downtown Boulder has many distinguishing characteristics. The commercial district offers more than 250 retail, food, and service businesses and many anchor tenants that can be defined as “one of a kind.” Total retail square footage equals that of a typical suburban mall, less the department stores. Our merchant mix is strong, made up of apparel, gift, and service businesses, and people love to stroll along the mall and see the new and ever-changing shops. Boulder loves to support independent businesses although our retail mix does include some well-known nationals such as Ann Taylor, Borders, and the Cheesecake Factory.

Our town’s restaurant collection is among the best in the entire region, and the total package offers an experience that combines unique shopping, great food, and the sights and sounds of a downtown experience that cannot be found at the local mall. Of course, that includes some less than favorable descriptors as well, including parking difficulties and an increasing level of street kids that offend some customers. But, in the end, people look on Downtown Boulder with a positive point of view and we intend to increase that over time.

The New Millennium Brings New Challenges

The year 2000 was a challenging one for Downtown Boulder. First and foremost, a new shopping mall, Flatiron Crossing, opened just seven miles down the main access road to Boulder, in the town of Broomfield. A high-tech wonderland not unlike California’s Silicon Valley, Broomfield, which lies halfway between Boulder and Denver on the Boulder Turnpike, is full of technology and telecom firms that have moved in over the last few years.

Flatiron Crossing is a new hybrid mall that contains many well-known anchors, including Nordstrom, Foleys (May Company), Dillards, and Lord and Taylor. The interior portion of the mall contains a strong mix of retailers ranging from Old Navy to Pottery Barn, plus a large food court. The center also contains an outdoor “village” concept that will be anchored in 2002 by a large stadium-seating movieplex. The village contains a strong mix of sit-down restaurants, Border, Crate and Barrel, and a long list of small, independent businesses, many of which were once exclusive to Downtown Boulder. In short, the mall was trying to “one up” downtown by providing an entertaining outdoor shopping destination in a clean, secure environment with an outstanding mix of stores.

Our mission was clear. We needed to build and enhance the value of our marketing expenditures and to maximize the visibility of both consumer marketing campaigns and programs executed by the BID on behalf of our stakeholders.

Our strategy focused on managing the customer’s experience of downtown at all levels in every place that we could control, including operations, marketing, special events, internal and stakeholder communications, and sense-of-place attributes. Our goal was simple and important: maximize every customer to minimize the sales erosion that was sure to occur as a result of the new mall. Later, we also needed to address the nation’s falling economy, the failure of many companies in the tech sector, and a slow tourism summer in Colorado. The challenges were great but we put together the right team to deal with the situation.

1. Develop the brand team.

The first step in developing a brand is to put together the brand team. Who is responsible for the process? In our case, we invited the two members of the BID board of directors who were responsible for marketing to join the BID's executive director, Jane Jenkins, and the marketing consultant in developing the program. We also established Jenkins as the "brand keeper," with final say on whether a program or communication was consistent with our brand strategy. In addition, we sought buy-in at every step of the way from BID board and other key stakeholders, such as the city manager and key property owners.

2. Assess the current situation.

The next step in our process was to assess how customers use the BID's offerings and determine how Downtown Boulder was perceived by core customer segments, including stakeholders. We reviewed our research, as well as information gathered by other parties such as the daily newspaper, talked with customers from all segments, spoke with merchants and other stakeholders, and determined if there was a need for any additional research.

We also tried to get a handle on what Boulder is not. This can be just as illuminating as what the district is. We found that we have three key customer segments, and each group uses our product differently: residents of Boulder and Boulder County (frequent users); Denver metro residents (experience seekers with periodic frequency); and visitors from Denver area hotels (experience seekers as part of their visit to Colorado).

We also came to the conclusion that Flatiron Crossing was going to be a formidable competitor for the experience seeker as well as the average shopper, that our customers and stakeholders are very opinionated, and that our product is inconsistent. We also determined what we are not: our product is not contrived, not wholesome, and not for everyone.

3. Develop the brand promise. The goal here is to identify and reach a consensus about what the brand stands for and what it offers your targeted customers. You will have to answer such questions as:

- What business are we really in?
- What do we provide?
- What differentiates our product from the competition?
- What do we do better than anyone else?

From this, you can develop your brand promises. In Boulder, we answered the questions as follows:

- What business are we in? Creating an entertaining retail/shopping destination that offers "a sense of place" that is unsurpassed in the region and that is realized through physical attributes and our mix of stores and restaurants.
- What do we provide? An experience that is real, not a contrived sterile environment.
- What differentiates our product from the competition? Independent businesses, outdoor lifestyle, ice rink (seasonal), and a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- What do we deliver in a superior fashion? An outdoor shopping and dining experience that is supplemented by the physical and environmental factors that are distinct to Boulder--i.e., the Flatiron Mountains, the Pearl Street Mall, etc.

Finally, take those promises and express them as though your targeted customer groups are doing the talking. The following are three examples from our plan, one for each of our targeted customer segments.

- Boulder resident: “As a resident of Boulder, I love going down to the mall. It’s the center point of life here in Boulder. I run into friends and family there, the kids love to play on the rocks, I find things I’d never find at the mall, and it’s great to be outside.”
- Denver resident: “We went up to Boulder last Sunday just for the afternoon. It was great. You know, they have stores I don’t see anywhere else, like Peppercorn. It was great to be outside and enjoy the Colorado weather. Yeah, there are some different types of people hanging out on the mall, but hey, that’s Boulder.”
- Visitor to the metro area: “I’m so glad the concierge suggested we go up to Boulder while we were in Denver. There’s nothing like it at home--great stores, great outdoor cafes. You should go there next summer. Quite a different experience from shopping at the local mall.”

4. Create the brand communications plan.

This is the part where you get to decide how consumers and stakeholders will view your brand. Developing a powerful logo and identity program is the first step and can be a difficult process. Remember, you want your communications to bring your brand personality to life. Once you’ve created the logo, other graphics should follow, including a graphic standards manual, color palette, and the development of an advertising campaign and collateral materials for your district.

One mistake some people make is to think that all advertising must look exactly the same. We disagree with this approach. We believe that your advertising campaign elements, including radio copy and television spots, must be consistent with your brand promise. While they must convey the brand’s personality, the actual look may vary. As long as you are strategically consistent, there is no problem making some shifts in approach along the way. In Boulder, our first radio spot was for the holiday season. The spot was soft, ephemeral, and gentle--a reminder of simpler holiday seasons in days gone by. Our second radio commercial was edgy, offbeat, and funny. Both of these spots did a wonderful job of conveying what was right for the targeted market (Denver daytrippers) at that particular season. Both reflected the personality of Downtown Boulder, yet they sounded decidedly different. And because they were consistent with our brand personality, that difference was welcomed.

Another good example of bringing the brand to life is our new web site, www.boulderdowntown.com. As mentioned earlier, Boulder’s customer is high-tech driven and well educated. It was critical that our new site be as technologically advanced as possible for a downtown district while having the visual and textual flair of Downtown Boulder’s personality. The site has many features and components, but one of the most valuable is the itinerary-building function that we call “My Itinerary.” It allows customers to build their own personalized itineraries of Downtown Boulder shops, eating establishments, galleries, and service businesses; print them out; and take them on their shopping excursions. That functionality, too, represents our intention to manage our customers’ perceptions of our brand.

5. Build the brand for stakeholders.

Equally important is the process of building the program’s brand for your stakeholders. You want them to have a positive image of the organization and to know everything you are doing on their behalf. In Downtown Boulder, we do this through constant communication and by keeping our logo front and center at all times--on our staff uniforms, on our memos, on equipment, etc.

We want the BID to represent energy and efficiency, and we do this by staying in touch with our stakeholders on a weekly and sometimes a daily basis. Building your organization's brand internally is just as important as building it externally.

The Next Frontier

Once you've completed your consumer and stakeholder branding program, you can begin to adopt and live the brand at every level of your organization. You have to audit all areas of performance and ask yourself if you are performing to the level of the brand promise. Is your operations program up to speed? Do your staff members understand the brand you are trying to create? What is their role in taking the brand to its next level? From there, you can begin to leverage your brand for additional income and visibility through economic development programming, sponsorship development, and creation of new events.

Measuring Your Brand's Performance

Whether it's through planned market research studies, customer feedback, informal focus groups, feedback from stakeholders, or other sources of research, you must continuously measure your brand's performance. In Downtown Boulder, our efforts have helped us minimize the loss of businesses over the last year; in fact, we actually increased sales over the previous year's holiday season. Moreover, the weakened national and local economies, as well as competitive forces in our market, have not stopped us from having a successful summer season, partially as a result of our summer advertising campaign.

Our ability to weather an economic storm stems not only from our outstanding product, but more importantly, from the brand image we've been able to build in the hearts and minds of our targeted customers.

Jeff Cohn, a former regional marketing director for the Rouse Company, is the principal and managing partner of the Cohn Marketing Group (CMG). Based in Denver, Colorado, CMG offers comprehensive marketing and web site services to individual businesses, downtown organizations, and economic development authorities.

Jane Jenkins is the executive director of the Downtown Boulder Business Improvement District. A former employee of the National Trust, Jane has more than 16 years' experience in downtown management.

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APPENDIX G: EVENT MATRICES

DBI Event Matrix	Community	Ambiance	Fund Raising	Traffic Generating	Promotes Retail	Restaurant	Boundary Extension	Demo Reached
Tulip Celebration	X							3
1st Qtr Sales Event					X			12
ArtFair	X		X	X		X	X	12
Friday Noon Tunes		X						
Bands on the Bricks	X	X		X		X		123
Sidewalk Sales					X			12
Fall Festival	X		X	X		X		123
Munchkin Masquerade	X				X			3
Switch on the Holidays/SL Nicks	X	X						3
Lights Parade	X					X	X	123

Primary Demographic Groups as identified by the marketing committee:

1. Empty Nester 2. Couples without Children 3. Couples with Children at Home

Event Matrix Template by Objective

Event	Community	Ambiance	Traffic Generating	Promotes Retail	Restaurant	Boundary Extension	Target Market
Sidewalk Sale			XXXX	XXXX			
Paint the Town Pink	XXXX						
Santa Walk/Tree Lighting							
Dine Darien; Shop Darien				XXXX	XXXX		
Halloween Window Painting and Parade	XXXX						
**Father's Day	XXXX						
**Christmas Downtown							
Big Car Big Truck Day						XXXX	
Push Me Pull Me							
Memorial Day Parade	XXXX		XXXX				
Food Fair @ Tilley Pond Park							
Farmer's Market			XXXX				

APPENDIX H: EVENT EVALUATION FORM

Special Event Evaluation Form

NAME OF EVENT: _____

COORDINATOR IN CHARGE: _____

PHONE: _____ E-MAIL: _____

DATE & TIME HELD: _____

VENUE/FACILITY: _____

OBJECTIVE: _____

DID THE EVENT MEET THE DESIRED OBJECTIVE? IF NOT, WHY NOT? _____

ESTIMATED ATTENDANCE: ____ youth; ____ teens; ____ adults; ____ seniors;
____ (total)

Discuss and record responses to the following applicable questions:

1. Was sufficient publicity for the event (i.e. posters, flyers, buttons, display ads etc.) Were the impacts of the publicity measurable?
2. Did volunteers have enough materials and equipment to meet event needs?
3. Were decorations (if applicable) appropriate for the event? Were there enough? Did the quality meet expectations?
4. Was the entertainment appropriate for event participants? Were there any unforeseen problems in entertainment arrangements?
5. Was there satisfaction with the quality and quantities of the food?
6. STAFF/VOLUNTEERS - Were there enough staff and volunteers to handle the event? Were they properly trained to handle their duties? Please attach a list of the event staff and volunteer names
7. FUNDS - Were there sufficient funds? If not, in what area were funds lacking and by how much?
8. GIFTS/GIVE-A-WAYS/INCENTIVES (if applicable) - Were they appropriate? Were there enough?
9. VENUE/FACILITY - Was the venue appropriate for the event? If not, what were the problems?

APPENDIX I: PARKING PROMOTION SAMPLES

Visit boulderdowntown.com for more info &
to purchase Downtown Boulder Gift Certificates



Plenty of Parking Downtown

Know the Numbers!



For a list of merchants that reimburse for parking
and additional parking information, visit
www.boulderdowntown.com/park.pdf

Win \$250 to Shop Downtown

Fill in your e-mail address below to receive information
ONLY from Downtown Boulder and be entered into a
drawing for a \$250 Downtown Boulder Gift Certificate.

Email: _____

NO 14976

Visit boulderdowntown.com for more info &
to purchase Downtown Boulder Gift Certificates



ENJOY A UNIQUE HOLIDAY In Downtown Boulder

Downtown Boulder Holiday To Do List

- ☐ Switch on the Holidays (Nov 26-28, 1-4pm)
*Santa's Reindeer & North Pole Visitors, Strolling Gardeners,
Children's Holiday Train Rides & Free Photos with Santa*
- ☐ St. Nicks on the Bricks in the Dickens Store (15th & Pearl)
(Fri 4-7; Sat 12-4 & 5-7; Sun 12-4 -- Nov 27-Dec 19)
- ☐ Lights of December Parade
(Dec 4, 6pm)
- ☐ Buy a Gift at one of over 140 Local Shops
- ☐ Ice Skate Outdoors & Sip a Cocoa (One Boulder Plaza)
(Sun-Tue 12-7; Wed-Sat 10-10 -- Nov 20-Jan 20)
- ☐ Eat at one of over 100 Unique Restaurants
- ☐ See the Beautiful Lights & Holiday Decorations
- ☐ Take an Elegant Carriage Ride on the East End
(Sat 4-8 -- Nov 27-Dec 18; Fri 4-8 -- Dec 24)

1-Hour Free Garage Parking



Redeem for 1-Hour Free Garage
Parking in City Garages

*Garages are **FREE** on Sat & Sun & Fri Nov 26
*Expires 12/31/04; 1 per customer per visit. No cash value

CITY PARKING



DOWNTOWN BOULDER PARKING



City Parking Garage or Parking Lot



Lot available FREE: Monday - Friday, 6pm - 8am and all day & night on Saturday and Sunday

For More Information: www.boulderdowntown.com
City parking garages are FREE on Saturday & Sunday!
City meters are FREE on Sunday!



DOWNTOWN PARKING VALIDATION PROGRAM

Participating Downtown Boulder merchants are teaming up to bring you validated parking for city garages and meters.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

- Look for the **WE VALIDATE CUSTOMER PARKING** sign in store windows.
- Ask the participating merchant for details. (program rules vary by merchant).
- Receive and then use your validation.

VALIDATION TYPES & USAGE:

Meter Tokens

- Valid in City Meters
- One token=15 min
- Time limits are posted
- Use like a coin

Garage Stamps

- Valid in City Garages
- One stamp=30 min
- 3 hour maximum
- Affix to entry ticket before leaving garage

CITY PARKING RATES:

Meters

- Enforced M-Sat 9am - 6pm
- Cost: \$1.00/hr
- **SUNDAY FREE**

Garages

- Hours requiring payment vary, see below
- Cost \$1.00/hr for first 3 hours
- \$2.00/hr for each additional hour
- **SATURDAY/SUNDAY FREE**

CITY PARKING LOCATIONS & HOURS:

Location	Hours Requiring Payment
11th & Walnut (Randolph)	9am - 11pm M-W; 9am - 2am Th & F
14th & Walnut (RTD)	9am - 7pm M-W; 9am - 10pm Th & F
11th & Spruce	9am - 11pm M-W; 9am - 2am Th & F
15th & Pearl	9am - 11pm M-F
Broadway & Spruce (meter lot)	9am - 6pm M-Sat
Downtown Meters	9am - 6pm M-Sat

Visit www.boulderdowntown.com for more information and a list of validating merchants.





DOWNTOWN BOULDER PARKING NEWS

Vol. 1, Issue 1

www.boulderdowntown.com

Nov 2005

What is this?

Dear Downtown Parking User,

Parking plays an important role in the interlocking Downtown puzzle. Its multiple facets and sophisticated nature cause passionate discussions. To service the community and provide accurate information Downtown Boulder introduces the first of many parking related newsletters. This piece will focus on dispelling myths and giving Downtown users the straight story about parking. It will provide insight into parking decisions and the rationale behind them. Thank you for taking the time to educate yourself about this critical issue and please give us any feedback.

Sincerely,

Gorard Cote
Downtown Boulder
gerard@dbi.org

FREE PARKING

**Every Saturday
and Sunday in the
Downtown City
Parking Garages**

Useful Stocking Stuffer

Give the gift of Downtown parking this holiday season with a prepaid parking key!

Call 303.413.7300 for information.



For more information, visit www.boulderdowntown.com

Holiday Parking in Downtown

During this holiday season, Downtown Boulder is employing four initiatives to help with parking in Downtown Boulder. These four initiatives are:

1. **Parking Ambassadors:** Every Saturday, Downtown Boulder will have ambassadors filling expired meters with "15 minutes of FREE parking courtesy of Downtown Boulder."

2. **Parking Greeters:** For random locals and visitors to Boulder, as you pull into your metered parking space during the week, there will be greeters giving away parking tokens for 15 minutes of FREE parking.

3. **Garage Greeters:** For those of you who choose covered parking to combat cleaning off your car from the snow and ice, there will be greeters at various parking garages throughout the week with validations for free parking.

4. **Garage Monitors:** Downtown ambassadors will be monitoring the high traffic garages during busy times this holiday season, to ensure parking spaces for every guest, just so you don't have to drive up and down the Downtown parking structures looking for that last parking

Parking Validation

1. Provide FREE parking to your customers this holiday season at a reduced cost to you!

2. Give tokens for the meters and/or stickers for the garages!

3. To find out more information about validation, please call 303.413.7300.



DOWNTOWN PARKING VALIDATION PROGRAM

Participating Downtown Boulder merchants are teaming up to bring you validated parking for city garages and meters.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

- Look for the FREE VALIDATE CUSTOMER PARKING sign in store windows.
- Ask the participating merchant for details. (validation valid only by receipt)
- Receive and then use your validation.

VALIDATION TYPES & USAGE:

Meter Tokens	Garage Stickers
Valid in City Meters	Valid in City Garages
One token = 15 min	One stamp = 15 min
Time limits are provided	3 hour maximum
Use last a day	Apply to every token before leaving garage

CITY PARKING RATES:

Meters	Garages
Enforced M-Sat 8am - 6pm Cost: \$1.00/hr	Hourly maximum payment nine use dollar
SUNDAY FREE	Cost: \$1.00/hr for first 3 hours \$2.00/hr for each additional hour
	SATURDAY/SUNDAY FREE

CITY PARKING LOCATIONS & HOURS:

Location	Hours of Operation
10th & Walnut (1st, 2nd, 3rd)	Mon - 8:00am - 6:00pm
11th & Walnut (4th, 5th, 6th)	Mon - 7:00am - 6:00pm; Tue - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Wed - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Thu - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Fri - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Sat - 8:00am - 6:00pm
14th & Walnut (7th, 8th, 9th)	Mon - 7:00am - 6:00pm; Tue - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Wed - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Thu - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Fri - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Sat - 8:00am - 6:00pm
11th & Spruce	Mon - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Tue - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Wed - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Thu - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Fri - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Sat - 8:00am - 6:00pm
12th & Pearl	Mon - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Tue - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Wed - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Thu - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Fri - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Sat - 8:00am - 6:00pm
14th & Spruce (1st, 2nd, 3rd)	Mon - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Tue - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Wed - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Thu - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Fri - 8:00am - 6:00pm; Sat - 8:00am - 6:00pm
Downtown Meters	Mon - 8:00am - 6:00pm

Visit www.boulderdowntown.com for more information and a list of validating merchants.

DOWNTOWN BOULDER PARKING



City Parking Garage or Parking Lot



Lot available FREE: Monday - Friday, 8am - 6pm and all day & night on Saturday and Sunday

APPENDIX J: THE BOARD GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

THE BOARD GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Assess the Board's current composition and identify needs
2. Develop job descriptions and a recruitment plan
3. Identify and cultivate prospective Board members
4. Develop a slate of nominees
5. Recruit candidates who are willing to serve
6. Oversee the election of Board members
7. Design and oversee a process of Board orientation
8. Design and implement an ongoing program of Board information and education
9. Initiate periodic assessment of Board's performance
10. Periodically review and update the Board's policy guidelines and practices

COMPOSITION:

Chair (2 year term) (Board member), and 3 committee members

REPORTS TO:

President of the Board of Directors

APPENDIX K: MAIN STREET PARTNERS

Your community is blessed with a number of organizations that are already committed to improving the quality of life throughout the region and in your downtown. Using the potential list below, a Main Street organization can build effective partnerships.

The Municipality (staff & elected):

- Office of the First Selectman
- Board of Selectmen
- Town Manager
- Offices of Planning & Zoning, Economic Development, Neighborhood Services, Parking Authority, Housing, etc.
- Town Recreation Department, Tourism Office
- Departments of Public Safety, Public Works, Building Inspector, Fire Marshal
- Town Commissions & Boards

State, Regional and Local Organizations & Agencies:

- State and local legislators
- State Department of Transportation (CONNDOT)
- State Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD)
- State Historical Commission (Commission on Culture & Tourism)
- State Commission on the Arts
- Small Business Development Center (CT-SBDC)
- Southwest Regional Planning Agency
- Chamber of Commerce
- Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Heritage or Preservation Trusts, Historical Societies
- Community Organizations
- Youth agencies

Downtown and Area Employers:

- Health facilities, social services
- Banks and Financial Institutions
- Realtors
- Local developers
- Corporations, Manufacturing
- Utilities
- Local Media: print, radio, TV
- Companies located in Business Parks outside downtown
- Lower Fairfield County Executives
- Downtown business owners
- Downtown property owners
- Downtown employees
- Merchants Association

Institutions and Destinations:

- Cultural Institutions: Museums, Theaters, Arts Council
- Restaurants, Hotels
- Library
- YMCA & YWCA
- Senior Center
- Schools: public, private, parochial, colleges/universities, adult education
- Churches, Synagogues, faith-based entities and organizations
- Event organizers throughout the region
- Anchors unique to your location (arts, sports, etc.)

Citizens throughout your town

APPENDIX L: CMSC AND THE MAIN STREET APPROACH

CONNECTICUT MAIN STREET CENTER

Connecticut Main Street Center is the **state's leading resource** for cities and towns seeking to comprehensively revitalize their "main street" districts. We provide **solutions** to help Connecticut's main streets once more become thriving centers of commercial and social activity. A member of the respected National Main Street network which has been in place for over 25 years, CMSC is a nonprofit organization committed to bringing Connecticut's downtown commercial districts back to life.

A healthy downtown is key to the viability of the entire community surrounding it. However, reviving a commercial district is a complex, long-term process. A collaborative effort is needed combining the **skills and advantages of both public and private sectors**. A successful Main Street program is created by leaders who understand its purpose, develop realistic goals, establish priorities and assess its progress.

Connecticut Main Street Center understands this process. We help communities analyze core issues and set attainable objectives. We provide training workshops, technical assistance, and advocacy. Our organized yet flexible approach allows communities to identify and develop their unique assets in an **integrated and comprehensive** way.

To learn more about Connecticut Main Street Center, contact us at:

Connecticut Main Street Center
PO Box 261595
Hartford, CT 06126
860-280-2337
ingrid@ctmainstreet.org
www.ctmainstreet.org

THE MAIN STREET FOUR POINT APPROACH™

What happened to Main Street?

Main Street's problems stem from profound changes in the retailing industry over the past four decades—changes that are the result of transportation and land use patterns as well as an unprecedented boom in commercial overbuilding. Dramatic suburban commercial growth and the development of major discount retailers on the periphery of communities have drawn customers and investors away from the central business district. A vast oversupply of retail space has undermined Main Street's traditional role as a retail center. Tremendous stocks of high-quality historic commercial buildings need financing to insure they will be enjoyed, and used, by future generations. Local permit processes need revamping to encourage entrepreneurial investment in building rehabilitation and business ventures. Outmoded business practices of long-term merchants and the inexperience of new small business owners have constrained traditional business districts from reaching their full market potential.

Why is Main Street important?

City governments and businesses commonly ask Main Street advocates, "Why should we invest in downtown?" In response, here are a few reasons why your downtown or neighborhood commercial district is an important and worthwhile investment in the economic health and quality of life in your community:

- Main Street is a symbol of community economic health, local quality of life, pride, and community history. These are all factors in industrial, commercial and professional recruitment.
- A vital Main Street retains and creates jobs, which also means a stronger tax base. Long-term revitalization establishes capable businesses that use public services and provide tax revenues for the community.
- Main Street is also a good incubator for new small businesses—the building blocks of a healthy economy. Strip centers and malls are often too expensive for new entrepreneurs.
- A vital Main Street area reduces sprawl by concentrating retail in one area and uses community resources wisely, such as infrastructure, tax dollars and land.
- A healthy Main Street core protects property values in surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- The traditional commercial district is an ideal location for independent businesses, which, in turn, keep profits in town (chain businesses send profits out of town). The district also supports local families with family-owned businesses, local community projects, such as ball teams and schools and provides an extremely stable economic foundation, as opposed to a few large businesses and chains with no ties to stay in the community.
- A revitalized Main Street increases the community's options for goods and services: whether for basic staples like clothing, food and professional services or less traditional functions such as housing and entertainment.
- Main Street provides an important civic forum, where members of the community can congregate. Parades, special events and celebrations held there reinforce a sense of community. Private developments like malls can and do restrict free speech and access.
- Many Main Street districts become tourist attractions by virtue of the character of buildings, location, selection of unique businesses, and events held there.

What is the Main Street Approach to Revitalization?

The Main Street Approach to downtown and neighborhood commercial district revitalization was developed by the National Main Street Center, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The approach is based on four points and relies on eight principles to increase the value of traditional commercial business districts.

FOUR POINTS

1. **Organization:** increasing the civic value of downtown by building consensus and cooperation among groups that play a role in the downtown. The Four Point Approach builds a framework for sensible volunteer-driven programming that matches the community's assets and potential.
2. **Promotion:** increasing the social value of downtown through branding (creating a positive image of downtown), retail promotions and special events.
3. **Design:** increasing the physical value of downtown through both new and rehabilitation construction and through the design of public spaces that will attract more people to walk and gather on a regular basis.
4. **Economic Restructuring / Business Improvement:** increasing the economic value of downtown by diversifying it with an appropriate mix of current and new businesses suitable for the given marketplace.

EIGHT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **The Main Street Approach is a comprehensive approach to revitalization.** Unlike many revitalization strategies that have been tried in the past, the Main Street Approach is comprehensive, addressing all areas in which action must take place. In the past, districts have covered entire blocks of building facades with aluminum slipcovers or demolished portions of the district in hopes of attracting a developer to build something new. Design improvements alone will not bring about meaningful change; effective marketing, a strong organizational base and solid economic development strategies are all necessary to reverse the cycle of decay and sustain preservation activity.
2. **The Main Street Approach relies on quality.** A district's architecture tells the history of a community and reflects the pride past generations felt. These buildings embody quality in construction, craft and style that cannot be replicated today. The quality inherent in its commercial architecture and in the services offered by its businesses make a district unique in the marketplace and gives it many marketing advantages. The projects undertaken by the local Main Street program should reflect this high level of quality to reinforce the district's special characteristics.
3. **A public-private partnership is needed to make meaningful, long-term revitalization possible.** To make a revitalization program successful, both public and private entities must be involved, as neither can bring about change alone. Each sector has unique skills and particular areas in which it works most effectively; combining the talents of both groups brings together all the skills necessary for revitalization to occur in a unified program.
4. **The Main Street Approach involves changing attitudes.** The economic changes experienced by traditional commercial districts in recent decades have made shoppers and investors skeptical about the district's ability to regain economic viability. Because of

its physical decay, many people have forgotten how important a community's historic commercial buildings are to shaping its identity and explaining its unique history. Changing people's attitudes—demonstrating that positive change is taking place—is central to a successful revitalization program.

5. **The Main Street Approach focuses on existing assets.** Each community is unique and has special characteristics that set it apart from all others. By creating a strong revitalization effort based on the district's unique heritage, a local Main Street program creates an organizational structure that builds on its own specific opportunities. In this way, the Main Street program is adaptable.
6. **Main Street is a self-help program.** Without the will to succeed and the desire to work hard to create change, no revitalization program will flourish. Grant programs can help fund pieces of the work plan and consultants can provide guidance, but without local initiative, the Main Street Approach will not work.
7. **The Main Street Approach is incremental in nature.** Traditional commercial districts did not lose their economic strength overnight; it happened over years, with small declines leading to a severe downward spiral. Improvement must be gradual as well. Cataclysmic changes, like those brought about by urban renewal's large-scale land clearance programs, have rarely created long-term economic growth. The Main Street Approach relies on a series of small improvements that begin to change public attitudes about the district, making the area's investment climate more favorable. Gradually, the small changes build to larger ones as the local revitalization organization gains strength and becomes efficient in mobilizing resources for revival.
8. **The Main Street Approach is implementation oriented.** By identifying and prioritizing the major issues that a district must confront, revitalization organizations can develop work plans that break down the large issues into smaller tasks.

APPENDIX M: DARIEN RESOURCE TEAM PROFILES

Kent Burnes, principal of Downtown Management Services, has over 17 years experience in the field of economic development, downtown development and small business consulting. Downtown Management Services has over twenty-five years of combined experience in the Main Street Four Point Approach™ to downtown management and has facilitated and trained numerous downtown and commercial business districts on this management approach. Downtown Management Services harbors a philosophy that if given the right tools communities can make big things happen.

Retaining and expanding small businesses in ever changing markets is another primary focus of Downtown Management Services. Through training seminars, speaking engagements and individual consulting, over 45,000 business owners/managers in 500+ communities have benefited from Mr. Burnes' advice.

Kent has been awarded the distinction of Certified Professional Consultant to Management by the Management Consulting Institute, a distinction awarded to less than 200 consultants in the United States. Kent's workshop "Sharpening Your Competitive Edge" has been recognized nationally and internationally. Mr. Burnes is the author of several publications including "Competing with National Discounters" and "Secrets to Small Business Success."

David A. Helmin is the Business Development Specialist with Connecticut Main Street Center. Dave comes to us with twenty-six years in the hospitality industry including six years as owner/operator of two restaurants; the Corner Café, located in Putnam, CT and the Calabash Coffee Company and Café, in historic Brooklyn, CT.

During his tenure in Northeast Connecticut, Dave was a member with the Northeast Chamber of Commerce. He also was integral in the continued development of the Putnam Business Association and Putnam Antique Dealers Association.

Previously, Dave spent over nine years with the Morse School of Business, initially as an instructor in their Hotel and Restaurant Management Program. Over time, he became Department Chair for that program and eventually the Director of Education for the school. He was responsible for ten academic departments which included oversight of nine department chairs, seventy-seven instructors, and over six hundred students. Ultimately, Dave collaborated with another colleague to design and develop the curriculum for the Center for Culinary Arts located in Cromwell, CT.

Jane Jenkins is the first Executive Director of the Downtown Boulder Business Improvement District. Under Jane's direction downtown Boulder has developed and created a consistent brand identity and successfully maintained a 97% retail occupancy rate in the face of a declining economy and the competition of a new regional center only a few miles from downtown.

Previously, Jenkins was the Director of the Southwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. During her three year tenure at the Trust Jane developed a marketing plan that increased National Trust visibility in the region and successfully advocated for retaining preservation enhancements as part of the federal Transportation Equity Act.

Jane has also served as the downtown manager for Denton, Texas, a Great American Main Street Award winning city. Jane began her downtown management career in 1986 as one of the first managers in the Oklahoma Main Street Program.

A former high school educator, Jane holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of North Texas in Denton.

Kimberley Parsons-Whitaker has been the Associate Director of the Connecticut Main Street Center since 2000. During her tenure at CMSC she has developed the quarterly newsletter, *CT's Main Streets*; the website *ctmainstreet.org*; the *CMSC Annual Awards for Excellence in Downtown Revitalization*; and was instrumental in the success of Main Street *SOLUTIONS*, Connecticut's Only Annual Commercial District Revitalization Conference. She has been involved in the development and launching of CMSC's two new programs – the Downtown Resource Center (DRC) and the Downtown Revitalization Institute (DRI). Formerly the Director of Membership and Development of the Connecticut chapter of The American Institute of Architects, Kim has experience in nonprofit organizational development, volunteer coordination, membership activities, public relations and marketing and has produced a variety of special events, trade shows, conventions and conferences.

In 1994 she became a co-founding member of The Connecticut Vocal Ensemble, an organization whose mission was to provide highly trained, young professional singers with experience in preparing and performing roles in full-length operas in intimate settings. A professional opera and concert singer, Kim holds degrees from New England Conservatory of Music and Boston University. She has performed extensively throughout North America and the Far East and continues her performing career, though closer to home. A former resident of New Haven, Kimberley now resides in West Hartford, CT, with her husband Bill Whitaker, a Broadway musician, and their young daughter, Daley.

John Simone became the Executive Director of the Connecticut Main Street Center in 2000. Under his leadership CMSC has grown in many directions. The number of designated Main Street communities has grown from five to nine. The statistical gains in these downtowns have been extraordinary. In 2005, John oversaw the launching of two new programs – the Downtown Resource Center (DRC) and the Downtown Revitalization Institute (DRI). In its first year the DRC has grown to 25 members. He is also responsible for developing the team of regional and national experts and partners to complement CMSC staff's expertise and provide a wide spectrum of resources and services in downtown revitalization. This year, he was elected by his peer state Main Street executive directors to serve on the first national executive committee to advance national advocacy issues. John also sits on the Board of Directors of Connecticut Preservation Action, the voice of historic preservation at the Connecticut General Assembly since 1980.

John's Main Street career began in 1996 when he became the first executive director for First Town Downtown, Windsor Center's Main Street program. Prior to this, he worked for the Hartford Ballet for over 20 years. He was a founding member of its professional dance company serving 15 years as managing and then executive director. He was a contributing author to the anthology entitled, "Market the Arts" published by the Foundation for the Effective Development of American Professional Theater (FEDAPT) and he has served on numerous grants panels and awards juries.

David Sousa, R.L.A., A.I.C.P., has 26 years experience in landscape architecture and urban planning. He is a disciple of Smart Growth and Traditional Neighborhood Development, and has

focused his career on creating more livable, sustainable and attractive communities. He is a licensed landscape architect and member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, American Institute of Certified Planners, and the American Planning Association. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Mr. Sousa has managed the design and construction administration of large-scale projects for corporate, institutional and governmental clients. He is responsible for urban design, land use planning, environmental permitting, and comprehensive master planning projects for Clough, Harbour & Associates, LLP.

Mr. Sousa's urban design, downtown revitalization and Brownfield redevelopment experience includes projects in the Connecticut cities of New Haven, New London, Norwich, Hartford, Waterbury, Danbury, Bridgeport, Groton, Milford, Middletown, and Willimantic, as well as Pittsfield and New Bedford, Massachusetts, Keene, New Hampshire, Providence, Rhode Island, and Stony Point, New York. He has also assisted Connecticut Main Street Center and the National Park Service on a Main Street Resource Team and National Historic Landmark Charrette for the town of Portland, Connecticut, and assisted the Town of Hebron, Connecticut in the planning of the New Village Green District.